



Dr. Vidya Hattangadi

POWER YOUR PROGRESS

Think smart

Work smarter, not harder. Just putting in longer hours is not always the answer to getting something done. Finding a better and more effective method, choosing and attacking the problem from a new angle can harvest much greater returns for the individual and the business than simply persisting with old method with sweat and long hours, says Prof. Dr. Vidya Hattangadi.

Lateral thinking techniques enable us to break out of the beaten, oft-trodden way of thinking and come up with startling, brilliant and original solutions.

Dr. Edward de Bono is regarded by many as the leading world authority in the field of creativity. It was he who invented the phrase "Lateral Thinking". His tools for lateral thinking are based directly on how the brain functions as a self-organizing information system.

Creative people think laterally. Lateral thinking is all about reasoning that is not immediately obvious and about ideas that may not be obtainable by using only traditional step-by-step logic.

Lateral thinking recognises that our brains are pattern recognition systems, and that they do not function like computers. It takes years of training before we learn to do simple arithmetic - something that computers do very easily. On the other hand, we can instantly recognise patterns such as faces, language, and handwriting. The only computers that have begun doing these things do it by modeling the way that human brain cells work.

The flip side, unfortunately, is that we get stuck in our patterns. We tend to think within them. Solutions we develop are based on previous solutions to similar problems and previous experience. Normally, it does not occur to us to use solutions belonging to other patterns. Lateral thinking techniques enable us to break out of this patterned way of thinking and come up with startling, brilliant and original solutions.

Often, that kind of thinking is induced by sheer pressure of necessity. Necessity, it is well said, is the mother of invention. When people are pressed hard for finding a solution to their problem, they will figure out a way to solve it. This means people think laterally when they have to struggle, when they need to fight odds, when they are pushed to the corners. Since the beginning of human life, enormous changes around us have taken us to a path of scientific progress, which in turn has benefited mankind in numerous ways. In every era, men invented many things so as to meet their rising needs; most of the inventions happened when the inventors were forced to think laterally. A few examples would suffice.

Take something as common as the ballpoint pen, often called just 'ball pen'. You would like to know that in most of the world it is still called Biro, after Ladislao Biro, the Hungarian journalist who invented it. Biro, a journalist, turned his mind to inventing a new kind of pen because he was thoroughly fed up with fountain pens. As a busy reporter with deadlines, he found smudged notes and ink stains on his clothes a distasteful occupational hazard. He used to be frustrated often with his mucky hands and clothes due to the ink of his fountain pen. This led him to think about finding a different type of writing instrument.

And lo! One day while looking at the printing process of his column an idea struck his mind: the printing presses used a different thicker ink for producing newspapers that dried quickly and fixed itself to paper. After many trials and testing, Biro devised a small rotating nib which would allow thinner quick-drying ink to be used. Despite the fact that the World War II was still raging, Biro and his brother, George, a chemist, patented the design of the ballpoint pen in 1943.

Authors, poets, scientists, researchers, doctors, teachers, musicians, entrepreneurs all of them

are lateral thinkers. A creative person thinks maturely. He tends to look at his work from variety of angles. He will ask himself not only whether his piece of work has shaped well but also whether it makes sense, how he can describe the positive effects of his work, the usage, the logic and value etc.

One cannot be a genius by choice. But one could adopt mental habits that would facilitate lateral thinking and invention. To be open to inspiration, one must cultivate a leaning for the problematic, a chronic attraction to things that do not totally fit, agree, or make sense. Inspired ideas are less often solutions to old problems than newly discovered or totally reformulated problems -- problems 'created' like brilliant works of art. While creativity is the hallmark of invention, the process of creating something for commerce, industry and marketing involves risk-taking and requires fearlessness. Organizations like 3M, Johnson & Johnson, Sony, LG have guts to accept innovations of their workers.

Emotional urge could sometimes be as powerful as, if not more than, the profit motive. Earle Dickson was employed as a cotton buyer for the Johnson & Johnson. He accidentally invented Band Aid purely out of love for his wife Josephine who always cut her fingers in the kitchen while preparing food. One day when he came home for lunch and as usual found his wife had cut her finger and was nursing it, Earle took a piece of gauze and attached it to the centre of a piece of tape, and then covered the product with crinoline to keep it sterile. This is how Band-Aid was born. His boss, James Johnson, saw Earle Dickson's invention and decided to manufacture band-aids for the public and made Earle Dickson vice-president of Johnson & Johnson.

Here is another example. In the early 1970s, an employee of 3M Corporation named Arthur Fry was in search of a bookmark for his church hymnal that would neither fall out nor damage the hymnal. Fry noticed that a colleague at 3M, Dr. Spencer Silver, had developed an adhesive in 1968 that was strong enough to stick to surfaces, but left no residue after removal and could be repositioned. Arthur Fry took some of Spencer Silver's adhesive and applied it along the edge of a piece of paper. His church hymnal problem was solved!

Arthur Fry soon realized that his "bookmark" had other potential functions when he used it to leave a note on a work file, and co-workers kept dropping by, seeking "bookmarks" for their offices. This "bookmark" was a new way to communicate and to organize. 3M Corporation crafted the name Post It Note for Arthur Fry's new bookmarks and began production in the late seventies for commercial use.

Sometimes the process could be gradual, spread over years, and shaped by more actors. History of calculator dem-

onstrates it.

There is a phrase in business: "work smarter, not harder". But what exactly does this mean? The key idea behind this phrase is that just working longer hours is not always the answer to getting something done. Finding a better and more effective method, choosing and attacking a problem from a new angle can harvest much greater returns for the individual and the business than simply pursuing the current method with sweat and long hours.

Gillette, the man behind the shaving blades, was born in Fond du Lac, Wisconsin in 1855. To support himself when the family's home was destroyed in the Chicago Fire of 1871, Gillette became a traveling salesman. This work led him to William Painter, the inventor of the disposable Crown Cork bottle cap, with whom Gillette struck a friendly cord. Gillette was also interested in making some money and becoming rich and famous. Once while chatting with Gillette, Crown assured him that a successful invention was one that was purchased over and over again by the satisfied customer.

In 1895, after several years of considering and rejecting possible inventions, Gillette suddenly had a brilliant idea while shaving one morning. It was an entirely new razor and blade that flashed in his mind a razor with a safe, inexpensive, and disposable blade. It took six years for Gillette's idea to evolve. During that time, technical experts told Gillette that it would be impossible to produce steel that was hard, thin, and inexpensive enough for commercial development of the disposable razor blade. Then in 1901, MIT graduate William Nickerson agreed to try.

By 1903, he had succeeded. Production of the Gillette safety razor and blade began as the Gillette Safety Razor Company started operations in South Boston. Sales grew steadily. During World War I, the U.S. Government issued Gillette safety razors to the entire armed forces. By the end of the war, some 3.5 million razors and 32 million blades were put into military hands, thereby converting an entire nation to the Gillette safety razor.

New products, ideas, strategies, models, innovations and progresses come with a question tags attached to them such as 'why', 'how', 'where', 'when' etc. Today, the managers need to sit back and answer the stake holders, which at times is a very painful experience. Today's business managers have to think laterally to succeed and find new angles to the business models and strategies. Let's get it straight, the globalization has brought with it competition and anything which stands out, and is distinctive will have a market. All you have to is Think Smart!

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