UP YOUR IMPACT

52 INNOVATIVE STRATEGIES TO ADD VALUE TO YOUR WORK

Chuck Frey

Up Your Impact: 52 Innovative Strategies To Add Value To Your Work

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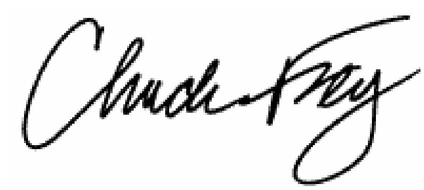
About the Author

Chuck Frey is the founder and publisher of InnovationTools.com, the world's largest, most extensive website focused on business innovation, creativity and brainstorming. He is also the author of the Mind Mapping Software Blog, and is widely regarded as one of the leading experts in the field of mind mapping and visual thinking.

He has extensive experience in public relations, marketing, business strategy, creativity and innovation, and is a keen student of the creative ways in which technology can help to increase the productivity, efficiency and success of businesses.

Dedication

This book is dedicated to my wonderful wife, Anne-Marie, my 3 awesome children, Charlie, Julianne and Marguerite and to my Lord Jesus Christ, who inspires and leads me daily.



Introduction

Adopting a value-added mindset is the antidote to fear and uncertainty – both of which seem to be in ample supply today. Instead of being disadvantaged by tough times, you can actually turn them to your advantage. But it takes a special frame of mind to make this happen, one that is focused on growth and possibility. It also requires a creative, generative spirit that is focused on learning more, creating more and contributing more – not sitting back and waiting for more to be handed to you.

This isn't a new approach, but it is one that book authors, bloggers and the business media seem to have forgotten. Although the tools and technologies we utilize to get work done have changed dramatically, the principles of success haven't changed. Success has always been about contribution and service, about doing more than you're paid to do, and outgrowing your current position and circumstances. It's about having a system for creative problem solving and noticing new opportunities, which are all around us but aren't usually obvious. It's about caring enough to bring your very best efforts to the people whom it is your privilege to serve.

Adding value is a strikingly effective way to increase your security in your present job. After all, if you're an A-player who is contributing exceptional value to the firm, your employer is not likely to include you in workforce reductions. "Right-sizing" is the way that companies get rid of dead weight – people who aren't contributing value in proportion to their salaries – as well as marginal workers and troublemakers. It's all part of the 20th century industrial mindset – people as interchangeable, predictable widgets that can be easily added, removed and replaced at will. That was the key to scaling a business in the last century. Did you know that?

Most people today are hunkered down, just doing what they're told and not taking any risks. If you only listen to the media, you would think that we're facing nothing but doom and gloom. It's something like the map makers around the time of Christopher Columbus, who drew dragons in the margins of maps to indicate bodies of water that were unexplored. Unfortunately, however, some sailors misinterpreted their artistic license to mean that there was actually danger in those waters, and so these otherwise brave souls started to avoid those "dangerous" waters.

It's much the same today: people are afraid to step out and explore, to share their ideas and opinions – yes, to take a risk. But in today's world of accelerating change, the worst thing you can do is sit still. You're likely to get run over!

Not only is adding value a smart strategy to maximize your employability, it's also one of the few ways left to create true wealth. Your compensation isn't based upon how many years of experience you have and the job title you hold. In large part, it's a reflection of how many people you serve and how well you serve them. According to the book *The Go-Giver: A Little Story About a Powerful Business Idea* by John David Mann, we ought to focus on providing exceptional service to our employers, customers and clients. We need to deliver a level of service that will delight them. In so doing, we're setting in motion a chain of events in which our compensation will take care of itself. It will increase in proportion to the quality and quantity of our service to others.

As you read through Up Your Impact, you'll notice several recurring themes, namely abundance contribution – or service to others – and creativity. These concepts are central to the whole idea of adding value to your life, and they all have something in common: They're generative. They are about bringing something new into the world and taking the first step, rather than waiting for someone in power to hand you an opportunity – or hoping to become lucky.

"Luck is what happens when preparation meets opportunity," said the ancient philosopher Lucius Annaeus Seneca. The job of *Up Your Impact* is to help prepare you with the mindset and the insight you need to better recognize opportunities more readily and to take action to bring them to fruition.

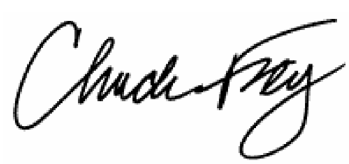
The good news is that there isn't much traffic on the "extra mile." So many of your peers are just trying to hang on that they're missing out on yawning chasms of opportunity all around them – opportunities to solve old problems, create new growth and get the attention of the person in the corner office. In other words, when so few people are approaching their life and work from a value-added mindset, it's surprisingly easy to stand out and become more successful.

This e-book presents 52 strategies for adding exceptional value to your employer and your customers or clients. My hope is that it will help you to reduce the uncertainty in your life, improve your career and, ultimately, help you to be happier and more fulfilled in your life's work. The qualities discussed in this book are still fairly rare – which is why they're so valuable.

I wish you much success and many blessings as you pursue life's opportunities and overcome its challenges with a new set of eyes, a fresh outlook and the determination to be of greater service to your fellow human beings.

I believe you CAN make a difference in your world!

Best Regards,



Chuck Frey

☞ How to Use this Book

Thanks for investing in this book. You obviously believe, as I do, that you don't have to sit back and be victimized by the winds of change. Instead, you can take a more proactive stance, add value to your work and be blessed with a more fulfilling and stable career, despite the tough times. At the same time, you can increase your odds of "making a dent in the universe," as the late Steve Jobs was fond of saying.

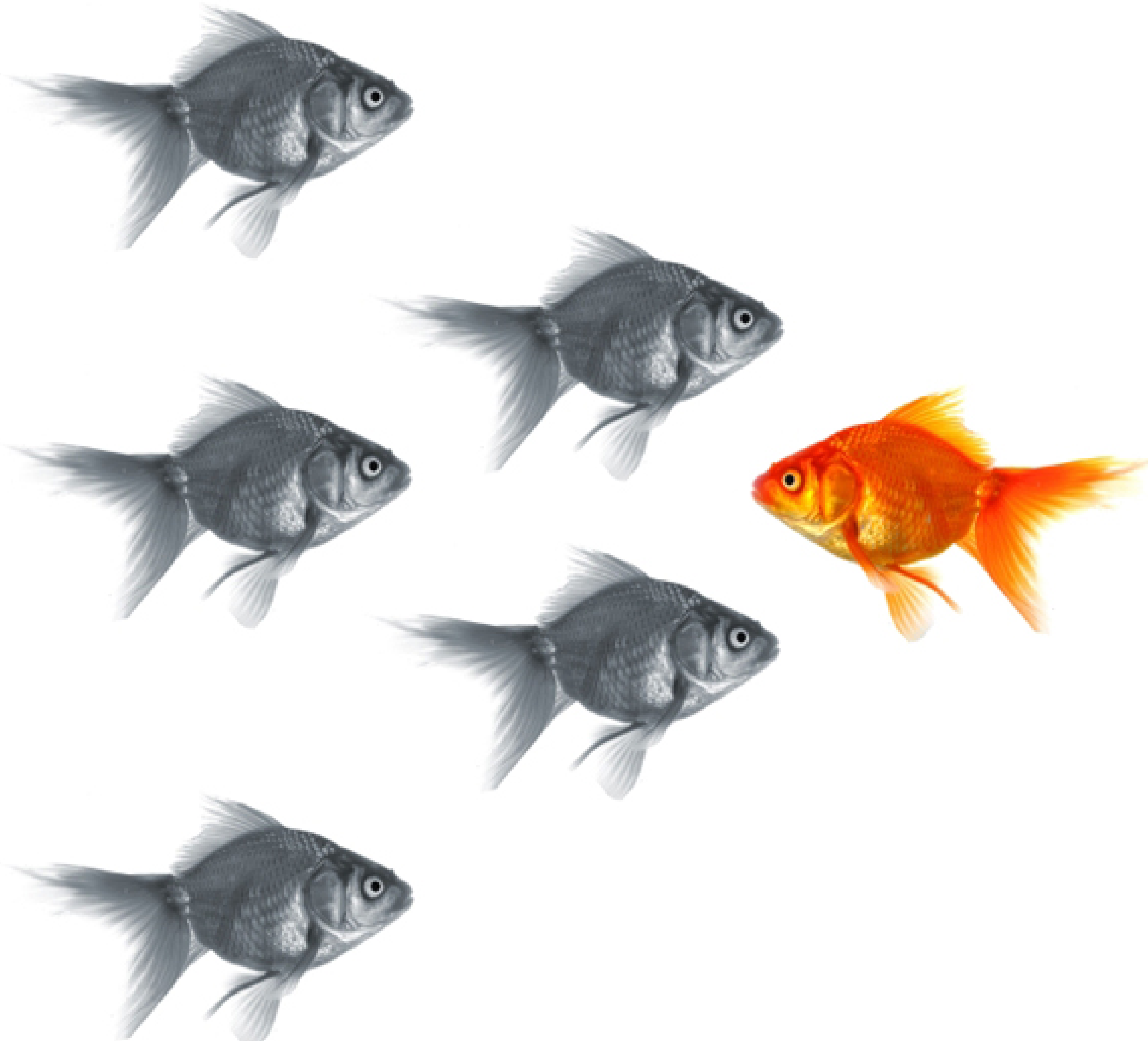
There are several ways to consume and use the ideas in this book:

First, you can read it cover to cover, and select several principles that you want to focus upon. Each principle includes one or two action steps that will help you to put it into practice. Focus on putting these ideas to work for several months, and then assess how much added value you've been able to provide as a result of implementing them. Armed with fresh momentum, you can then slowly expand your repertoire to include other strategies, so you can continue to grow your value to your key stakeholders.

You can also take one principle per week and focus exclusively on it. That's why there are 52 strategies, one for each week of the year.

Think of this as a success workbook. Print it out. Make notes in the margins. Highlight the action items you plan to implement. Make this book your own – put it to work for you!

CHAPTER 1 | *Differentiate Yourself*



1. Don’t be a commodity

In marketing terms, a commodity is an undifferentiated product that is just like its competitors.

It isn't usually very innovative, and offers a similar set of features and price point compared to competitive products. In other words, its defining characteristic is its “sameness” compared to other similar products. When a product becomes a commodity, the price that it commands in the marketplace tends to erode. People aren't willing to pay extra for your product. They consider it and those of your competitors to be interchangeable, so no one company has an edge in sales. As a result, you need to spend more money on marketing to convince customers that your widget IS better and why they should buy from you. Discounts are the order of the day, to incentivize customers to buy from you. But that erodes your profit margins. It’s a slippery slope, one that can easily end in bankruptcy.

People can be commodities, too. In fact, let's be honest – the majority of people you meet are commodities. They're just like everyone else. Chances are excellent that you are a commodity, too! If you live in the Western world, you’ve probably been deeply scripted by your parents and schooling that you must fit in and conform to the expectations they set for you. Being different means you may not be accepted by others. You'll be alone, potentially ostracized by your peers. You won't make the grade. You'll be labeled a “trouble-maker.” No one wants to be rejected, so you put your head down and walk in formation with everyone else, thinking, dressing, working and living like them.

As the Borg says in one of the Star Trek movies, *"Resistance is futile. You <u>will</u> be assimilated."* We unwitting become part of a giant "hive mind," thinking, believing, dressing, working – and ultimately living – just like our society tells us we ought to. We're comfortable, if more than a little bored. But there's comfort in security and predictability, in being liked and accepted by our families, peers and employers.

There's only one thing wrong with this picture: It's not valid any more. According to marketing guru Seth Godin, it's a relic of the Industrial Age, where we were all bred to be interchangeable cogs in the gigantic machinery of business and industry. In his excellent book, *Linchpin: Are You Indispensable?*, Godin explains what has changed – and what it means to us:

"I grew up in a world where people did what they were told, followed instructions, found a job, made a living, and that was that. Now we live in a world where all the joy and profit have been squeezed out of following the rules. Outsourcing and automation and the new marketing punish anyone who is merely good, merely obedient, and merely reliable."

"Our society is struggling because during times of change, the very last people you need on your team are well-paid bureaucrats, note takers, literalists, manual readers, TGIF laborers, map followers, and fearful employees. ***The compliant masses don't help so much when you don't know what to do next.****"* (emphasis mine)

"What we want, what we need, what we must have are indispensable human beings. We need original thinkers, provocateurs, and people who care... Every organization needs a linchpin, the one person who can bring it together and make a difference."

In today's world, being a commodity is the kiss of death. Being just like everyone else makes it appallingly easy for employers to lay you off and replace you with someone half your age at half your salary – or outsource your job to an overseas supplier for one-fourth the cost.

Do you remember that we defined a commodity product as one that is just like those from competitors, one that doesn't offer any unique value to its customers? The same definition and conditions apply to people. When you're a commodity, the "price" you can command on the job market tends to erode. Especially in a downturn, there is tremendous downward pressure on salaries. If you get laid off during a recession, it's highly likely your next job won't pay as much – unless you do something to stop being a “me-too” worker.

The antithesis of a commodity is a specialty, value-added product. Think Cadillac versus Chevrolet. An iPhone versus a generic smart phone from any other supplier. They can command a higher price because everyone knows and recognizes what makes them different, better, and ultimately, more desirable. We're willing to pay a premium for a product that is beautifully designed or which is known to be incredibly reliable, safe or productive.

Different. Remarkable. Exceptional. That’s what gets attention and is successful today, in products <u>and</u> in people.

You need to become a specialty person, an executive who is recognized inside your company and in your profession or industry as a thought leader – someone who has a deeper understanding of the trends that are affecting it. Someone who can analyze a situation and develop creative solutions and identify new opportunities. This kind of a mindset makes you stand out in the best possible way, and makes you eminently employable at above-average wages. It also gives you a measure of job security and satisfaction that you can't find any other way.

ACTION STEP

- Think about the ways in which you can accentuate your uniqueness so that it brings greater value to your work. Not just different, but better. Significantly better.

Notes

2. What differentiates you?

Rich Horwath, in his new book, *Strategy for You: Building a Bridge to the Life You Want*, makes the case that your added value must flow from your life's passion, purpose and goals. He outlines two types of personal differentiation, based upon doing different <u>things</u> than other people, and doing the <u>same types of things</u> as your peers, but doing them <u>in a different and memorable way</u>.

To help you develop a clearer picture of what makes you unique – the platform upon which you will base your personal differentiation – Horwath recommends that you ask yourself these questions:

- What are the activities I perform that are truly different from those others perform?
- What are the similar activities I perform in different ways than others do?
- What characteristics or traits do I have that are unique to me?
- What resources do I have that are different from those of others? How does my purpose differ from that of others?
- How do my family, friends, and colleagues describe my differences?
- In what ways can I express my strategic themes differently than others do? How does my personal development plan differ from that of others?
- What is the primary differentiated value I bring to people in my life?

Horwath adds that success goes to those who are willing to be different in ways that bring value to others. *"Excellence, by its very definition, is deviation from the norm. The norm is an average, or a standard level."* In short, if you're looking for ways to differentiate yourself and add value to your career and life, don't even THINK about being average. It is the antithesis of excellence.

ACTION STEPS

- Spend time answering Howarth's questions in as much detail as you can. You will need to talk to others (including family members and friends) to get their impressions of how they perceive your unique strengths.
- Analyze your notes and develop a set of "strategic themes" that you can project more strongly to the world. Not over the top strong, but just take some of the qualities that have been primarily internal up to this time. Begin to share them with the world, through your writing, speaking and personal relationships.

Notes

3. Analyze your strengths and weaknesses

You are a unique person, with a one-of-a-kind combination of strengths, passions and capabilities. To deliver more value, you need to have a firm grasp on what makes you unique, what drives you and where your passion is focused. That's where you can make the greatest contribution to the world.

To zero in on your unique gifts and areas of contribution, invest an hour or two several times per year, analyzing your strengths, weaknesses, passions and interests. Some people do this as part of the process of formulating their New Year's resolutions.

Many people don't take the time to do this because they're too busy maintaining the status quo, or too busy "doing" to devote time deeply to think about their gifts. To make sure you take the time to do this, I recommend setting an appointment on your schedule. Block out the time, just as you would any other business meeting. This self-assessment is at least as important as your other business commitments, if not more so. So take it seriously and put it on your calendar!

