



Future Trends

Brainstorming and Creative Thinking

Remember, by using imagination, intellect and existing knowledge you can form in your mind a new thought or idea.

By Roger Gudobba

Last month's article emphasized the increasing need in the United States for more STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) talent in the future. I believe I made a strong statement on why it was extremely important, especially for the mortgage industry. What may have been overlooked is the methodology IDEO used in the brainstorming session. The most significant component was the mixture of people from various industries with a wide range of backgrounds and experience. I also thought it was ironic that with all the high-technology tools available today they used multi-colored sticky notes as the primary method for capturing, recording and organizing their ideas and thoughts. So how can your organization use these two fundamentals to break from the past and visualize new approaches to old problems?

It's easy to come up with new ideas; the hard part is **letting go** of what worked for you two years ago, but will soon be out of date, said Roger von Oech.

Brainstorming: While you probably can't put 100 leading innovators and entrepreneurs on a plane, you can put a team of employees together for a brainstorming session. It's virtually mandatory to have a cross section of employees from multiple departments and roles within the organization. They will have different skill sets, thought processes and imagination. They will draw on their industry background and experience. I recall reading the following: "All experiences are neutral. You do not see things as they are; you see them as you are. You give

them meaning by the way you choose to interpret them. IBM observed that no one in the world had a personal computer and interpreted this to mean there was no market. Bill Gates and Steve Jobs looked at it as a massive opportunity."

However, the brainstorming session needs to be structured. You need a strong facilitator. Their role is to encourage everyone to participate and to not allow anyone to censor or evaluate them. People won't participate if their ideas are criticized. There is no right answer. Have a methodology, using post-it notes or flip charts, to capture and categorize all the ideas. Record everything.

Think about it this way, without question, our lives would be very different without the inventions of Thomas Alva Edison. This prodigious creator changed our culture in countless ways with the seemingly miraculous devices that flooded out of his New Jersey laboratory. Edison was granted 1,093 United States patents and 1,200 patents in other countries. He recorded and illustrated every problem he worked on in a notebook and used them to review past experiments. He used his notebooks to review past experiments in light of any new learning's and often he would review his notebooks to try and provide new ideas and insight to other projects that he was working on. He would read others' creative ideas, research papers, failed patents and ideas from other fields.



Thomas Alva Edison once said, “I have not failed. I’ve just found 10,000 ways that won’t work.”

Creative Thinking: Everyone is capable of creating new ideas and often it is simply the process of taking an existing idea and building upon it. Most ideas are in fact modifications of something else that exists within your knowledge base. Instead of taking pride in developing a unique product or solution, many organizations are content to be copycats. They never consider that quite possibly it was copied

You can’t ask customers what they want and then give it to them. **By the time you get it built, they’ll want something new,** said Steve Jobs.

from someone else. What’s even worse, such practices prevent most companies from achieving greater success. What they need are ideas that make a company’s products or services different from those of the competition.

It’s about breaking from the past and seeing new ways to solve old problems. It’s about pushing beyond routine and trying new approaches. It’s about asking why not, but also it’s about realizing that usually there is a good reason why not.

“Innovation is not a single action but a total process of interrelated sub processes. It is not just the conception of a new idea, nor the invention of a new device, nor the development of a new market. The process is all these things acting in an integrated fashion.”

Your creative thinking ability is built around three human thought processing functions:

1. **Strategy:** How you organize and plan your thought processes. Evaluation of thoughts and ideas and future plans based on any given situation or problem.
2. **Knowledge base:** Your acquired information on a group of subjects and problem domains. You draw on this information in order to be able to solve problems or add new thinking to situations.
3. **Motivation and your attitude:** Such factors are often driven by your personality, energy levels, perseverance and

your self-confidence, which in turn are acquired from a lifetime of experiences and interactions. Motivation and attitude affects the decisions and direction that you take in order to get to a desired result.

Creative leadership: This is about anticipating needs, and the confidence to rely on intuition to complement market and consumer understanding. There are no rules here - we’re trying to accomplish something.

“If you had told people 25 years ago that, in the future, nearly everyone on the street would be carrying a portable phone in their pocket or bag, they might have wondered if that was completely necessary, since there was a pay phone practically on every corner. If you had then told them to imagine that they also would be able to use that phone someday to listen to music, map out how to drive someplace, pay bills, make hotel and restaurant reservations and instantly type a message that would show up on another phone anywhere in the world, they might have assumed, at that point, that you had entered the realm of science fiction. But of course, as we now know, smartphones are in the hands of most people, and many of us feel lost if we leave home without one.” Excerpt- From data to decisions II, by IBM.

So, what’s the point of that quote? As humans, we have an ability that no other animals that we share this planet with have, an ability to imagine. How do we apply all of these principles to our space you might ask? Well, let’s briefly discuss a typical technology implementation at a typical lender. In this case that I’m going to detail the lender has isolated a problem in their process. So, what do they do next? They look for a piece of technology to solve that problem. Seems like a great plan, right? Wrong.

We’re not doing our best and living up to our true potential if we’re just solving one problem at a time, only to wait for the next problem to occur. So, what’s the right approach to this common lending scenario? The lender should engage a new technology vendor, or perhaps an existing one, to solve their current problem, but that lender should also use the opportunity to look at their whole process and really think creatively about how it can be improved. If lenders are always chasing the solution to the next problem, that’s less time spent on actually do the business that brings their company revenue.

Remember, by using imagination, intellect and existing knowledge you can form in your mind a new thought or idea. The mind is like a parachute, it only works when it’s open. ❖