

## Got any ideas?

Are you creative? There's a mistaken belief that very few people are creative and that the rest of us poor plods couldn't come up with an original idea if it was given to us on a platter. And quotes like "Innovation distinguishes between a leader and a follower" (Steve Jobs) are pure rubbish. Everyone has ideas.

In most organisations the concept of creativity is used a bit like a club to beat people with. Being labelled "creative" is often code meaning unfocused, disruptive, undisciplined, rebellious, unreliable, and not worth paying a lot of attention to. People who have lots of ideas – and who hasn't? – and who put them forward, are seen as interfering with getting the actual work done.

The following is one of those "Don't try this at home (or in this case work)" things.

Some years ago, on the back of a departmental meeting where Toyota's performance improvement suggestion scheme had been discussed we got together with a group of colleagues, eight of us in total, and agreed that we would each think of one idea a day to do something at work better, faster, cheaper, easier, more enjoyably, more efficiently, etc. We agreed we wouldn't discuss or share any of the ideas, just write them on a piece of paper, seal them in envelopes and put them on our boss's desk first thing every morning. We wrote a covering note to him that accompanied the first batch of ideas and explained the process that had been initiated.

It only took until the next weekly meeting for it all to come to a grinding halt. The boss, a genuinely nice, open-minded person, started things off by indicating about forty sheets of paper in front of him and asking "What am I supposed to do with these? Are you really thinking of doing this every week? Do you want

to discuss all of these ideas? At this rate we'll have 2,000 a year to process. We won't have time to do any other work."

Being creative at work isn't easy. It's seen as getting in the way of doing things. People who make lots of suggestions and have lots of ideas sooner or later get the message that the behaviour is career limiting. "We are an innovative, creative company" tends to rank in credibility terms with "People are our most valued asset" and "The cheque is in the mail".

Years ago, when Japanese industry was starting to make major inroads into Western markets and various books and articles were being written about Japanese management, we had a discussion with a Japanese businessman. One of the things we talked about was the concept of lifetime employment. We asked the businessman how that could possibly work. Surely, we said, there must be some people who weren't good at their jobs and should be removed, and certainly somewhere along the career path some individuals would find themselves out of their depth and be unable to perform their jobs effectively. Why would such people be kept on the payroll? Wouldn't that be de-motivating for others?

His answer explains a great deal about why people in organisations in the Western World don't try too hard to generate new ideas and suggestions. He asked how much effort we gave to our work. Did we give 100% - i.e. everything we had, all the time, non-stop – or did we give

something less? The uncomfortable truth is that only the most trusting and naïve give everything because we all know that when you're no longer considered useful you will be let go. So we hold something back and we work on developing transferable skills that we can hopefully use when the company turns its back on us. And we keep our good ideas to ourselves because they might be needed somewhere else. However, our Japanese acquaintance said, if you know that when you have nothing more to give you will continue to be treated honourably, and continue to be rewarded for what you have done in the past, you will give your very best.

Got any good ideas? Of course you do. Going to write them up and put them in the suggestion box, or explain them to your boss? Maybe, and maybe not. Chances are you think that if you do make your suggestion it will either get dismissed out of hand or if it is accepted and acted on you won't be given the credit and you would have been better not saying anything.

There's a huge pool of creative thoughts and ideas out there in every organisation. But you can't hear a good idea if you won't listen. Avis used to say when you're number two you try harder. But if you want to be number one you need to *listen* harder.

Robin Stuart-Kotze  
Senior Advisor

## strategy people performance

Penumbra is a strategic business consultancy. We bring clarity by using research to drive understanding and direction. We deliver success by balancing experience and innovative thinking.

Whatever your aspiration, we'll provide the tools, information and analysis to turn your strategy into operational reality, in a way that motivates your people to outperform the market.

### Overview

As a strategic business consultancy, our expertise is in helping our clients executing strategies and delivering results.

We achieve this by combining a robust management planning system with a focus on people which drives alignment and commitment

We work in partnership with talented and committed leadership teams to help organisations build corporate value with a wide range of customised, cross-functional advisory programmes and services delivered from four complementary service groups:

#### Strategy

(Development, formulation, implementation and alignment)

Our innovative **Penumbra Balance** approach creates dynamism, drives and sustains momentum and makes strategy real for stakeholders

#### Organisational Development

(Behavioural issues)

We call our holistic approach **Balanced Motivation** which encompasses activities that improve performance both for the organisation and the individual

#### Research and Insight

Our stimulating **Clarity** approach draws on our business consulting skills to deliver a mix of business analysis and market research which

provides compelling insights for winning decisions.

#### Operations

The Operations practice brings all of our hands-on practical experience to bear on execution and delivery of results.

Our technology enabling approach called **Totality** facilitates business focussed services and solutions, aligned to business needs, for people, processes and tools.

#### Why Us?

Organisations turn to us when they:

- Want to find a new strategic direction
- Have created a strategy and now need to execute it
- Need to drive more value from existing initiatives
- Have a big issue to resolve, usually dependent on lasting employee buy-in
- Need to explore new ways to drive value
- Need a breakthrough result
- Are seeking measurable results

#### Our Experience

We have real world experience spanning 20 years with our clients. This includes working with:

BP, Citibank, Morgan Chase, WestLB, RBS, UBS, Bankers Trust, Kleinwort Benson, Coutts, Natwest, Intel, Nokia, Adobe, Kall-Kwik, Glaxo Smith Kline,

Dupont, Pfizer, Savills, British Council, Clifford Chance, British Airways, Gillette, Unilever, Shell, Volvo, Vauxhall, British Gas, TradeStation, MWB Business Exchange, Investors in People, University of Cambridge

On projects such as:

Strategic Planning, Strategy development and implementation, Culture change, Post-Merger Integration, Vision, Purpose and Values, Current State Analysis, Organisation Re-design, Transformational Change, Client Focus Strategies, Perception Studies, Client and Staff Engagement surveys, Global Rebranding, Know your Customer, Market Forecasting, Consumer Insight, Market Segmentation, Process optimisation, Lean/Six Sigma, Project Management, ERP Systems Roll-out, Market Research, Financial Modelling, Franchise Start-up Evaluation models, Cost Benefit Analysis, Implementation Alignment, Strategic Alignment, Complex Database development, Custom Application development, Supply Chain Optimisation

Covering diverse sectors such as:

Financial Services, Pharmaceuticals, Manufacturing, Energy, Mobile Telecoms, Travel and Tourism, Aviation, Property, Hi-tech and Business Services