ACTION STEPS

- Grab your calendar and set appointments with yourself for the next year to analyze your strengths and weaknesses.
- Analyze your written reviews from your job for the last several years. In what areas does your boss think you need to improve? Develop several goals to address these shortcomings.

Notes

4. Engage in life-long learning

Make a commitment to life-long learning. Adding new skills and knowledge to your repertoire increases your value. Never stop learning.

Most people in industrialized countries are heavily scripted in the "inoculation theory of education." In other words, after you complete high school or secondary education, you're done for life. Sort of like a flu shot – once you have it, you're somehow "safe." That may have been true in the Industrial Age, but it no longer applies in today's era of accelerating change, in which knowledge is being obsoleted faster and faster. We need to become lifelong learners to be able to continually add value to our work in the years ahead.

How can you continue your education after you're done with high school or college? Opportunities abound, if you're disciplined and driven enough to take advantage of them:

- Read books in your area of work, as well as general business, strategy and creativity titles. Learning how to become a creative problem-solver is particularly important today, and will help you to add a significant amount of value to your work.
- Take evening courses, either in person or online. There are numerous vocational and collegiate options with flexible schedules and curricula.
- Go back to college for a higher-level degree.
- Attend conferences and speeches where industry experts are speaking about trends and new developments in your industry or profession – and then invest time brainstorming ways to put this new knowledge to work in your job.

The bottom line is that to add value, you need to **rethink how to learn, assimilate and utilize what you're learning**. Hone your ability to discern what to use and what to discard from the information you're gathering and consuming.

I prefer to think of my knowledge as a mosaic, composed of thousands of tiny tiles of information. As new bits enter my brain, I determine if they fill missing spots in my knowledge, expand upon existing ideas I've accepted as valid, or if they challenge my worldview on a specific topic. It's an ongoing process.

I've also gotten into the habit of capturing important ideas and pieces of information in my Evernote database – which gives me the ability to return to it later, review it and think about it at my leisure – which is very powerful! I've even heard this tool described as an "outsourced brain!" The important thing is that it's a tool that enables me to capture this information in a meaningful, organized and searchable format, rather than just letting it pass through my brain and then disappear forever. I'm convinced that this strategy is going to pay off for me in the long run!

ACTION STEPS

- Develop a plan for your continuing education for the next year. Seek input from your boss and at least one trusted mentor regarding the areas in which you should focus.
- If the travel budget is still restricted at your company, there are other ways to get continuing education. Consider participating in relevant webinars that are being held by associations or suppliers in your industry or profession. Many of them are free, and will give you a deeper sense of the forces and trends that are affecting your firm and the marketplace in which it competes.

Notes

5. Participate in the flows of knowledge in your profession or industry

Get involved in discussion forums and other online gathering places where your professional peers are sharing ideas and asking questions. These "edge networks" – as John Seeley Brown, John Hagel III and Lang Davidson describes them in their excellent book, *The Power of Pull: How Small Moves, Smartly Made, Can Set Big Things in Motion* – are where some of the very best ideas and insights lie. This is becoming necessary because of the rapidly diminishing life span of knowledge and by accelerating advances in technology, medicine and other disciplines. Practitioners in any field need to be able to talk to each other and share the latest solutions and knowledge.

"To succeed now, we have to continually refresh our stocks of knowledge by participating in relevant 'flows' of knowledge—interactions that create knowledge or transfer it across individuals. These flows occur in any social, fluid environment that allows firms and individuals to get better faster by working with others."

The authors contend that knowledge is growing too fast for executives to learn using conventional means, such as books, college courses and seminars. Social media channels and online discussion forums are quickly becoming hotbeds where people who share a common domain expertise can debate and discuss the latest trends in their area of shared interest. Participating in these groups also increases the odds of serendipity – coming across a key nugget of knowledge or information that has the potential to transform your career or your organization.

Participating in these groups is a potent way to add value to your job, bringing promising ideas back from the edge to your company for discussion and consideration. Your reputation as a thought leader could be greatly enhanced by being the person who explores these fringe areas and presents potential opportunities to your company's senior management.

ACTION STEPS

- Determine where people in your profession gather online and get involved. Ask questions, contribute knowledge where possible and build relationships with the colleagues you meet there.
- Participate in webinars, Twitter chats, Google+ Hangouts and other opportunities for online knowledge sharing and collaboration.

Notes

6. Stay relevant!

Considering the pace of change today, you must keep up with the future trends and requirements of your industry or profession. As we have already discussed, knowledge is being obsoleted faster than ever, so continuous learning is a must.

Some industries and professions mandate certain levels of practitioner performance through formal certification. Most don't, however, leaving the average executive to his or her own devices. No one ever plans to get behind the curve – it just happens while you're busy doing your day-to-day work.

This actually isn't a new problem – it happened to my father 30 years ago. He was an electrical engineer, designing and building electronic controls on "bread boards" with soldered components for manufacturing automation. Somehow, he missed the transition to programmable controllers. So when he was laid off from a job after 14 years, he found himself on the wrong side of the technology curve. Potential employers wanted to hire engineers with experience working with programmable controllers. It was very hard for him to find a company willing to hire him and pay to have him trained on this new technology. He finally found a firm that was willing to do so, but it was a long, difficult couple of years as he played catch-up in his field.

The problem is even worse today, thanks to accelerating technology life cycles. The lesson? Take courses. Stay active in industry and professional organizations. Read trade journals, blogs, websites and other sources in your field, so you can anticipate these trends and take action accordingly. Keeping up with the latest technologies in your industry doesn’t make you a “geek” – it helps you to be a survivor!

Invest in continuing education. Attending work-related workshops, development seminars, or reading self-improvement books demonstrates to the key executives in your firm that you're committed to your career. It also looks very impressive on your LinkedIn profile and resume, and exposes you to experts in your field with whom you can network and from whom you can learn.

The era of learning a craft or profession once and then performing it for the rest of your life is a relic of the last century. Executives change professions an average of 6 times throughout their professional lives. Today's high school and college students are being trained for today's existing professions; by the time they enter the workforce, new jobs will have been created that don't even exist today.

The bottom line? Continuing education is critically important to adding value to your work. Have a plan for it. Learn how to be a life-long learner. Don't leave this aspect of your life and career to chance!

ACTION STEP

- What's your plan for either formal or informal continuing education? If you don't have one, create one!

Notes

7. Commit to personal kaizen

One of the problems with the way in which many people work today is that they're too satisfied with the status quo. Fill in the blank for the second half of this sentence: If it isn't broke, __________. If you're like most people living in the Western world, you automatically responded with, "...don't fix it!" In a fast-changing world, this mindset can be major liability.

To find an alternative to this laissez faire attitude, we only need to look to Japan, where companies like Toyota have raised the bar on quality using a simple principle called kaizen. Chance are, you've heard of this concept – and probably think you know what it means – constant, incremental improvement in all areas of your business, right?

What you may not be aware of is the astounding extent to which Toyota empowers its employees to make such improvements to their work areas – **without having to check with their boss first!** They are expected to take the initiative to implement their ideas for improving the efficiency of their work areas, says Bunji Tozawa, author of *The Idea Generator: Quick and Easy Kaizen*.

So how does this translate into <u>personal</u> kaizen? What does it mean to you?

Simply this: Do an activity as well as you can do it right now AND keep searching for ways to do it better in the future. Nearly everything you do can be improved in some way. Commit to a habit of excellence in everything you do. In so doing, you will differentiate yourself and your work from that of your peers, for whom "good" is good enough.

ACTION STEP

- Take 30 minutes with a pad of paper and a pen. Break down your work into a list of the main tasks that you do on a regular basis. Once you have completed this list, brainstorm ways to improve each one of them. What can be done immediately to improve your productivity and efficiency?

Notes

8. Cultivate thought leadership

Start a blog to share your thinking with the world, and build a reputation as a thought leader in your area of work.

What is a thought leader? Someone who looks at the same situation as everyone else and is able to extract some deeper insights from it, and who can communicate them in a memorable way. It's someone who asks the important questions, notices and shares trends and points out things that we ought to be aware of or could learn from.

These days, a blog is an awesome successor to the traditional resume – because it demonstrates how you think, and that you are able to communicate your ideas clearly and with confidence. It can also help you to get the attention of other thought leaders in your profession or industry. If you're good enough, it could even lead to job offers! This strategy is especially valuable for recent college graduates, tend to get stuck in the Catch 22 of not having enough experience to get hired, but they need to get hired to gain experience.

One friend of my daughter’s is currently in the midst of her undergraduate studies in journalism and photography. She has started up two blogs; in one, she posts one captioned photo per day. The other one is devoted to her thoughts about life in a large college town, politics and observations about life in general. I think this is a great move on her part. It commits her to writing and taking pictures on a regular basis – which should improve her skills in these areas through frequent practice. It also creates, over time, a portfolio of work that may some day be of interest to prospective employers.

The nice thing about a blog is that you can set one up for next to nothing. Hosting for my Mind Mapping Software Blog is only US$10 per month. There are many free and low-cost WordPress themes available, which you can easily download and install to give your new blog a professional look. If you need help tweaking anything, talented WordPress developers can help you for an affordable hourly fee. Most tweaks only take a few hours, but they can save you many hours of frustration. The only other investment you must make is your time – in generating fresh content and insights, responding to reader comments and participating in relevant social channels where your peers gather online, such as Twitter and LinkedIn.

Another way to cultivate thought leadership, depending upon the type of industry in which you work, is to write technical papers and volunteer to give presentations at industry conferences. This gives you an immediate advantage compared to your peers, and in some ways is easier to do than setting up and maintaining a blog. Being able to stand in front of an audience and give a presentation has always been viewed as a positive by prospective employers, and it may be even more important today, in our modern world where nearly everyone can produce and publish multimedia content to YouTube and other video sites.

Yet another way to cultivate thought leadership is to serve on an association committee that's pertinent to your industry, trade or profession. This will set you apart as leadership material and should put you in close contact with some of the key movers and shakers in your industry or profession. This strategy has worked well for me during the last 30 years, and it has brought me in contact with some truly wonderful people. There's something about working together on a common set of causes, and then enjoying each others' company, that is very rewarding – and fun!

ACTION STEPS

- Invest some time analyzing what your areas of expertise are. What specialized knowledge, expertise or insights do you have that others may value? What is your passion? Set up a blog to cover this topic. Brainstorm at least 10 short articles that you can write to initially populate it.
- Seek out opportunities to speak at events in your industry or profession. Pick a subject that is timely and important to your audience, and in which you can share some ideas and strategies of value.

Notes

9. Choose the right path, based on potential value and contribution

If you have a choice of two or more paths in your career, always choose the one where you can add the most value. This will keep you aligned with your purpose in life and will ultimately bring you greater happiness and rewards. Adding value is a conscious decision; it's not something you can fake. Therefore it has to be something that is authentic, something that is aligned with your passions and beliefs

Look for the opportunities were you can make the greatest impact. A few years ago, I was forced out of a job that I had held for 14 years. I took a job as the marketing manager for a small company that really needed a lot of help promoting its innovative products. I've been able to “move the needle” a substantial amount in the two years I've been there. The owners of the company are thrilled with what I've been able to accomplish on their behalf. And I'm happy that I have been able to make an impact there.

Imagine for a moment that my predecessor in this position had the company well-positioned in all aspects of its marketing strategy when he left the company. If that was the case, I would not have been able to make as much of an impact. I'd be more of a caretaker, making sure that the pre-existing marketing machine would keep running – and perhaps I’d have room to make some incremental improvements. In other words, I wouldn't have been able to add as much value to my position.

But as it is, my employer considers me to be an invaluable employee, because I am giving them a higher profile in the industries in which they’re focused – and business is starting to roll in because of it. I had to take a cut in pay to take this job, but because I am making such a big impact, I'm confident that the compensation will take care of itself as the business begins to grow in the next few years.

Taking a career path that isn't aligned with your natural skill set and higher purpose is a waste of time – because you will not be able to sustain the kind of effort it takes to be successful in it. Remember, every job has its pros and cons. If you have a focused purpose and if you are doing work for which you are naturally suited, it's more likely you'll be able to sustain momentum through any low points or rough spots.

ACTION STEP

- Look for ways that you can "move the needle" in your job or for the customers and clients you serve. How can you make a difference in their lives? How can you remove or reduce their "pain points" or help them to improve their business?

Notes

10. Create a "value statement" for your resume and online profiles

Begin your resume (and your LinkedIn and Google+ profiles) with a "value statement" instead of a summary of your experience – to clearly and impactfully communicate your unique value and personal brand. Value summaries typically don't include a specific objective; rather, the areas highlighted in it communicate your career goals and personal brand to the reader.

A value statement is an ideal opening for your resume, because it summarizes how you can bring value to a prospective employer or client. Instead of being "you" focused (*"I'm seeking a position as the director of sales for a Fortune 1000 company"*), it is aimed at "them" and their specific needs (*"I can help ACME Inc. to increase international sales by 20% during the next year, based upon my past experience and track record."*). That makes your CV much more likely to capture their attention – and differentiates it from hundreds of average, "me-too" resumes.

As I thought about this value-adding strategy, I realized that it's also perfect for crafting more benefit-oriented LinkedIn and Google+ profiles. In both cases, your goal is to convince the reader that you are someone interesting and valuable – someone who should be a "must-add" to their network. As with every other piece of content on the web, your profile needs to stand out and command attention. In other words, it must be meaningfully differentiated from everything else your reader is skimming. This type of declaration, clearly called out with asub-heading that declares it as a "value statement," is an excellent way to do this.

ACTION STEPS

- Invest some time thinking about the unique value you provide. Brainstorm a set of key terms, and then weave them into a 1-2 sentence value statement. This will be the "template" you will use for the jobs for which you will apply.
- As you respond to specific job opportunities, customize your value statement template to each one, declaring the specific value you will bring to the position in terms of the qualifications the firm is seeking. Make it specific to each firm.

Notes

11. Become a better note taker

Most executives should be adept at taking notes. We spend enough hours in meetings, after all. But familiarity doesn't necessarily breed effectiveness, as I've discovered by watching how other executives take notes. Here are some of the challenges:

If you're trying to take notes as a speaker talks, you can't write very much, or you'll lose track of what the speaker is saying. So how do you keep up? By simply writing down the main concepts. This requires a trained ear. Your goal is to capture just enough detail that you can review your notes a short time later and fill in the blanks. In other words, what you jot down should serve as a memory prompt to fill in the details later.

A similar technique works well in a business meeting, except you want record only the important background information you think you will use later, plus action items that you and other team members are responsible for. Why take pages and pages of notes about routine items that you'll never need to refer to again? Unfortunately, I see many people do this. It’s a waste of time, because then you have so much content to wade through, you may not be able to find the single bit of information you really need.

Some very smart people have devised ingenious ways of dividing up a notes page to get more out of it. One method reserves the main part of the page for your notes from the meeting. In the margin on the right side of the page, jot down any action items you need to follow up on. Create a similar, horizontal region at the bottom of the page, where you can jot down any ideas that occur to you. Bill Gates uses this method of note taking to ensure that no follow-ups or ideas fall through the cracks.

Another method that I use involves my favorite writing instrument, the Lamy 4-color ballpoint pen. I use black and blue ink to record meeting notes, red to denote urgent items that need immediate attention and green to record ideas. That enables me to skim my notes and quickly extract what I'm responsible for. It works like charm!

If you're not confident in your ability to generate and capture ideas right now, I urge you to try a technique that Austin Kleon describes in his excellent book, *Steal Like an Artist: 10 Things Nobody Told You About Being Creative*: Create a logbook. Use your notebook to briefly record what you did each day. Austin does a great job of explaining what it is and how to use it:

"A logbook isn't necessarily a diary or a journal, it's just a little book in which you list the things you do every day. What project you worked on, where you went to lunch, what movie you saw. It's much easier than keeping a detailed diary, and you'd be amazed at how helpful having a daily record like this can be, especially over several years. The small details will help you remember the big details."

He suggests starting out by answering this question:

What's the best thing that happened to me today?

Don't worry if it's neat or complete – just some nuggets or keywords or doodles that will help you to remember the details later. In the process, you'll find that you're recording little gems that inspired you, which can serve as fodder for future projects – or simply a reminder of how much you have grown as a person during the last few years.

ACTION STEPS

- Explore different styles of note taking. Get your hands on a Moleskine or a Behance Action Notebook and begin using it to jot notes to yourself, make sketches or capture ideas in whatever form feels comfortable to you. Start by logging your daily "best things," as recommended by Austin Kleon.
- Carry your notebook and a compact pen around with you wherever you go for several weeks to record ideas, thoughts and inspirations. Then notice what a difference that makes in your creative output. I'm sure you'll be pleased by the results it will make in your life!

Notes

12. Become a better story teller

If you want to add value and make an impact in your work, then you need to become a better story teller. Not the *"Once upon a time..."* variety. But rather, you need to be able to present and persuasively sell your ideas to key stakeholders – bosses, customers, clients and others. Stories touch something deep inside of us; it's as if we're hard wired to respond to them.

That's why *"stories are the most powerful delivery tool for information, more powerful and enduring than any other art form,"* explains visual thinking expert Nancy Duarte in her excellent book *Resonate: Present Visual Stories That Transform Audiences. "Stories are dynamic – they help an audience visualize what you do or what you believe. Tell a story and people will be more engaged and receptive to the ideas you're communicating,"* she adds.

To understand how powerful this concept can be, we need to think about its antithesis – the average business PowerPoint presentation. Zzzzz... WAKE UP!! We've all been forced to sit through many PowerPoint "Decks from Hell." It's a modern form of torture. Numerous bullet points, copious text and a presenter that is reading off of them as if he was presenting to a room of illiterate dolts. Yawn…

Fortunately, there is a better way. It involves the use of powerful visuals and minimal words. Another technique is to set up a dynamic tension in the listener's mind between the present (inadequate) state of affairs and an ideal, attractive future. In a recent TEDx presentation, Duarte demonstrated (visually, of course) how famous speeches by Martin Luther King, Jr. and Steve Jobs employed this story-telling technique very effectively. It's a fascinating presentation, and I definitely recommend you watch it (click here to view the video).

You should also consider picking up some excellent books on visual thinking, which will help you to become more fluent in this important area (click here to view my list of the 10 top books on visual thinking).

ACTION STEP

- In addition to reading Nancy Duarte's book, *Resonate*, also consider her previous title, *Slide:ology*. I also recommend you read Cliff Atkinson's *Beyond Bullet Points*, which describes a very simple, effective method of structured storytelling for crafting more effective PowerPoint presentations. I highly recommend it!

Notes

13. Differentiate yourself by cultivating a signature style

At first glance, this topic seems a bit frivolous in a book about adding value to your work and making a bigger impact. But the thought leaders I pay attention to all have a signature style that makes them stand out from the crowd. That makes them memorable in the minds of the people they want to influence – and that's important in today's attention-starved world. If you want to add value, "blending in" isn't a good strategy! Here are some notable examples:

The late Steve Jobs became known for his black turtlenecks, which he wore every day to work at Apple, and to every product launch event. According to his biography, he owned over 100 of them. He started wearing them because he didn't want to have to worry about what to wear to work in the morning. Over time, it became his signature style.

My friend and social media consultant Phil Gerbyshak rocks a pair of brightly colored glasses, which have become part of what makes him unique and memorable. Along with that, nearly every photo he uses for his online profiles depicts him with both hands cupped in front of his mouth, like a megaphone, amplifying his voice. Since he is a social media consultant, that's incredibly apropos!

Another good friend, author and speaker Jordan Ayan was known early in his career for his unique business cards. He'd have them printed and delivered in large sheets. He would then have his kids scribble over them with crayons, have the sheets laminated and then cut into individual business cards. Viola! Each one was unique and creative, perfect for a creativity consultant, author and speaker.

His other claim to fame was his audience participation exercises. At one conference, he gave an audience the objective of taking a piece of paper on their chairs and transforming it into a design that would enable it to fly into a small garbage can on the stage. Inevitably, everyone made their piece of paper into an airplane. At the count of three, the room was filled with paper airplanes, flying toward the stage – a very memorable scene that participants talked about for the next several years. Only a few paper airplanes actually made it into the can, however. His point was that the entire audience followed its preconceived notion of what needed to be done. It turned out the most efficient design was to crumple the paper into a ball and throw it at the garbage can. D-OH!

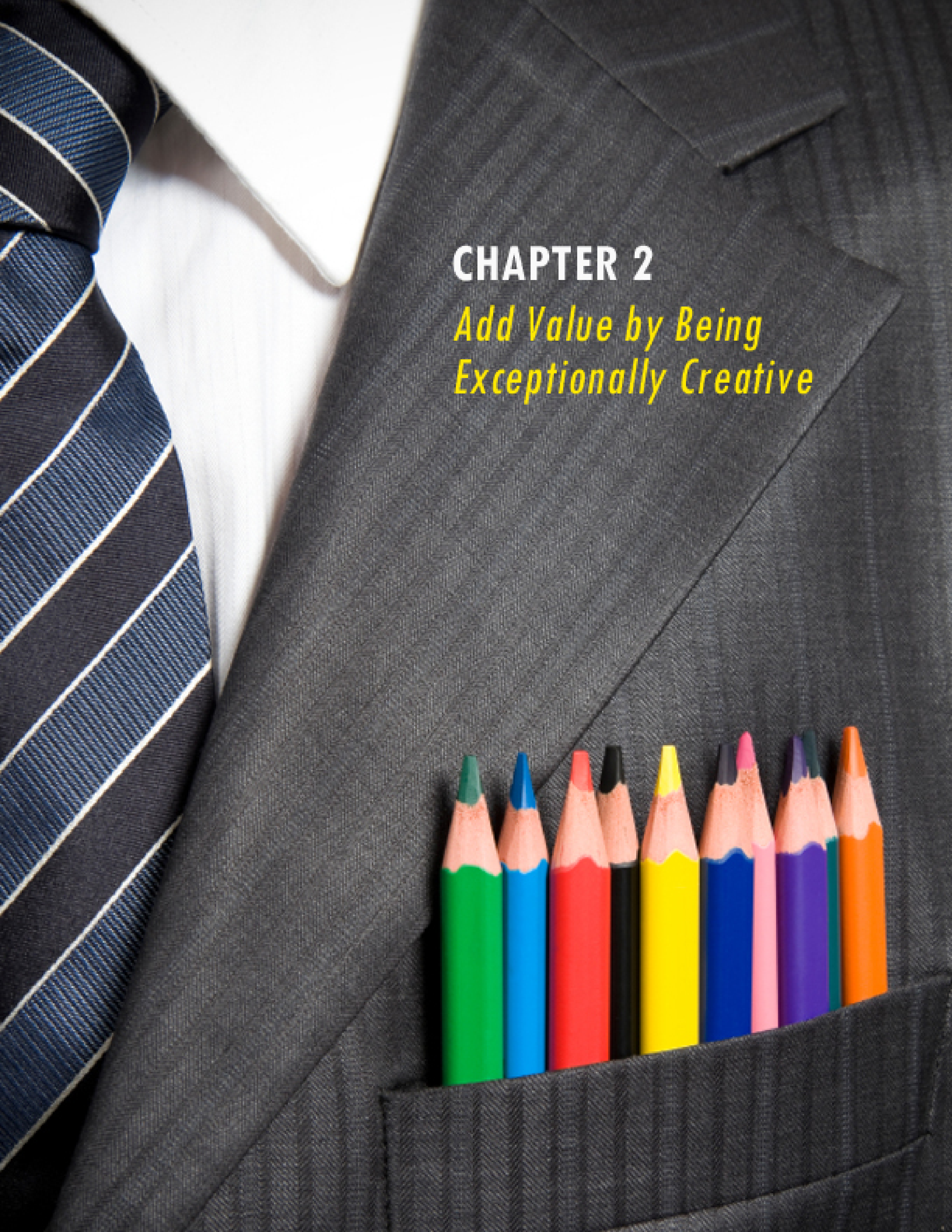
In another case, Ayan was trying to dramatize how we would all be connected to each other in the era of electronic communication. He distributed a number of balls of brightly colored yarn to members in the front row of the audience, with the instructions to hold onto the free end of the spool and to toss the ball across the room. Each person who caught one of the flying balls of yarn was to do the same – hang onto the yarn, but toss the ball again. In a few minutes, the conference hall was transformed into a network of brightly colored lines, representing how we would all be connected – another very memorable visual metaphor that created a lasting buzz.

All things being equal, you must do exceptional work that adds value. But given people's limited attention span today, it makes a lot of sense to give them a "visual hook" by which they will remember you, as these three people did. What can you do to stand out visually?

ACTION STEPS

- Think about your current style: What could be modified or amplified to create a signature style for you?
- Think about the elements beyond your clothing and dress, such as the way in which you present yourself, your personality, the way you share ideas and how you tell stories. How can you amplify some of those aspects to cultivate a unique style?

Notes



CHAPTER 2

Add Value by Being Exceptionally Creative

14. Keep the raw material pile of your mind full

In order to deliver superior value to your employer, customers, clients and other stakeholders, you need to keep the "raw material pile" of your brain full. In other words, do whatever you have to do to keep a steady stream of great ideas, inspiring insights and successful strategies pouring into your marvelous brain.

While you may not consciously remember every bit of information and knowledge you've consumed, you subconscious will. They will become part of the vast storehouse of this vast, submerged part of your mind, which will then be able to use them to develop new insights and ideas – which it will deliver to your conscious mind as hunches or flashes of insight.

Your brain is equipped with the awesome capability of making associations between seemingly disparate pieces of information. It’s part of what makes human beings so incessantly creative. To help ensure that your brain has a rich pile of creative “raw material” from which to draw, try to seek out unique inputs, knowledge and experiences:

- Read a book or magazine that you don’t normally read. Reading broadly, from a variety of sources, brings your brain into contact with new ideas and concepts, and can be a great trigger to your imagination.

- Discuss your problem with people from entirely different backgrounds. You may be amazed at the ideas and insights these discussions will provoke. Today's social media channels are a great place to do this. Don't be afraid to ask questions – you may be surprised and delighted at the responses you'll get. I know I have been!

- Take a trip abroad and immerse yourself in another culture. International travel is one of the most mind-expanding experiences that I know of. Your senses are heightened as you experience new practices, customs and beliefs – creating a fertile field in your mind for new ideas to grow. If you can't afford to do that, visit a natural history museum or an exhibit at a local art gallery. Expose yourself to new inputs!

- Spend some time surfing the web, following links and connections to see where they lead. Let serendipity guide you. Inevitably, you will find some fascinating nuggets of information that you may be able to apply to one of your projects or challenges. Or you may find inspiration for your next creative project!

- As you consider the problems and challenges you face, be on the lookout for analogous situations in other industries or fields. How did someone else solve a similar problem? What elements of their solution can you adapt to your situation?

ACTION STEPS

- Broaden your reading list by seeking out at least two new sources per month.
- Seek out interesting new voices in your social media channels and the websites you visit. Try to bring some fresh “blood” to your daily and weekly scans of information online. In other words, look for sources that challenge your thinking, and which aren’t as predictable as what you normally consume.

Notes

15. Become fluent in multiple types of thinking

As Albert Einstein once famously observed, *"The problems we face cannot be solved at the level of thinking we were at when we created them."* What this means is that the problems we face today are so complex and so different than anything we've encountered before that we need better types of thinking to analyze them and solve them. These types of thinking include critical thinking, systems thinking, lateral thinking and associative thinking.

Being well versed in these different types of thinking is something like having a toolbox with more tools. It enables us to approach problems and challenges from multiple perspectives and come up with a wider range of potential solutions for them.

Lateral thinking involves moving beyond your well-worn paths of thinking into widely divergent areas, hunting for ideas that can be adapted to your current situation. Paul Sloane, in his excellent book, *How to be a Brilliant Thinker: Exercise Your Mind & Find Creative Solutions*, explains it like this: *"Lateral thinking is a phrase coined by Dr. Edward de Bono as a counterpoint to conventional or vertical thinking. In conventional thinking, we go forward in a predictable, direct fashion. Lateral thinking involves coming at the problem from new directions – literally, from the side."*

Systemic thinking involves stepping back and taking a look at the larger system of which your problem or challenge is a part. It combines analysis – in other words, making sense of things by dissecting them into their component parts – and synthesis – making sense of things by seeing how they fit together. Frequently, it's at that larger system level that you discover factors that may be contributing to or causing the problem that you're facing. Thinking at this level will often suggest potential solutions that wouldn't otherwise be apparent to you.

Critical thinking is the act of challenging your assumptions and the validity of information you have gathered. Considering how much information we work with today comes from the web, critical thinking has become much more important. Not everything we read there is true, accurate, complete or unbiased, of course. We need to look at everything with a critical eye to determine if it is reasonable and correct. That includes the generally-accepted norms in your profession or industry about "how we do things around here."

Associative thinking: Associative thinkers look at the patterns between things, and often rely on metaphors and analogies to generate creative comparisons. Our minds love to work by association, which makes this form of thinking particularly powerful. One way to support associative thinking is to draw or create a mind map by hand or using mind mapping software.

There are many other types of creative thinking. To explore them, I recommend that you pick up a few books on creative problem solving, such as Michael Michalko's excellent *Thinkertoys*.

ACTION STEPS

- Become an avid consumer of books that are focused on ideas and thinking techniques. Learn what you can and apply it to your work. Michael Michalko's work is a great start; also check out books by Tony Buzan, Tom Wujec, Robert Allen Black, Paul Sloane and Roger von Oech.
- Follow bloggers who focus on creative thinking and problem solving, including Tanner Christensen, Roger von Oech, Lateral Action (Mark McGuinness), The Idea Sandbox (Paul Williams) and The Heart of Innovation (Mitch Ditkoff). Learn from their stories and examples, and apply the best ideas to your situation.

Notes

16. Be keenly observant to recognize new opportunities

The creative person creates new value by observing people in action, listening to what they're challenged by, reading their stories and combining the ideas they uncover into new products and services. Creativity experts call this cultivating an "insight outlook" – being keenly aware of everything around you, with an eye toward "How can I use this?" The creative person knows that nearly anything they encounter in the course of daily life can be fodder for creative solutions.

Watching what people struggle with when using products is often an excellent source of creative inspiration. Corporate innovation practitioners call this "ethnography" – observing how customers use their products. What works well? What doesn't? Where do they get stuck? Where do they need help?

An example: After Maytag launched its revolutionary Neptune line of front-loading washers and dryers, one of its product managers was visiting a customer. When she entered the laundry room, she was surprised to see that the homeowner had propped up both appliances on crates, raising them several feet off the floor. The product manager asked the woman why she did this. The homeowner explained that she had lower back problems, and it was too hard for her to bend over to load and unload her washer and dryer. In short, she had improved the ergonomics of the appliances with her simple, home-grown solution.

The product manager quickly recognized that this was a problem that was probably shared by many owners of Maytag appliances, particularly older people. As a result of this simple observation of a customer's "pain point," all Neptune washers and dryers now come on an integrated stand, which doubles as a storage compartment.

This illustrates an important point for those of us who seek new ways to add value and differentiate ourselves: Ideas are all around us, if only our eyes – and our minds – are open to see them. It's time to take off your blinders and see these opportunities!

ACTION STEP

- New ideas can be inspired by anything, anytime, anywhere: A billboard, a TV commercial, a snippet of conversation overheard in a restaurant or something you read in a magazine, for example. Have your "idea antennae" up at all times and always be on the lookout for bits and pieces of inspiration that you can use in your work.

Notes

17. Become a lateral thinker

One powerful way to increase your value and influence in your job is to become a lateral thinker. This technique involves looking at a challenge from a different perspective – literally, from the side.

Every industry and profession has its dogmas – the dominant ideas that everyone simply accepts without questioning them. They are the unwritten assumptions, rules and conventions that influence people's thinking and attitudes. Once they're in place, people naturally support them, because they seem to make sense, and they tend to vociferously defend those beliefs, no matter what. Lateral thinking is an excellent tool for viewing those dominant ideas in a fresh light. One way to do this is to write them down and then deliberately challenge them. Turn every dominant idea and association on its head, and simply see where it leads.

Asking "What if?" is an excellent technique that can help you to stretch your lateral thinking muscles, because it forces you to explore possibilities and challenge assumptions – both at the same time. Lateral thinking expert Paul Sloane suggests that you develop questions that are extreme to the point of being ridiculous, because they will help to whack you out of your well-rutted paths of thinking.

> *"Many people are in a rut and a rut is nothing but a grave – with both ends kicked out."* – Vince Havner

As you generate these crazy questions, explore ways of fulfilling them and write down any ideas that occur to you. These answers may not necessarily represent actual solutions to your challenge, but rather they may serve as powerful stepping stones to fresh insights and ideas.

ACTION STEPS

- What dogmas and assumptions can you dig into and potentially overturn in your work?
- Think about a current problem or challenge you face. How could you come at it from a different perspective?

Notes

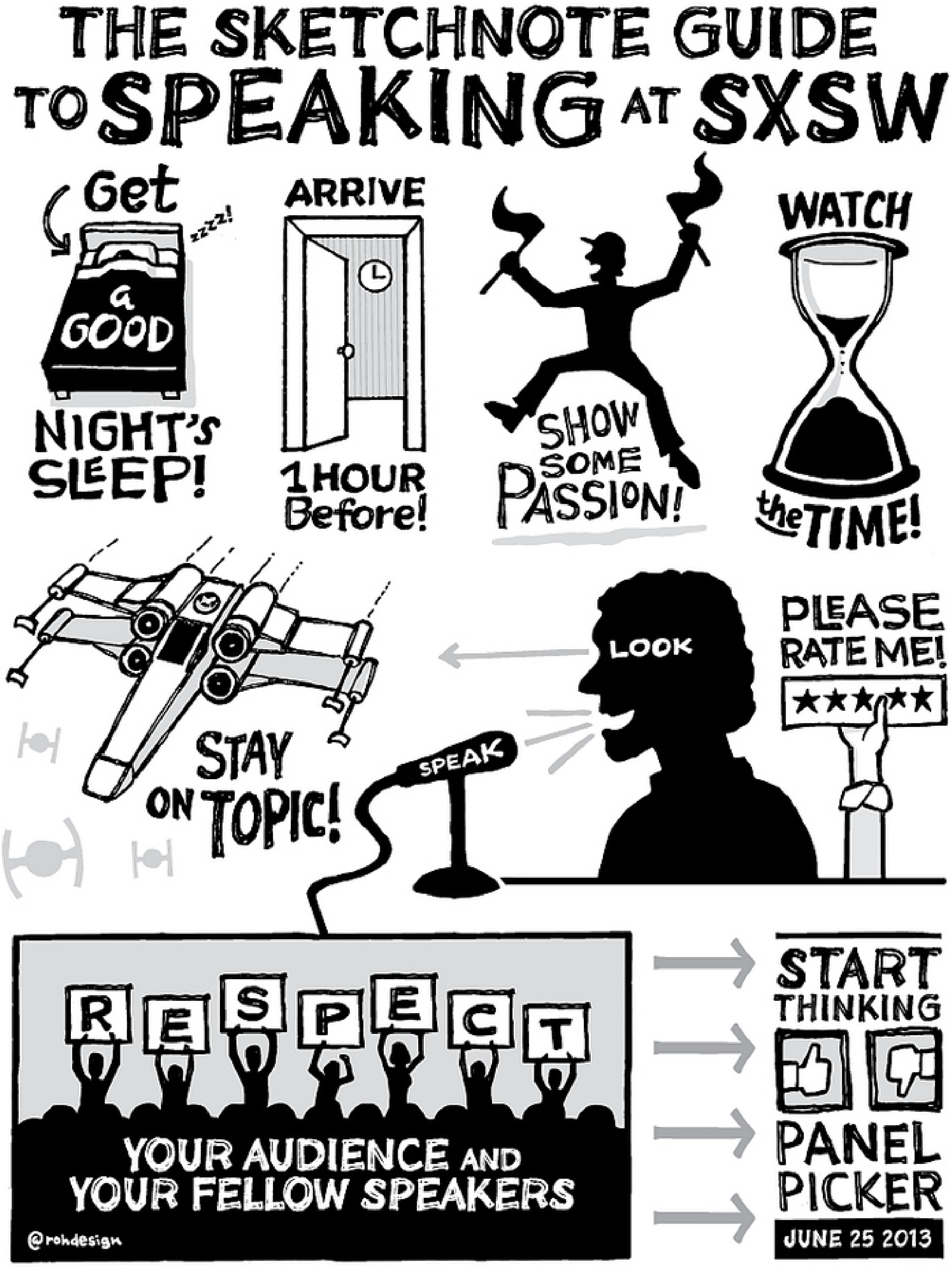
18. Become a visual thinker

Visual thinking is quickly gaining popularity as a tool for analyzing and solving complex business problems. As such, it's an excellent skill to cultivate to help you add value to your job. Your mind does it – it thinks in pictures and images constantly, and the subconscious mind relentlessly associates ideas and concepts together. Why not leverage the way your brain is wired?

As the problems we face in business and life become more complex, we need better tools to help us clearly and accurately describe problems or challenges, envision the ideas that may solve them, and formulate the action plans that can help bring them to fruition. Visual thinking can help in all three areas.

As Adam Sicinski points out in his excellent Visual Thinking Magic blog, *"When you begin to reap the benefits of visual thinking in your life by becoming a better problem solver, decision maker (and) thinker, you also begin the process of enhancing your personal value to yourself, others and the world around you... You see the world, people, circumstances and all things within your environment from an all-encompassing omniscient visual thinking perspective — piecing things together with incredible precision. You envision all the possibilities and probabilities of your reality, and apply these to the visual thinking process in order to formulate ingenious solutions to the problems you or others face."*

It's a powerful perspective, one that can help you to become an A-player in the eyes of your firm's senior management. It's an awesome differentiator for you and your unique, value-added style.



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Visual thinking can help you to:

- See patterns and connections that others aren't even aware of
- Envision new possibilities and ideas
- Display the quality of your thinking
- Dissect complex problems, view their components and discern their underlying causes
- Reach clarity more quickly on complex business problems
- Make better informed decisions
- Communicate your ideas in a high-impact, memorable manner to the key people you are trying to influence
- Build consensus among your team members faster

Visual thinking has become so popular today that it has spawned many excellent books from its most talented practitioners. These books are invaluable guides to this fascinating world of non-linear, bigger-picture thinking. Specifically, I recommend these ten books:

The Back of the Napkin: Solving Problems and Selling Ideas with Pictures – Dan Roam

Unfolding the Napkin: The Hands-On Method for Solving Complex Problems with Simple Pictures – Dan Roam

Blah Blah Blah: What To Do When Words Don't Work – Dan Roam

Visual Meetings: How Graphics, Sticky Notes and Idea Mapping Can Transform Group Productivity – David Sibbett

Mind Maps for Business: Revolutionize Your Business Thinking and Practice – Tony Buzan

Idea Mapping: How to Access Your Hidden Brain Power, Learn Faster, Remember More and Achieve Success in Business – Jamie Nast

Thinking Visually: Business Applications of 14 Core Diagrams – Malcolm Craig

Gamestorming: A Playbook for Innovators, Rulebreakers, and Changemakers – Dave Gray, Sunni Brown and James Macanufo

Resonate: Present Visual Stories that Transform Audiences – Nancy Duarte

Visual Teams: Graphic Tools for Commitment, Innovation, and High Performance – David Sibbett

ACTION STEPS

- Select several books from the reading list and become familiar with visual thinking, why it's important today and how you can utilize it to think and plan more effectively.
- Follow blogs and websites related to visual thinking. I recommend Nancy Duarte's blog, Adam Sicinski's Visual Thinking Magic and Mindjet's Conspire Blog.

Notes

19. Adopt mind mapping as your "secret weapon"

In the name of organizational efficiency, chances are you're now doing more work than ever before – more projects, more objectives, more data, more plans and more deliverables. It's getting harder to keep up. Chances are, you're a victim of "information overload."

To survive, you need to be able to sift through a mountain of information, ideas and knowledge, synthesize meaning from it and communicate it in reports, plans, presentations and other forms of business communication. But in many cases, you're limited to the same set of business productivity tools that nearly every organization gives its knowledge workers – Microsoft Word, Excel, PowerPoint and Outlook. Nothing against Microsoft or its ubiquitous business suite. It's excellent, and it enables a lot of work to be done. But it's not enough any more. What's needed is a new paradigm for managing ideas, information, data and knowledge – a software tool that enables users to manipulate these assets with greater flexibility, and which helps you to see new connections and possibilities. One type of tool that meets these requirements very well is mind mapping software.

Many executives who have used mind mapping software rave about it – how it has delivered a quantum leap in their productivity, creativity and decision-making skills. According to surveys I've conducted with users of this type of software, it delivers an average increase in productivity of over 20% – that's like gaining one extra work day per week! Top benefits cited by survey respondents have included reaching clarity on issues faster and enabling them to handle complex projects that they wouldn't have been able to handle before they used it.

Here are the practical benefits of mind mapping software:

Unbelievable flexibility: No other type of program lets you manipulate ideas, knowledge and information with as much freedom and flexibility as mind mapping software. That's because it encapsulates ideas and knowledge in "containers" that can hold various types of content and data. You can rearrange these at will.

Reach clarity faster: No other medium allows you to brainstorm about a subject and quickly rearrange topics, like notes on a desk. You can create "containers" for information, on the fly, and arrange them in an easy to see, hub-and-spokes format. It can literally convey what used to take hundreds of pages in one visually engaging document.

You can see the forest <u>and</u> the trees: The expandable/contractible format of mind map branches enables you to see both the 50,000 foot overview and a detailed view, both in the same document. Try that with Microsoft Word or PowerPoint!

It helps you to make connections. Because your brain works by association, mapping information visually makes it easier to see connections between seemingly unrelated bits of information. Also, your brain hates to see things in an unfinished state. So when it sees a map branch with information that hasn't been fully developed, your brain kicks into gear and delivers the thoughts and ideas needed to complete it. That's valuable!

It helps you to identify gaps in your information: Your brain works visually, and it works by association. So when you start to visually record your ideas and knowledge, it enables you to more easily see where gaps exist in your information – such as additional facts or knowledge you need to gather, or new "white space" ideas that you couldn't see before.

It gives you a powerful set of tools to think about your thinking: When you move a topic in a mind map, you change its context – you "reframe" its meaning. That's powerful, because it gives you a unique ability to "think about your thinking" – to look at ideas and information from a higher level of abstraction and rethink and rearrange your ideas until they make sense to you. Mind mapping software is the only type of business software that enables this capability.

It promotes whole-brained thinking. Most types of conventional thinking leverage only the linear or visual sides of your brain, but not both. Mind mapping taps into both sides simultaneously, which is very powerful.

ACTION STEPS

- If you haven't yet invested in mind mapping software give a free program like XMind or the free version of Mindjet Connect a try.
- Get your hands on a good mind mapping book to understand the business benefits of this visual thinking technique. I recommend *Mind Maps for Business: Revolutionize Your Business Thinking and Practice* by Tony Buzan.

Notes

20. Invest in creativity tools

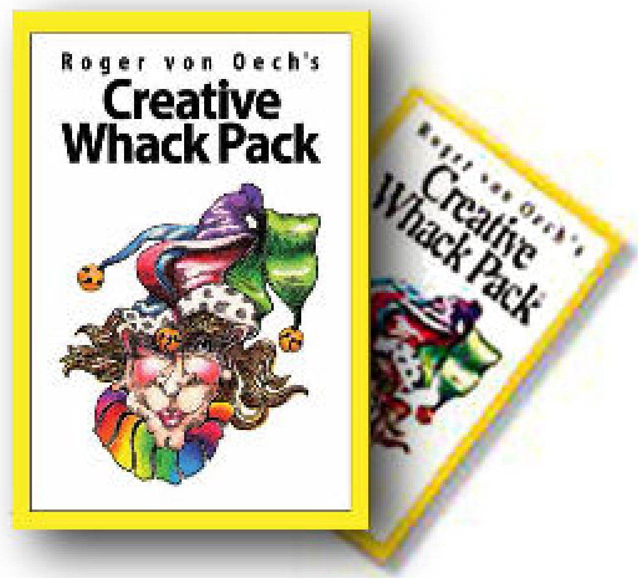
Your ideas are needed like never before. Companies are struggling to survive the continued economic malaise, and desperately need new ideas to help drive fresh growth. Increasingly, they're no longer relying on an elite "skunkworks" team to generate ideas and solutions. Instead, they're asking all employees to contribute their best thinking to the business. And that means an excellent opportunity for you to add value to your employer or client.

Even if you don't believe you're naturally creative, you <u>can</u> become a creative problem solver, if you have the right tools. Creativity and brainstorming tools are excellent aids that can help you to generate more and better ideas. They serve as catalysts, jump-starting your brain's creative juices with different stimuli. Some brainstorming tools ask you questions, while others rely on a variety of associative or lateral thinking techniques to "whack" your thinking.

Several excellent tools that I have personally used and recommend include these two:

KnowBrainer: If you are looking for a single creativity tool that is powerful, portable, and effective, this is the one to buy. This fan-card deck brings a simple process of problem definition, brainstorming and idea evaluation to your challenges, and is equally well-suited for solo brainstorming or with a small group. Its content is based on years of research by its inventor, Gerald Haman, into the most effective questions, keywords and images for ideation. So it's not just someone's random collection of creative stimuli – rather, it's a heavily vetted, proven tool that has generated millions of dollars in value for its corporate users.

The Creative Whack Pack: This is an illustrated deck of 64 creative thinking strategies that will whack you out of habitual thought patterns and enable you to look at your life and actions in a fresh way. The cards are divided into four 16-card suits: Explorer, Artist, Judge, and Warrior. These represent the four roles or types of thinking of the creative process. The creative problem-solving techniques contained in this marvelous tool are based upon the contents of Roger von Oech's excellent books, *A Whack on the Side of the Head* and *A Kick in the Seat of the Pants*, two of the best-selling creativity books of all time. An excellent iPhone/iPod/iPad app is also available and I highly recommend it.



ACTION STEPS

- If you want to get off to a quick start with brainstorming techniques, Google the term "creativity + SCAMPER." This should lead you to a mnemonic that you can use to consider your challenge from multiple perspectives. It is one of the most respected and effective brainstorming techniques anywhere and it's very easy to use.
- If you're looking for a brainstorming tool, I recommend that you visit my InnovationTools website and look at the brainstorming tool reviews there. You'll find much to think about – literally!

Notes

21. Have a device with you to capture ideas

Do you have a method or strategy for recording ideas when ideas occur to you? If not, you should. Ideas tend to be fleeting creatures, bubbling up from your subconscious mind without warning, and then disappearing just as quickly – perhaps never to be recalled again.

"Ideas are all around you, and they can appear (and disappear) very quickly," explains creativity expert Charles Cave, an advocate of recording your ideas any time, anywhere. *"Be receptive to the world around you. There are times when you may hear a snatch of conversation, or see a funny sign. Unless you capture that thought immediately, it will be gone in matter of minutes. Imagine your ideas are butterflies flying out into the open. You need a net to capture the butterflies and not let them get away."*

Fortunately, ideas are easy to capture and record, and you have many tools at your disposal that you can use to lasso your insights, hunches and ideas. These include index cards, notebooks, flip charts, whiteboards, digital audio recorders and mobile devices.

Over the last 20 years, I have been on quest to find the best go-anywhere tool for capturing my ideas quickly and easily, no matter where I am. My tool du jour is my iPhone with Evernote and Dragon Dictation apps. Dragon Dictation records your speech, sends the audio file to a remote server, translates it into text and transfers it back to the screen of your iPhone – all within 4 to 5 seconds. It's surprisingly accurate. I can then copy and paste the text into Evernote.

The beautiful thing about Evernote is that my ideas are accessible from every device I use – my iPhone, iPad, two laptops and a desktop PC. Everything stays perfectly in sync, without me having to think about it. That's very convenient!

In fact, this entire book was written on my iPhone using Dragon Dictation and Evernote. I wanted to see if it was possible – and it worked very well! The trick was knowing the status of each piece of content, which I was able to do by creating folders for each stage of my workflow. I then placed ideas and articles in the appropriate folders, so I could work through them and complete the next step on each one.

ACTION STEPS

- If you have an iPhone, utilize Dragon Dictate to dictate ideas and then copy and paste them into Evernote or a similar note-taking app. If you prefer a paper-based system, I recommend picking up a pocket-sized Moleskine notebook and a small pen that you can carry with you everywhere.
- Get in the habit of utilizing these tools to record bits of inspiration, ideas and items for future reference.

Notes

22. Conceive a creative solution to a tough problem

Everybody loves a problem solver, especially in today's economy. Cultivate your ability to become one by developing a systematic approach to analyzing problems, developing solutions and selecting the best ones to recommend to your bosses. This requires that you become adept at two primary skills:

1. Deconstructing your current challenge and analyzing its component parts. This includes looking for the root causes of problems – not just the surface-level symptoms – and considering the larger systems within which your problem resides. During this stage of creative problem-solving, it's essential that you develop a thorough and accurate understanding of what the <u>real</u> problem or root cause is. Keep asking “Why?” and you’ll eventually arrive at the root cause of a problem.

2. Brainstorming creative solutions based upon what you've learned in step one. There are numerous creative thinking books that can help you to learn brainstorming techniques. One of the very best, in my opinion, is *Thinkertoys* by Michael Michalko. This is one book you're going to want to keep on your desk to use as a reference when you're trying to solve a thorny problem at work!

Here are some tips on how to brainstorm creative solutions and add value to your work:

- Look to other industries that have similar business problems and see if there are ways that their solutions could be adapted to your situation and your industry.

- Use visual thinking to lay out the current challenge or situation in detail – either as a flowchart or a mind map – by breaking it into its component parts. You will be able to see relationships and connections more easily, which could be the key to developing the perfect solution to your challenge.
- Trying to solve a complex business problem using only your current perspective is a bit like the proverbial blind man feeling his way along an elephant and trying to discover what it is. You need to be able to step back and look at the bigger picture, including what is upstream and downstream of the problem area.
- Imagine how someone else would approach this challenge. How would Steve Jobs solve it? Thomas Edison? Richard Branson? Sometimes this "sleight of head" exercise can pay big benefits, because it forces you outside of your current, limited patterns of thought.
- Don't be dismayed if the problem you're trying to solve is outside of your normal area of expertise. Remember, it's often the outsiders who come up with breakthrough solutions, because they are not hampered by the limited mindset of experienced people – the so-called "curse of experience" – and the way things are done in your industry or profession. Use your expanded perspective to your advantage and think more broadly than your peers. That's an excellent way to add value to your job and to impress your bosses.

ACTION STEPS

- Pick one challenge or problem that your department is facing and dissect it to determine its root causes. Then brainstorm potential solutions and communicate the best of them to your boss.
- Make a list of the challenges in your life. Then invest at least 15 to 30 minutes each morning with a pad of paper and a pen, thinking through these problems and brainstorming potential solutions to them. Make it a regular habit!

Notes

23. Adapt an idea used in another industry to your business

In today's stagnant economy, corporate leaders are desperate for excellent ideas that will help the company to be more profitable, more efficient or reduce costs – and to drive new growth. To help meet this need, you should invest some time and energy brainstorming business development ideas that are aligned with your company's major strategic objectives.

Don't think you don't have to come up with an idea that is completely new to the world – real "blue sky" ideas are actually fairly rare. A much more productive approach is to look at the ways in which other industries or professions solved similar problems or challenges. Chances are, you will uncover some ideas that you may be able to adapt to your current situation. You may also find that one of your existing products, placed in a different context in another industry, may solve some important problems for people in that world.

One recent example I read about on Seth Godin's blog was a StairMaster type of exercise machine that has been adapted to from strengthening legs into a human-powered water pump to irrigate crops in several South American countries. This cool adaptation solves several problems in a very elegant way. Many farmers in South America are very poor, and can't afford other methods commonly used to pump water, such as electricity and gasoline-powered pumps. But they do have human muscles, which can be used on this exercise machine to turn a pump manually. Godin reports that some farmers have literally tripled their income because of the efficient irrigation this device makes possible. It can be used in similar situations in developing countries around the world. And it's all because a creative person looked at a StairMaster and said, *"What if we could use this in another application like farming?"*

What opportunities are hiding in plain sight in your world? Where else could your company's products be used? What products or services used in other industries could help your company to solve some difficult problems? What firm could you partner with that has complementary strengths to those of your organization – where the two of you together could be much more effective than either one of you could ever be alone?

Opportunities to add value are all around you. All you need to do is ask smarter and more creative questions!

ACTION STEPS

- Periodically scan websites and publications such as IndustryWeek, BusinessWeek Forbes, FastCompany, Entrepreneur and Wired magazine for technologies, business models and methods utilized in other industries or professions that may have some application in your field of work.
- Use mind mapping software to set up a number of scenarios based upon the trends that you have selected to track. I have created a mind map template that you can use to get a jump start on this process. Click on the links below to download it in one of four popular formats:

  MindManager

  NovaMind

  MindGenius

  XMind

Notes

24. Develop expertise in selling your ideas

If creative ideas are the currency of the 21st-century, then it naturally follows that your ability to sell your ideas to others is of primary importance.

Your ideas may be wonderful – game changing, profit producing and impactful. But they will only create value if they get implemented, if they survive the corporate approval process. This means that you need to be very skillful at selling others on your ideas, and develop a keen sense for the unique personalities of each executive whom you're trying to influence. You need to tailor the presentation of your idea around the issues and terms that are the most meaningful and attractive to them. What's in it for them? How will they benefit?

To successfully sell your idea to others, they need to feel a sense of "ownership" of it. They need to internalize it and make it their own. That means you need to be open to the fact that others may add to your idea or make changes to it to make it better fit their worldview – or simply to put their imprimatur on it, because that’s their style. That's OK. It's all part of the game of getting an idea accepted, supported and implemented in today's organization.

Be aware of how different senior executives like to have ideas presented to them. Some prefer to read a detailed proposal and ask lots of questions. Others prefer an executive summary. With some executives, you may find that before you give them a formal proposal, it works best if you first float a "trial balloon" past them. In other words, bring up the idea verbally as something you're analyzing and considering. That way, when you present a proposal to them, your Big Idea won't seem so foreign. This will hopefully reduce the odds of them rejecting it. I used to work for an association executive who used this approach to present major funding proposals to his board of directors, and it worked very well.

Remember, new ideas are, by their nature, unfamiliar. Expect your big idea to come under a lot of scrutiny from senior executives. Be prepared to answer tough questions about it. Put yourself in their shoes and anticipate the questions they're likely to ask. Because your firm's senior executive team tends to be bigger-picture, bottom-line oriented people, they are most likely to be concerned about issues like increasing profits, decreasing costs, risk reduction and new business development. If you can couch your ideas in those terms, you're more likely to get their attention and support. You also need to show that you have anticipated any potential downsides to your ideas, and that you have plans to mitigate them.

Good luck crafting and selling your big idea to your company's leaders!

ACTION STEPS

- Determine what primary criteria your company's management tends to use when evaluating new ideas. Create a worksheet that you can use as a screen to evaluate your ideas to make sure that they stand up to those criteria.
- Refine your idea until you can state what it is and its benefits in 30 seconds or less – in other words, create a so-called “elevator pitch.” Senior-level executives are extremely busy. What if you had a brief encounter with the president of your company, and had to communicate the essence of your new idea in only 30 seconds? Could you do it? This time restriction forces you to simplify and clarify your idea. This will also make it easier to communicate to others, increasing its odds of success.

Notes

25. Develop a prototype or model of your idea

New ideas are, by their nature, unfamiliar and therefore scary to some senior-level executives. Their gut instinct: If they can't understand it, they should kill it. To overcome this tendency when selling your Big Idea to your organization's leadership, one very effective strategy is to build an inexpensive pilot or prototype of your idea – something they can hold, manipulate and understand.

3-D material deposition technology is ideal for this type of application. It enables you to inexpensively create a resin scale model of your product idea, directly from a CAD drawing. Clay modeling, used in the automotive industry, is still used in today's world of sophisticated 3-D design software because having something tangible to react to is still important. In a world of high tech, people still need high touch. Modeling your idea takes it from abstract to concrete.

If your new product idea is not a physical item, then you may want to consider creating a graphical model of it – anything that takes your idea beyond a written proposal, where words just can't do an adequate job of conveying its impact.

The biggest advantage of a prototype or model is that it gives people something tangible to wrap their heads around. If you do the envisioning for them, you create something they can more easily get excited about. It also makes it easier to defend your vision against other executives trying to add to it and compromise its simplicity.

In the early 1990s, when Jeff Hawkins had an idea for a hand-held information appliance (which eventually became the Palm Pilot), he carved a crude prototype out of wood. It contained controls where he envisioned they would be on his proposed device, and he carried it around in his pocket to determine if his idea of a take-everywhere information tool was really practical. In its early stages, other people insisted that he add features and functionality to it. But like Steve Jobs and the design of the iPod, Hawkins was convinced that keeping the device as simple as possible was the key to its success. Ultimately, he was right. But the Palm Pilot may have never seen the light of day if Hawkins hadn't validated the concept and refined it with his wooden prototype.

Another key advantage of a prototype or limited pilot of a concept is that its small scope and budget makes it more likely to be approved by senior management. After all, if it fails, its negative impact will be minimal compared to betting the farm on a risky idea. But if it succeeds, it can be expanded and refined, and gradually given more funding in incremental stages. An early success will give your company's more leadership more confidence to devote additional budget and manpower to it, via a multi-stage investment strategy. This is very similar to the way that venture capital firms manage risk. They fund start-up companies in successive rounds, based on the young firm reaching certain milestones.

By taking it one step at a time and demonstrating success each step of the way, your small idea can more readily become a big one.

ACTION STEPS

- What can you do to create a prototype model or pilot of your idea?
- How can you make your idea more tangible before showing it to others?

Notes

26. Add value from your genius

When you add value from your genius, that's when you are able to best utilize your time and energy. Your genius is your unique gift that has an extremely high value, and will make the biggest contribution to your employer, your family and the world.

Adding value to your work is going to require all of the creativity, enthusiasm and insight that you can muster. To increase your odds of success, it makes sense to play to your strengths, that unique combination of skills and capabilities that only you can contribute to the world.

If you try to add value from an area in which you are weak, you're not likely to be successful. Bringing something new into the world frequently involves a challenging "birthing" process, full of obstacles that must be overcome and problems that must be solved. You need an abundance of passion and energy to power through or sidestep these barriers. If you're operating from a weak foundation, you're likely to give up when the going gets too difficult.

In short, you can't add much value when you're simply going through the motions.

That's why you need to focus on your genius and your strengths. That's where your passion, creativity and greatest potential for contribution lies.

ACTION STEP

- Set a goal of improving your strength and knowledge in an area of your greatest strength and passion. It's easier and more productive to build on your strengths than trying to correct weaknesses.

Notes

CHAPTER 3
Cultivate a Value-Added Attitude

27. Cultivate an abundance mindset

A lot of people incorrectly look at life as a zero-sum game – in other words, if I get more, you get less. There is a scarcity of resources, only so much to go around. So it has to be carefully allocated and given to those most deserving. This idea was first taught to us in school via the bell curve, which says that there's a natural distribution of grades – there are only so many A's we can give out, so many B's and so forth. The middle of the curve is of course the largest part – which is also where average people are lumped together. In sports, too, we're deeply scripted that there can only be one winner – the rest are also-rans or losers.

When we enter the work world, the culture of scarcity still surrounds us. Even during the best of times, only a relative handful of executives are picked for promotions or rewarded with bonuses. They also tend to get the biggest raises. We compete against each other for scarce resources, such as budget, manpower and the attention of senior management. During a downturn, the problem gets considerably worse, as budget cuts, frozen wages and headcount reductions become the order of the day. There's austerity everywhere. It's no wonder we operate from a mindset of scarcity – we've been embedded in it all of our lives.

But a handful of creative, resourceful people don't play by these rules. They don't accept that life is a zero-sum game. Instead, they practice the mindset of abundance. This way of thinking says there's more than enough for everyone and, having a creative, generative mind, we can brainstorm ways to create more, or transform previously unvaluable resources into valuable ones. Ideas are, of course, the ultimate renewable resource. Abundance thinkers invest time regularly on creative problem-solving on a regular basis, constantly improving their work and their life in numerous ways that make them remarkably successful and resilient, even during tough times.

Abundance thinkers realize the true nature of an idea: It's not a scarce resource, but a plentiful one. An idea is like a candle flame. It can be spread from one candle to another without dimming the original light source. In fact, sharing the flame among a large number of candles brightens the room so we all can see clearly. That's why abundance thinkers openly share their ideas with others. They say, *"I don't care if someone steals an idea, takes credit for it, ignores it or decides not to implement it. There's much more where that came from. I am a limitless supply of ideas."*

Remember this: Even if your boss or the senior management of your firm doesn't implement many of your ideas, they will undoubtedly appreciate that you're thinking about the business in a deep and creative way and that you care enough to share your thoughts about improving it with them. This practice will increase your reputation for providing value to the company. Not only that, it will go a long way to differentiate you from your peers, many of whom are simply doing what they're told and not one iota more.

If you find that you're in a culture that really doesn't value your ideas and rejects your creative problem-solving mindset, maybe it's time to look for a different job, to find an environment that is more accepting of your generative, abundant outlook. If that's the case, then of course your resume, LinkedIn profile and other social media channels ought to reflect this mindset. It will naturally attract prospective employers who share your outlook.

Why not try adopting an abundance mindset? I think you'll be presently surprised at the effect it has on your attitude – and the way that key stakeholders in your work and life respond to you.

ACTION STEPS

- Carefully consider your attitudes toward money, time, opportunity and your life in general. Are you operating from a mindset of abundance or scarcity? Make a conscious effort to move in the direction of abundance.
- If you are relentlessly pragmatic and just can't bring yourself to think about abundance, try a little experiment: Be generous to someone. Give them something for free – your time, information or ideas – and observe what happens. Chances are, people will appreciate your openness and they will return your kindness many times over. You will soon learn that abundance brings into your life many opportunities that you never could have imagined.

Notes

28. Ask yourself the value question – daily!

One very effective strategy to ensure that you make an impact in your work and life is to ask yourself this question on a daily basis:

> ***"Today, how am I going to create value for other people and deliver it as well as I can?"***

In today's world, we are all victims of information overload. Distractions abound, making it hard to discern what's really important and to focus relentlessly on it. That's why you need to make a conscious effort each morning to ask yourself what is the highest and best use of your time today? If you can bring those priorities to the top of your mind before you get to work, you have a better chance of staying focused on them throughout your work day.

Asking yourself the value question on a daily basis also has another major benefit: It turns a simple mental exercise into a habit, one that becomes an invisible part of your mind's "Personal Operating System" and helps you to ferociously create and deliver value every day.

ACTION STEPS

- Get in the habit of asking yourself this question each morning at breakfast or as part of your morning routine – before you jump into the day's projects and priorities. Your daily actions must focus upon the highest value-added tasks, not those that seem urgent but aren't really that important.
- As you rise to higher levels of management, be careful of how many things you say "yes" to. It's easy to unwittingly load up your plate with too many low-value activities that don't give you time to accomplish the higher value priorities that your bosses expect you to do.

Notes

29. Act more like an entrepreneur at work

Entrepreneurs are always on the lookout for new ideas that they can use to enhance their business. You should take a similar attitude in your work, no matter how big or small the company. Leaders always like to have workers who feel a sense of ownership about their job and aren't just sitting back waiting to be told what to do. Don't just mindlessly do your work – look for ways to make it great!

One strategy that many workers overlook is that they can get ahead in part by making their boss look smart and effective to his or her superiors. Your exemplary performance reflects well on them; be sure that you make it easy for them to share your progress updates and reports with <u>their</u> key stakeholders.

One idea, especially if you have a new boss or have recently started a new position, is to create a mind map that includes not only the skills you're employing at work but also some of the things that you're doing in your free time – your avocations that may have some value to your work, if only your new boss was aware that you had these talents. It’s an excellent visual summary of who you are and what you bring to the table.

ACTION STEPS

- Entrepreneurs are always on the lookout for new ideas. Cultivate a reputation as the "idea person" in your job, someone who is always thinking two steps ahead of where the firm is now.
- Create a mind map of your skills and experience and share it with your boss.

Notes

30. Exceed people's expectations

Exceeding expectations is a great way to stand out and add value. Your job has certain roles and responsibilities, upon which your performance review is based. Of course, you need to do those things flawlessly. But that's just table stakes in the big game of adding value. To get the attention of your boss and the leadership of your firm, you need to do something more – to exceed their expectations.

One simple way to do this is to under-promise and over-deliver to customers. In other words, set realistic project deadlines and then try to exceed them in terms of delivery date or the quality of the finished product. This practice inevitably leads to strong customer satisfaction, especially if you work in a consulting or service business. But it's something you don't see practiced very often – perhaps because everyone is so routinely overworked these days. That's exactly why it's a great opportunity for you to add value. With so many people in survival mode, doing just enough to get by, the market for people who exceed expectations is extremely small. That makes it easy for you to stand out.

Consider several corporations that do this, and have made it part of their brand image:

Domino's Pizza – 30 minutes or less or it's free.

Dell Computer – If you've ever ordered a computer online during the last decade, then you may know that your computer often arrives a day or two before the stated delivery date – always a pleasant surprise!

Apple Computer – If you have ever purchased an iPhone, iPod or iPad, then you know that the package the product comes in is artfully designed. Apple takes something as mundane as packaging – which most other consumer product companies take for granted – and transforms it into a something elegant that surprises and delights you. Also, the entire experience of utilizing an Apple product tends to exceed your expectations – which is part of the reason Apple users are so fanatical.

While these are corporate examples, you can do the same thing, no matter where you work or what you do. It's a matter of caring enough to put exceptional effort and quality into the services you provide. It's about being passionate and putting an abundance of love into the work that you do. This strategy works, whether you run a restaurant, a consulting business or are a salesperson. Customers appreciate being made to feel special. They'll pay you more, and they'll be loyal to you and your firm.

One caution, however: To make this strategy work, you must approach it completely unselfishly. If you have an ulterior motive, and expect to be compensated for exceeding their expectations, your customer or employer will be able to sense it, and this approach may backfire on you. Also, don't "sandbag" by setting artificially low targets. These need to be "stretch" goals, and everyone needs to recognize them as such.

Altruism <u>does</u> pay off. People hope for value, but are routinely disappointed and lulled into accepting average service and quality. So when you serve them in an exceptional way, you will definitely capture their attention!

ACTION STEPS

- What are you going to do to today to exceed the expectations of the people whom it is your privilege to serve?
- What will be part of your unique skills that will help you to exceed your boss' expectations? For me, it's my ability to do visual mapping and diagramming. The company I work for produces products and services that are sometimes very complex. It helps to put them into a flow chart or diagram, so our customers and prospects can better understand what we're selling and how it meets their needs.

Notes

31. Show an eagerness to tackle new challenges

Many executives are content to just do what they're told and nothing more. While that may have been very efficient in the Industrial Age, it's completely out of step with the needs of the Creative Age, in which employees are expected to contribute at a higher level – to come up with ideas that will help to grow the business. To add value, you can't just sit on the sidelines, waiting to be asked to take on cool new projects. You need to be proactive. Here are some ways you can do that:

- If you learn that your company is planning to launch a major new initiative that dovetails with your skill set, let the senior management of your firm know you would like to manage it. They will appreciate your willingness to do so.
- Propose to attend an industry conference that is calculated to stretch you beyond your comfort zone. This gives you an opportunity to network with your peers and to bring back important knowledge and insight that can be put to use in your job.
- Propose to your company that it invest in new software, training or technology that will help it to be more efficient, creative or responsive to customer needs.
- Suggest that your company form a task force to identify and develop strategies to proactively anticipate future customer needs. Volunteer to serve on or head this group.

ACTION STEP

- Let your boss know that you're looking for opportunities to grow your participation and influence in your department or operational area.

Notes

32. Build good karma

Positive karma. Pay it forward. Enrich the community. Build a reputation as someone who helps others to solve problems and who contributes your expertise freely, while expecting nothing in return. Self-development expert Denis Waitley calls this strategy *"growing a shade tree under which you know you'll never stand."*

The average person limits their contribution based upon their current salary. "Why should I do more?" they reason. "My employer doesn't pay me all that much." Earl Nightingale compares it to sitting in front of a fireplace and demanding, "Give me heat!" You must put in some firewood first, obviously. In the same way, you need to contribute service or value to your employer before the compensation will come.

The whole mindset of helping others has taken on new importance in the age of social media. Those who are most successful in social channels tend to give far more than they receive. They know that giving information away and sharing their expertise freely is how you build followers and trust. It's a valuable strategy to build a reputation as a trusted thought leader in your area of expertise.

Despite big changes in technology and other areas of our life, one thing remains the same: Your compensation is on average equal to the number of people you serve, how well you serve them and how unique your service is. If you can nail all three of those things you will increase your compensation, almost without fail.

The bottom line is that you can increase your salary by contributing more, by outgrowing your job, by providing greater service and thereby distinguishing yourself from your peers – many of whom are just going through the motions and doing just enough to maintain the status quo. Truthfully, however, there are so few people who are actually trying to be excellent that there are big opportunities to differentiate yourself, stand out and become a plus factor to everyone you serve.

ACTION STEP

- How can you help others? Invest time to think about this. Focusing on the needs of individual people is where you will find opportunities to be of greater service.

Notes

33. Care immensely about what you do

In today's world, only your best work will do.

In the past, you could probably get away with doing your work "good enough." But in today's globally-connected world, you're competing with far-flung peers in places like London, Dubai and Beijing. Doing good quality work is only table stakes today – it's what you need to play the game, but it doesn't necessarily give you the winning edge.

When everyone has access to the same knowledge via "global brains" like Google and other web search engines, how can you differentiate your work? By caring immensely about what you do, and being passionate and creative about doing it better than anyone else.

It means being willing to look at what you do on behalf of your customers, clients and coworkers with a critical creative eye, always asking yourself questions like:

- Is this the best way this can possibly be done?
- How could it be improved or be made better?
- More efficient?
- More persuasive?
- More impactful?
- How could it be made more profitable?
- Less wasteful?
- More sustainable?

Look at what you do with an eye toward radical improvement.

In nearly every business and industry, there is a certain unwritten orthodoxy – a set of rules that everybody understands that governs "how we do things around here." Your peers accept it and never question it. It's like an invisible box that subtly shapes the way you think and act. It's so much a part of your organization's culture, part of the background noise, that no one ever questions it.

Be willing to challenge the orthodoxy. Don't accept that the way you're doing things now is good enough. It may not be. The way you're doing things now may be in the process of becoming less and less effective – only you may not be aware of that. Even if you're not in a position of power to change things, at least ask the questions that no one else is asking.

The key to doing superior work and standing out is caring more than other others think is practical and really putting your passion and creativity into everything you do. That will make your work stand out; that will add the most value.

ACTION STEP

- If you don't like your current job, spend some focused time thinking about why that is so. Try to determine the root causes for your unhappiness. Is this something that can be changed in your current setting? If not, consider finding a job that is more conducive to your passions and skills. As Ken Blanchard and Mark Miller point out in their book, Great Leaders GROW, *"when a person's core values are not aligned with a company's values, it's rarely a great situation – short term or long term."*

Notes

34. Never compare yourself to others

Comparing yourself to others is a recipe for mediocrity or worse, failure. Instead of comparing yourself to others, learn from other people. Learn from people you admire and from people you'd prefer not to be around. Yes, that's right – people who rub you the wrong way can actually teach you, by helping you to be sensitized to the behaviors you ought to avoid. Learning from others is an excellent strategy to cultivate excellence.

Comparing yourself to others is almost always a losing game, because you will always find someone who is better looking, makes more money, has what appears to be a more exciting job, a better looking spouse and so on. Beyond the surface appearance, however, they may be dealing with challenges and trade-offs you can't possibly imagine. The grass usually isn't greener on the other side of the fence.

You need to be happy in your own situation, with your own focus on life, your own talents and your own one-of-a-kind success journey. Of course, you can grow your talents through training, reading, deep study and learning from experience. But if you compare yourself to others, you're unnecessarily limiting yourself.

Remember: If you've made a commitment to be an innovator, that naturally means you are different and won't necessarily be accepted by everyone. If you were just like everyone else, you wouldn't be an innovator, would you?

One way you can profit from the lives of others is by reading the biographies of successful people of integrity. Learn from their life lessons and experiences. Understand how their minds worked, how they approached challenges and opportunities. Learn from their mistakes, the challenges they overcame and what they accomplished. As you're reading these fascinating life stories, and ask yourself, what lessons can you apply or adapt to your life?

A more productive mindset is to compare your current version of yourself with your ideal future self and to set goals to help you bridge that gap. Naturally, your ideal future self will be someone who looks for opportunities at every turn to add value to their job, their relationships and their life. You'll be someone who is committed to being a contributor, a "go-giver" who sees abundance all around them and shares freely and openly with others – someone who thinks in terms of possibilities rather than limitations.

Your focus needs to be upon envisioning what is possible and taking action to bring it about. Don't limit yourself by being overly focused on limitations, fear and uncertainty. Make your own luck.

ACTION STEP

- Set a goal of reading at least one biography per quarter (four per year). I hadn't done so in a long time, until I read the excellent biography of Steve Jobs by Walter Isaacson. It was fascinating, and I learned much from it – not only some ideas I can adapt to my work style, but also some bad behaviors to avoid!

Notes

35. What is your higher purpose?

What is the bigger purpose that motivates you, that gets you out of bed in the morning, that keeps you going late at night? For me, it's a sense of contribution, sharing knowledge that others will benefit from and which will improve their lives – knowledge that will help them to be better managers, leaders, entrepreneurs, problem solvers and collaborators. That's what gets me going. What's your higher purpose?

Consider the case of the late Steve Jobs, whose mission was to create “insanely great” products that would make peoples’ lives better. As a result of his higher purpose, he focused obsessively on every detail of Apple's products. He was very serious in his criticism of existing competitive products, which all had the same shortcomings that consumers had learned to live with. But he wasn't willing to compromise. He demanded that Apple deliver a better experience, one that would surprise and delight customers. That passion inspired the people he led and resulted in the exceptional success Apple enjoys today.

If you have a clearly defined, invigorating purpose, it will come through in all of your communication with others – in your personal conversations, in your writing, in the ideas you share and in the way you treat others. People can tell if you're just going through the motions or if you’re inspired by some larger purpose.

Even the word "inspired" refers to the spirit within you – something that is burning deep inside, putting the sparkle in your eyes, driving you forward, compelling you to take action and, in turn, inspiring others.

ACTION STEPS

- What is your higher purpose? What inspires you? That's where you need to focus your efforts, because that's where you can deliver the greatest value!
- Once you have a clear idea of what your higher purpose is, invest some quality time to make a plan. How are you going to translate that purpose into goals and actions? Remember: A purpose without action is useless; it's just a set of platitudes. In order to contribute at a higher level in your job and your other life roles, you need to figure out how to put your purpose in to action on a day-to-day basis.

Notes

36. Don’t wait for things to improve – act now!

There's no question that the global economy is still in the doldrums, and is likely to be in a state of uncertainty for at least the next several years. That means businesses will continue to be conservative, spending as little as possible until the upturn comes. But when it does come – and you know it will, based upon a long history of economic boom and bust cycles – it will be too late to put the pedal to the metal and start growing.

Why not adopt a contrarian viewpoint? Recession? Bah! I've decided not to participate, and you should, too!

Any strategist worth his or her salt will tell you that the time to act is now. There are huge gains to be made while your competitors are being über-conservative, wallowing in a mindset of scarcity and loss. Now is the time to bring your own micro-economy back by creating greater value for the people whom you serve – whether that's an external customer or an internal one (e.g., your boss).

The raw material of value creation is ideas. And thanks to the creative mindset you've been cultivating, you have a distinct advantage over your competitors, both internal and external.

Pick your best ideas and do a careful job of packaging and "selling" them to your stakeholders. Remember: During a recession, customers still have needs. They're still willing to spend money – they're just much more pragmatic about it. They want to spend less and get greater value. Package your ideas accordingly. Be sure to emphasize how your ideas are less risky than standing still and doing nothing.

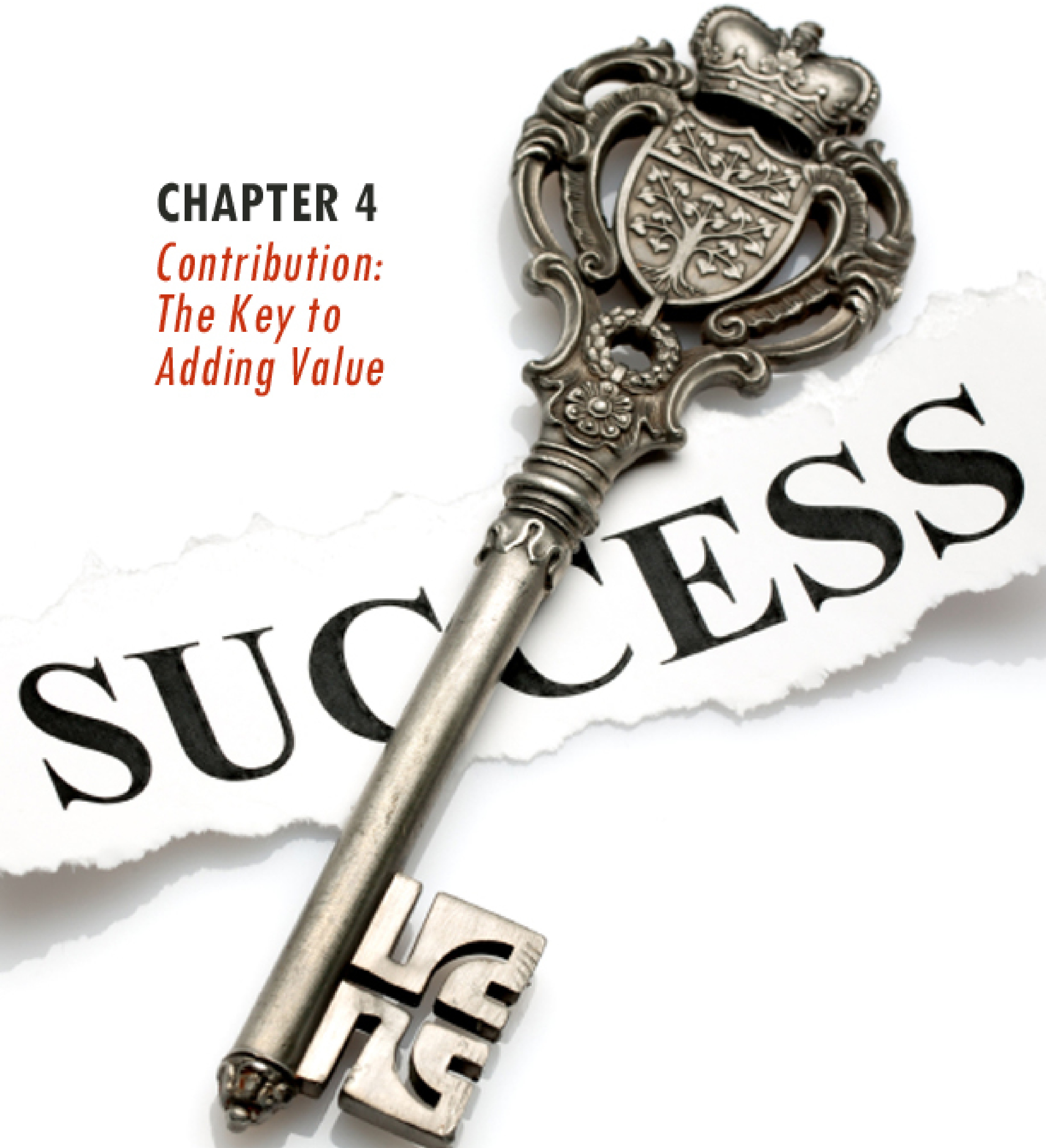
ACTION STEPS

- Identify areas where you can jump ahead now by taking calculated risks. Remember, playing it safe may be the most dangerous strategy of all.
- Invest some time learning how the ongoing economic instability has affected your customers' needs. What needs do they have now? Talk to your company's salespeople, interview key customers directly or consider conducting a survey to find out.

Notes

CHAPTER 4

Contribution: The Key to Adding Value



37. Focus on contribution, not salary

Did you know that the number of opportunities you have at your fingertips is essentially unlimited? That's because they are based upon the power of your creative mind. Creativity is generative; it's about envisioning something that never existed before. Look around you: Everything you see started as an idea in someone's brain. Awesome to comprehend, isn't it?

Focus on creating and contributing from a mindset of abundance, and your compensation will take care of itself. It will naturally follow, in direct proportion to the number of people you serve with your ideas and how well you serve them.

The late Earl Nightingale compared the concepts of contribution and compensation to the two sides of an old-fashioned apothecary scale, the kind that pharmacies used to measure medicine in the early part of the 20th century. You'd place the item to be weighed on a platter on one side of the scale, and then determine how much it weighed by adding small weights to the platter on the other side until the two were in balance with each other. In our analogy, the product to be weighed is our contribution. We need to put that on our "life scale" first. Compensation will then come to balance out our contribution.

This is almost always the case. Most people aren't aware that this principle is in operation because they never understand the importance of adopting an attitude of service. This rule is even more true today. As authors like Seth Godin have pointed out, the days of checking your brain at the door and just doing what you're told are a relic of the past. Employers expect much more today, as they struggle to stay in business.

They desperately need the creative energy and contributions of their creative workers in order to fuel new growth and to leverage new, emerging opportunities.

In other words, the opportunities to creatively contribute to your work and add tremendous value to it have never been greater.

ACTION STEPS

- Why not give this idea of contributing more than you're paid to do a try? Yes, it requires a leap of faith. No, you don't have anything to lose by trying it. If anything, you have much to gain, both in terms of psychic rewards (job satisfaction, and knowing that you've given the best you've got) and monetary rewards.
- If for some reason your employer is unwilling or unable to recognize your contributions, at the very least you will have a resume with some new kick-ass projects that will look very attractive to a prospective employer. Focus upon finding a company that <u>will</u> appreciate what you can contribute to them. There's still a lot of value in that!

Notes

38. Cultivate a strategic instead of a tactical mindset

Many business people don't know the difference between a strategy and a tactic. Strategy is focused upon bigger-picture issues like objectives and purpose. When you're thinking strategically, you're looking at many possibilities.

Simply put, a strategy is the "what," while tactics represent the "how." *"A strategy is an idea… A conceptualization of how the goal could be achieved... A tactic is an action you take to execute the strategy,"* is how the Brand Insights Blog compares the two concepts.

Here's the problem: The average executive is firmly rooted in a tactical mindset – focused upon doing (following orders), rather than thinking about what needs to be done and why. What's worse, they don't even know they're wearing "tactical blinders."

To add the most value and capture the attention of your organization's senior management, you'll need to cultivate strong strategic thinking skills. How can you tell if you have a tactical or strategic mindset? Ask yourself questions like these:

- Am I focused on processes and next actions? (tactical)
- Am I focused on my organization's overall business objectives? (strategic)
- Why do we want to accomplish this? (strategic)
- What do we need to do in order to accomplish this objective, utilizing what resources? (tactical)

ACTION STEPS

- Analyze your current areas of focus in your work. Use the questions above to determine if you have a tactical or strategic focus. Make a commitment to move more in the direction of looking at things strategically, where you can add greater value.
- What is the bigger picture surrounding your work? What is the larger context within which your work is done? Pay more attention to that bigger frame and look for opportunities to add more value in that larger space.

Notes

39. Outgrow your job

Many executives who have been in the same position for many years handle their duties with great efficiency, working very hard and putting in long hours. But they never learn any new skills and never expand their scope of influence within the company. Essentially, they're standing still. These are the managers who walk around with a target on their back during a business downturn. They tend to be interchangeable and expendable.

"The failure to grow sabotages the careers of more leaders than anything else," warn Ken Blanchard and Mark Miller in their new book, *Great Leaders GROW: Becoming a Leader for Life*. They caution that leaders who stop growing risk stagnation or, even worse, irrelevance.

You, in contrast, need to provide superior value and demonstrate that you've been growing your skills and applying them in ways that are aligned with the needs of your company. That's how you can increase your job security and make yourself promotable.

Take on the mindset of someone two levels above you. If your job is mainly tactical, adopt more of a strategic mindset. Look at the bigger picture. Are there emerging threats that senior management seems to be ignoring? Perhaps this is an opportunity for you to do some research and present your findings to them.

Don't be the executive who has repeated the same level of experience 20 years in a row. Instead, be the person who can honestly say that you have had 20 years of progressively growing knowledge, responsibility and experience – based on an aggressive plan of continuous learning and personal development.

What are you waiting for? It's time to outgrow your job!

ACTION STEPS

- Brainstorm what the next steps in your career path should be. What education would be required? What skills do you need to acquire in order to be effective in a higher-level position? What skills and qualifications does your boss have? What is typically required of a person in that position in your company? Make sure you have clear answers to these questions.
- Review your progress regularly – at least on a quarterly basis – and determine any corrective action you need to take to keep you on course in your career growth.

Notes

40. Follow the 10x rule

A good rule of thumb is to give 10x (ten times) the value compared to your cost to your employer or client. Why? Because your internal customers (e.g., your boss) and external customers or clients are always comparing what it costs to utilize your services versus the value you're creating on their behalf. For many executives, that number is unfortunately a negative one.

During good economic times, a manager or worker who isn't providing value commensurate with their pay can get by, hiding behind the facade of busy-ness. A rising tide raises all ships, which means they get carried along by the organization's success. Senior management is so busy trying to keep up with booming business that they don't pay much attention to slackers.

All that changes in a downturn, however. Every part of the firm's operations comes under scrutiny, including its human capital. Often, an extended upturn like the one we experienced for the last decade tends to inflate salaries. Good times, right? Yes, until the downturn hits, and that big-ass salary now looks like a giant target attached to your back. If you've just been going through the motions and maintaining the status quo, chances are you're going to be toast. If you haven't already been laid off, the pink slip may arrive before you know it.

The late personal improvement guru Earl Nightingale used the analogy of a ship at sea to drive home the importance of personal value creation. What happened centuries ago when a sailing ship encountered rough seas? The crew threw all non-essential supplies overboard, to lighten the ship’s load and prevent it from capsizing in the giant waves.

So what about you? Are you essential to your firm's operation? Or are you expensive overhead that could be jettisoned?

What can you do now to ensure that you're essential to your organization's operations? People who contribute above the norm, thinking creatively and strategically about how to improve business – not just working longer hours – are the ones who will survive and thrive, despite the harsh economic times.

Because a top-tier professional is someone your employer needs to hang on to, they'll often go the extra mile to ensure that you won't "jump ship" in response to a better offer from a competitor.

ACTION STEP

- Set a goal of delivering greater value to your employer, customers or clients – whomever it is your job to serve. Over-deliver, well above and beyond the level at which you're compensated. They will love you for it, and increased compensation and new opportunities will follow, in time.

Notes

41. Be better informed

One way to add value to your job is to be better informed on what's going on in your industry than anyone else, and to share that information with key people who need to know it

This strategy is so easy to implement, yet so few people do it unless it's specifically part of their job. It's actually very simple to set up and it won't cost you anything. That means you can do it on your own, and make it part of your value added services to the company.

Simply create Google Alerts on key terms, including key customer names, key industry terms, industry trends and other relevant keywords and phrases. Then review the e-mails that Google generates each day for these alerts and send links to any important stories to key people in your organization. They'll appreciate the heads up!

How do you set up a Google Alert? Simply do a search of news on Google (it's a sub-category within the main search). At the bottom of the search results page is a link that you can click on to set up an alert on that topic. Doing so will take you to a web page where you need to enter your e-mail address and tell Google how frequently to give you updates. Google will then send you an e-mail to verify that you want to set up this alert. That's all there is to it! It's simple to set up, and best of all, it's free!

Another valuable service, which updates you whenever a specific web page has changed, is called InfoMinder. It's ideal for tracking web pages that change infrequently or on an irregular basis, such as a blog or a corporate news release page. It's a wonderful competitive intelligence tool! A professional account, which tracks up to 100 pages, is only US$30 per year – a great bargain, considering how much you can accomplish with it.

Another way to stay informed is to sign up for the e-newsletters of key websites in your industry or profession. Often, these sites will contain trend articles, industry news and other focused content that will help you to keep up with the latest developments in your field.

Other techniques to be well informed include following industry gurus on Twitter and Google+, subscribing to the RSS feeds of key bloggers and then closely watching the issues and trends they're talking about. Often, they will discern trends before anyone else does.

No matter what industry or profession you're in, technology is having an impact on what you do. Round out your reading with technology sites like Wired.com, Mashable and others that offer broad, general coverage of technology and its impact on business and society. “Like” the Facebook pages of competitors and other key players in your industry or profession. Look at the kinds of questions customers are asking. Is there a pattern that may point to some unmet needs?

Finally, consider becoming a blogger yourself, and share your thoughts and opinions with others in your field. This exercise will help you to become a better communicator in your job, and over time you will become connected with other thought leaders in your areas of expertise – who will alert you to other developments and opportunities you should know about. The future belongs to the connected!

ACTION STEPS

- Set up Google Alerts for the key terms and company names that you need to be following in order to keep up with industry developments. Consider investing in a service like InfoMinder to track specific web pages for relevant news and new developments.
- Follow thought leaders in your industry or profession and pay close attention to the trends they're discussing. How could they positively or negatively affect your firm?

Notes

42. Offer to serve on committees and task forces

Offer to serve on committees and task forces in your company. They are an increasingly important way to add value outside of your normal job description. Volunteering for these types of assignments gives you a higher profile with key people in other parts of the company, and helps you to build new relationships that could be valuable to you some day. It also exposes you to new ideas and insights that you wouldn't otherwise get by working strictly within your department.

The other huge benefit is the message it sends to the senior management of your company: That you are smart, ambitious and are willing to take on new challenges. This can help to differentiate you from other managers at your job level.

Think about opportunities to serve on committees <u>outside</u> of your company as well. These could be industry associations or partnerships that your company has with other firms. In the former case, you will have the opportunity to collaborate with peers at other companies in your industry or profession – which could lead to job offers later, if you do a good job on the committee work. At the very least, you'll make some new friends who you can use to ask questions, share expertise and bounce ideas off of. In the latter case, you have the opportunity to contribute to a partnership that could add substantial value to your company (if it's successful), making you more visible to your company's leadership.

One of the things I've learned from serving on committees for a number of groups is to be aware of people's inherent resistance to change, and to plan for it in the way I present my ideas. A number of years ago, I served several terms on the parish council of my church. Because I was heavily involved in web development in my job, I promoted the idea that the church should replace its old, single-page website, maintained by a volunteer parishioner, with a new, database-driven site that would make it easier for church and school staff to maintain.

The push-back I got from the staff person who oversaw the website was immediate and very negative. She was really pissed at me; she thought I was extremely arrogant for riding in and offering to "save them from themselves." She also didn't like that I presented the idea to the council without bothering to talk to her about it first. In addition my idea would have taken control of the website away from the parishioner, who had maintained it for many years, and for whom it was a labor of love – his way of giving back to the parish.

She presented her argument in front of the parish council, in front of the pastor and my council peers, criticizing my efforts to change things and the way I handled the situation. She was openly angry and extremely frustrated. From her perspective, my idea would just make everything more complicated. Under the existing arrangement, all she had to do was hand off the materials she wanted on the site to the volunteer webmaster, and he'd take care of everything. She didn't want to be posting content to the site herself, nor did she want staff and teachers spending their valuable time doing it.

Ouch! Lesson learned: Anticipate and plan for the objections of key stakeholders. Communicate with them early on to learn what their concerns are.

Another big benefit of getting involved in these opportunities is that they look terrific on your resume and LinkedIn profile. They show you aren't satisfied to just sit in your cubicle all day and do what you're told. It shows that you're interested serving as a leader – and that's very attractive to your current and prospective employers.

ACTION STEPS

- Seek out volunteer opportunities that are consistent with your purpose and values. Even if you're not actively seeking to add value to your job, it feels good to share your time and talents with the organizations you support. It's a great way to "give back" and say thank you for the many blessings in your life!
- Think about the lessons you've learned about the organizations you've worked with. What's effective about the way they are managed? What's not? What can you learn from your experiences that you can apply to your full-time job?

Notes

43. Let your extracurriculars shine

Demonstrate a drive for excellence through your extracurricular activities and the projects you work on. Your extracurriculars are a place where you can let your passion shine. Volunteering to help a non-profit organization, for example, may give you an opportunity to utilize some skills that you haven't been able to exercise in your normal job. It's also very rewarding to help people out, to give of your time and talents, while expecting nothing in return.

If you're a recent college graduate who can't find a job in the field in which you received your degree, look for opportunities to volunteer in roles where you can put your newly-minted skills to work. This will give your resume some added impact. It demonstrates that you care so much about your new profession that you pursued opportunities to practice it and gain valuable experience, rather than just taking any old job or living in the basement of your parents' house, hoping for the "Big Opportunity."

I graduated from college in 1980, in the middle of another very deep recession here in the States. I had a bachelor's degree in journalism and a public relations internship with a very prominent local company on my resume. I thought I could find a nice job fairly quickly. I did, but I only lasted a month there, because I screwed some things up and my boss fired me. Not an auspicious start.

But I decided to get back on the horse that threw me, figuratively speaking. I sought out volunteer positions doing copy editing and newsletter production, and steadily built up the PR and editing experience on my resume, while at the same time holding down a full-time job that paid the bills and provided health insurance. Finally, five years later, I got my first break into the world of public relations. Part of the reason my new boss hired me was because, in the face of a major setback, I was very persistent in seeking out and doing great work on a volunteer basis.

Finally, in addition to showcasing your ambition, volunteerism sends another positive message to a current or prospective employer: It says that you are a person who can be counted on to contribute above and beyond what's expected, and that you care about others. That's one of those intangible factors that can give you an edge over other job seekers.

ACTION STEPS

- Where can you put your skills to work today, in a paid or voluntary capacity? Do it – you'll be glad you did!
- If you already volunteer, consider how the talents you're using as part of your avocation could be used in your vocation.

Notes

44. Communicate your accomplishments

Remember the famous rhetorical question: If a tree falls in the woods and nobody hears it, does it still make a sound? The corollary in our exploration of how to add value is this: If you have accomplished some great things and your boss and other key stakeholders don't know about it, you're still invisible. You need to promote what you've accomplished, and emphasize the benefits to the organization.

Describe your accomplishments briefly; be sure to couch them in terms that matter to your boss and other key stakeholders. For most senior executives, that means metrics like increasing profits, decreasing expenses, improving efficiency or throughput, reducing errors and other positive metrics. They want to know what the bottom line is. Be informative but brief; no one has time to read an exhaustive account of what you did. Your goal is to give them a concise impression of the exemplary work that you did on their behalf.

Don't assume that your boss and other key stakeholders already know what you've accomplished. Everyone is extremely busy these days, especially in this age of reduced staffing. Many people are doing the jobs of two or three people. Your boss is juggling many projects and priorities and may not be aware of all that you do or the results you've achieved. Don't be shy but don't be too pushy, either. Just send him or her an e-mail summarizing the project and the results you achieved in 100 words or less. Utilize a subject line that conveys that your message is an executive summary of "results." That should get his or her attention.

If you work for a company where "tooting your own horn" is frowned upon, at least make sure that your LinkedIn profile is completely up-to-date with your skills, experience and the significant projects that you have worked on. Also, don't overlook the opportunity to add examples of your work to your LinkedIn profile, such as PDF files and PowerPoint presentations. Just be careful not to share any proprietary information, because that could get you fired. To avoid any potential problems, I recommend that you check with your boss before posting any company-related reports or presentations to your LinkedIn profile.

For more information abou the "apps" you can add to your profile to enable these capabilities, please click here.

If your company has an internal knowledge network or social media network, make sure that your profile is completely filled out with all of your skills and the cool projects that you have worked on. This will increase your odds of being noticed and selected for key projects. Showing what you've done and the positive outcomes you have achieved provides tangible proof that you are capable and results-oriented.

ACTION STEP

- Set a monthly follow-up on your calendar to review what you have accomplished during the last 30 days and send a brief e-mail to your boss summarizing your accomplishments. If there aren't any, that's okay. The important thing is to get into the habit of conducting this review every 30 days so you can provide your boss with regular updates on your progress.

Notes

CHAPTER 5
Add Value By Being a True Team Player

45. Encourage other people

You may not be in a leadership position in your job, but you can still have an influence on those around you. Encourage your direct reports and coworkers. Try to get the best out of people – encourage them to be the best they can be. This will inspire them to take their own risks and add their own value to the world.

In most workplaces, the talk around the water cooler these days is exceptionally negative. It's all about who isn't pulling their weight, which managers are ineffective and those dolts who run this place, who don't seem to know what they're doing. Things don't seem to be improving. If anything, they seem to be getting worse. There are rumors of more layoffs coming. The health insurance sucks. Uncertainty and fear abound.

Don't buy into this negative talk, because it will poison your attitude and will render you unable to add value to your job in any meaningful way. Choose to be a positive factor instead. Decide today that you're going to do your part to make things better at work. You're going to commit to delivering exceptional value, to doing more than is expected, to being a true contributor to the business. Instead of complaining about problems, you're going to brainstorm ways to solve them. Recession, my ass – remember, you've decided NOT to participate!

A lot of this book is focused on helping YOU to deliver more value to YOUR work. But it's not just about you. Of course, you need to do an exceptional job in your life's work. But you also need to support, encourage and push those around you to do exceptional work and add more value to what they do. Support them however you can. Hopefully, your positive, can-do attitude will be infectious and will spread to others around you.

Always remember: The mark of a true leader is that he or she is not afraid to develop the skills and capabilities of others around them. Every day you have an opportunity to encourage the people around you. Why not give it a try? You may discover that you can have an impact on others that goes far beyond what you could have imagined.

ACTION STEPS

- Think about your direct reports and coworkers for a moment. Who could use some encouragement? Think about what you can legitimately compliment or praise them about. Remember, this must be genuine; if it appears to be empty praise, it will be rejected by the person and may actually discourage them.
- If you are in need of encouragement, select someone at work with whom you feel comfortable and become accountability partners to each other. In other words, talk about what's going well and what's not. Look out for each other, and encourage each other as needed. Help each other get over the rough spots and get back on track as enthusiastic, contributing members of the team. I could have used someone like that in my last job, where toward the end of my tenure, I got very jaded and cynical about the firm's dysfunctional culture. If I had an accountability partner, that person would have told me that I needed to get out of my funk and focus on the higher value-added things that I needed to do to justify my salary.

Notes

46. Develop internal advocates at work

If you're trying to do anything of significant strategic importance within your company, you need advocates – people who have "got your back," who will help you with resources, information and getting other key people on board to support your ideas. You need to cultivate champions who can help you to break down internal resistance and who support your ideas so completely that they're willing to expend their political capital to support it.

Start with the colleagues with whom you feel comfortable. Present your case and get their feedback. This is your opportunity to strengthen your presentation and value proposition, to help ensure that you can gain the support of other key executives who don't know you as well.

Seek out mentors who can help you to build your managerial and leadership skills and can help you to iron out any rough spots in your personality. Leaders need to be persuasive consensus builders. They also need to have a vision for the future of the company that is compelling enough to inspire others.

Once you have honed your presentation, carefully craft elevator pitches for each of the key executives you need to influence to become part of your internal support network. Don't expect them to be altruists: Be sure to identify what's in it for them. Why should they support you? What can you possibly do for them or contribute to their operations in return for supporting your initiative?

One final note: Don't get too hung up on trying to protect "your" Big Idea. If you want it to spread and gain support from other key executives in your company, they need to buy into it. In other words, they have to internalize it, make it their own. In the process, they will add their nuances to it – let's face it, it's human nature for them to want to put their imprimatur on an idea or project that they're staking their reputation upon. Let them do so. You never know – they may improve it in ways that you would never have imagined!

ACTION STEPS

- Cultivate your relationships with your colleagues. Identify one or two whom you can trust to share your idea with them, and ask for their feedback. Use them as a sounding board to improve both your idea and your presentation of it.
- Seek out like-minded people in other parts of the company. Your goal is to build a groundswell of support that gets the attention of the senior management. If they only see one person who supports your idea, they can quickly kill it. But if you have the support of dozens if not hundreds of people, they will take it more seriously.

Notes

47. Coach and develop your direct reports

One way that you can add value to your company and increase your own value – and hopefully make yourself more promotable – is to coach and develop your direct reports. Provide them with training, whether formal or informal, and help them to increase their skills in areas that add value to the company.

Sometimes managers are unpromotable because there are no legitimate replacements for them. None of their direct reports have the necessary skills, background or drive to take over their position. By training your direct reports in all aspects of your department's operations, you're grooming them to take over so that you can move up the ladder

One way you can do this is by scheduling “brown bag” lunchtime learning sessions with them every two to four weeks, with specific training topics to be discussed during each meeting. That enables you to complete some valuable training, while minimizing the impact on your department’s productivity.

Mentoring is another valuable strategy to enhance the performance of your team. It's also an excellent way to show younger protégées that you care about their success and well being. According to Wikipedia, mentoring is defined as *"providing expertise to less experienced individuals to help them advance their careers, enhance their education, and build their networks."*

If you are a younger professional, seek out an older mentor who can help you understand some of the finer nuances of handling office politics and thriving within your unique corporate culture. They can also introduce you to key senior-level executives who can help you to grow your influence and impact within your company.

If you're an older professional, be sure to mentor one or more young up-and-comers. It will reflect well on your resume, and will mark you as an executive who is concerned about cultivating and retaining top-notch talent within your firm. It also feels great to give back to someone younger who is eager to learn.

ACTION STEPS

- Create a simple plan that addresses the training needs of your direct reports, and begin working it to build their skills.
- Seek out mentors who can help you to grow in your management and critical thinking skills, or seek out younger professionals whom you can mentor.

Notes

48. Become an 'idea connector'

Become an idea connector in your firm. This is becoming an increasingly important role in helping people with a need for innovation to connect with those people who can help them to exploit their ideas. Idea connectors have the relationships and influence to bring people together to solve problems and leverage opportunities. A recent MIT Sloan Management Review article clearly explains who the idea connector is and why he or she is so important to businesses today:

Eoin Whelan, Salvatore Parise, Jasper de Valk and Rick Aalbers, writing in the article, "Creating Employee Networks That Deliver Open Innovation", explain that idea connectors *"are the hub of the company's social network, the go-to people of the organization. Much of their expertise lies in knowing who is doing what. When they are made aware of an opportunity for innovation, connectors not only know who in the company is best equipped to exploit that idea but also possess the social capital needed to rapidly deploy the network to meet that particular challenge."*

The article cites Google VP Marissa Meyer as the quintessential example of an idea connector. She's not someone who brainstorms a lot of original ideas and insights. But her knowledge of what's going on in the various nooks and crannies of the far-flung technology giant – from its current information products to the latest concepts percolating in its R&D teams – enables her to connect people working on similar projects with each other. In other words, she can help person A who needs a specific piece of information connect with person B who has it. That's incredibly valuable!

If you can fill this role in your organization, you will deliver incomparable value to your company.

ACTION STEP

- Use Evernote, Info Select or another free-form personal information database to start taking notes about each person you know in your company. Your goal is to create a searchable database that you can use to quickly locate people with relevant knowledge and expertise whenever a question or challenge comes up. Be sure to capture all of their relevant contact information, in addition to their skills and expertise. Be the connector, and use technology in a creative way to help you get it done.

Notes

49. Follow the principle of 'completed staff work'

This concept, which originated in the U.S. military, means that if you encounter a problem, you don't just take it to your boss and lay it on his or her desk as if it's his or her problem to solve. That just creates more work for your boss. If you've identified the problem, you should also brainstorm and recommend some potential solutions to it. That's the idea behind completed staff work.

You may have heard this phrased before in a different way, namely *"Who owns the problem?"* Children often bring problems to parents, expecting them to solve these issues for them. They would learn more if they came up with several potential solutions on their own, and then brought them to you for a discussion of their pros and cons. Teaching kids to "own" their problems and help to solve them is an important parenting strategy, and an important element in teaching young people to be responsible, capable adults.

Contrast completed staff work to the way most people work with their managers. Typically, the average line worker asks his or her manager, "Here's a challenge I'm facing – what should I do?" This puts the onus on the manager to come up with a solution, which he or she often does. But such upward delegation does nothing to help grow the worker's expertise or problem-solving abilities, and it dilutes the manager's valuable and limited time.

As the late management thinker Oren Harari once explained in his blog (which is no longer online), this is the kind of thinking that leaders are really looking for:

- “Don’t just bring me problems; solve them, bring me solutions.”
- “Don’t just do a piece of work and toss it over the wall to another group; take responsibility for the final product.”
- “Don’t just do busy-work tasks; show me outcomes that add real value.”

The distinction is that you need to advise your boss what to do, not asking him or her what to do. Taking the attitude of "completed staff work" helps to ensure that you won't be taking half-baked ideas to your boss for review. It urges you to think things through. As Harari points out (quoting an old U.S. Army manuscript on completed staff work), it's up to you to *"study, write, re-study and rewrite until you have evolved a single proposed action"* for review and approval by your boss.

I heard of the idea of completed staff work a number of years ago (I may have even read about it in Harari’s first book, *Jumping the Curve*, which I read over ten years ago), and I have tried to make it a part of the way I work with my bosses. It makes a big difference in the way he or she perceives you. If you take only completed staff work to your boss, you've just made his or her life easier, and have added more value to yourself and your position!

ACTION STEP

- Consider a problem or challenge you currently face. Before you talk to your boss about it, spent some time brainstorming at least three or four potential solutions. Then approach your boss, present the problem <u>and</u> share your ideas for solving it.

Notes

50. Suggest an improvement

One trap that many executives get stuck in is maintaining the status quo, never questioning how things are done in your company. In fact, there is almost always room for improvement in nearly every part of the company’s operations.

To add value, identify a list of potential improvements and suggest them in writing to your boss or the head of your company. Ideally, focus on an area of your company's operations that is of strategic importance. This will show your company's senior management that you are concerned about the same priority areas as they are, increasing the odds that they will see your ideas as being of value to them.

Be sure to build a case for your idea:

- What are its benefits?
- Why should they implement it now?
- What are the challenges the company is likely to face in implementing it?
- Approximately how much investment will it require?
- How much risk does your idea entail?

Make sure that your bosses know you have carefully thought through your idea before presenting it.

Don't feel like you have to suggest a really big, far-reaching idea. A series of incremental changes can be just as valuable for their cumulative impact over time. This is the principle of the Japanese continuous improvement philosophy, kaizen.

Even if your boss only implements a fraction of the ideas that you submit, he or she will appreciate the fact that you are thinking about the business strategically, and how it can be made more efficient and profitable. That will help you to gain points in the value-added department. If your boss doesn't appreciate your ideas, criticizes them or takes credit for them, perhaps it's time to look for another job where you CAN add more value!

ACTION STEPS

- Use the steps outlined above to identify the problems, challenges or shortcomings you want to address via brainstorming. Make sure they are of strategic importance. It doesn't make any sense to pick away at little things that few people care about.
- Present your case to your boss. Be sure to demonstrate that you have analyzed the problem thoroughly, developed one or more ideas that do an effective job of solving it, meet the criteria that your firm usually uses to evaluate ideas and have acceptable levels of investment and risk.

Notes

51. Analyze the effects of emerging trends on your business

What emerging trends that seem insignificant today could have a major impact on your business in 5-10 years?

This is a great question to ask, and an important area to explore if you want to add value to your job. Across many industries and professions, business trends are often obvious in retrospect. The problem is usually a failure of vision: Most executives are so busy running their day-to-day businesses and "putting out fires" that they never raise up their heads and clear their schedules long enough to do some serious thinking about what the future may bring.

As one of the leading thinkers and innovators in your organization, you need to think about questions like these:

- What if a marginal competitor suddenly started to win business from us?
- What if a B or C level player in our industry were suddenly acquired by a much bigger company that has deep pockets and the ambition to dominate our industry?
- What if the price of a major raw material needed to produce our products was to double without warning, or unexpectedly became scarce, expensive or unavailable?
- What if one of our major suppliers lost its biggest production facility to a fire, causing us to not be able to obtain components or services from them for 1-2 years?

- What if our biggest distributor, the one with the greatest sales year after year, suddenly went bankrupt?
- What if that technology that we explored but dismissed as "not ready for prime time" suddenly got dramatically better in terms of price, functionality or reliability? How would we respond?
- What if environmentalists suddenly focused upon our company and its supposedly "dirty" manufacturing methods or questionable raw materials needed to produce our products?

Your company's leaders need to spend time thinking about questions and scenarios like these. But the fact is, many of them never take the time. But this is a role that you could potentially fill, and in the process, create enormous value for you and your employer.

ACTION STEPS

- Choose a handful of business trends that are just starting to touch the fringes of your business. Gather information about their current state, and predictions about their future impact. Then ask yourself, *"What if these forces became much stronger? What would that mean to our business? How would our company be affected, positively and negatively?"* Work through these scenarios, and map out probable conclusions. Click on one of the links below to download a mind map template to help you with this scenario planning process:

  MindManager

  NovaMind

  MindGenius

  XMind

- Share your findings with your company's senior management. Chances are, they will be blown away by your analysis and will appreciate the effort you put into it.

Notes

52. Reduce and manage costs – but do so creatively

During bad economic times, cutting costs is always a popular strategy. Unfortunately, it's not usually a way of adding value. If anything, if cost-cutting is not done intelligently, it can often diminish value. More often than not, it's done with a meat axe rather than a scalpel, becase the company must move quickly to reduce its losses.

Brainstorm ways to creatively reduce costs – without reducing the quality of your product or the level of your service. For example:

- Look for ways to use resources, such as people, facilities and budgets – more efficiently or employ them in multiple ways to make them stretch farther.
- Analyze your department's business processes to determine which steps don't add value. What can be eliminated or simplified without compromising the quality of your products or services?
- Think about creative partnerships, joint ventures or cost-sharing opportunities outside the walls of your company. For example, find a firm that sells complementary products to the same groups of customers. Join forces to share sales leads and provide more value to the customer than either of you could individually. Share a salesperson. Share knowledge and expertise. Enter emerging markets by partnering with an established firm with a good reputation in that niche. The key is to craft a mutually-beneficial, performance-based agreement that helps both of you achieve your goals. Want more ideas? Check out Jay Abraham's excellent book, *The Sticking Point Solution*. Chapter 10 contains numerous examples of joint ventures and creative partnerships that will expand your thinking on what's possible. If you're the person who suggests these creative, low-risk opportunities to your company's

leadership, you win! You don't have to tell them where the ideas came from. It'll be our little secret! ;-)

- Reduce the number of suppliers your company uses and then renegotiate deals with the remaining ones in exchange for exclusivity. This will help you to cut your overall costs, while keeping the level of service high.
- If you work in the area of marketing, you can save money by sending out more e-mail and utilizing more social media (low or no cost) and do less expensive magazine advertising and direct marketing, which involves expensive printing and postage costs. As I talk to colleagues working in the world of social media, I'm astounded at the number of companies who are still stuck in the rut of doing what they have always done. These firms continue to turn their backs on social media and other new communication channels, as if they're a fad that will go away soon. Whether your company sells to consumers (B2C) or businesses (B2B), you need to learn about these new communication channels and how you can utilize them to generate more leads and sales. Tips, strategies and tutorials are widespread – all you have to do is seek them out online and learn from them. If you wait any longer, your company is going to be at a serious disadvantage.

ACTION STEP

- By now, your company has probably been through several rounds of cost cutting, in all of the obvious areas: head count, advertising, travel and so forth. To add value, you'll need to look at some less obvious areas where cost savings can still be realized. Why not utilize some of the strategies outlined above to identify creative opportunities for cost containment, without cutting the quality of the products or services you provide?

Notes

Resource List

Books

(presented in the order in which they appear in the book)

The Go-Giver: A Little Story About a Powerful Business Idea by John David Mann

Linchpin: Are You Indispensable? By Seth Godin

Strategy for You: Building a Bridge to the Life You Want by Rich Horwath

The Power of Pull: How Small Moves, Smartly Made, Can Set Big Things in Motion by John Seeley Brown, John Hagel III and Lang Davidson

The Idea Generator: Quick and Easy Kaizen by Bunji Tozawa

Steal Like an Artist: 10 Things Nobody Told You About Being Creative by Austin Kleon

Resonate: Present Visual Stories That Transform Audiences by Nancy Duarte

slide:ology: The Art and Science of Creating Great Presentations by Nancy Duarte

Beyond Bullet Points: Using Microsoft PowerPoint to Create Presentations That Inform, Motivate and Inspire by Cliff Atkinson

How to be a Brilliant Thinker: Exercise Your Mind and Find Creative Solutions by Paul Sloane

Thinkertoys: A Handbook of Creative-Thinking Techniques (2nd edition) by Michael Michalko

Mind Maps for Business: Revolutionize Your Business Thinking and Practice by Tony Buzan

Great Leaders GROW: Becoming a Leader for Life by Ken Blanchard and Mark Miller

Jumping the Curve: Innovation and Strategic Choice in an Age of Transition by Nicholas Imparato and Oren Harari

The Sticking Point Solution: 9 Ways to Move Your Business from Stagnation to Stunning Growth in Tough Economic Times by Jay Abraham

Software

Evernote: A personal information manager that is adept at capturing notes, part or all of web pages, images, attached files and much more. It's very flexible, and quickly synchs your information across multiple devices. Highly recommended!

Dragon Dictation app: Makes it possible to dictate spoken words into your iPad, iPhone or iPod Touch. This free service transcribes your words and displays them on screen. You can then copy and paste them into other apps that accept text input, such as Evernote.

Tools

KnowBrainer

The Creative Whack Pack

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