

Venturing Your Concept

The Creative Process

© Harry Rosenberg

The roles of curiosity, knowledge, insight, and spirit.

Venturing a concept potentially carries rewards well beyond what licensing can ever return. The downside is that one must provide the creativity, energy, and drive to make a new business happen. Those who enjoy such a challenge would call these the upside. So this column is not for the faint-of-heart, it is dedicated to the tigers among us who would change the world—hopefully we will leave it better than we found it.

Done right, venturing is not easy and takes time. One would like to think every new idea would instantly hit it big. That usually doesn't happen. But if we plan and work for the long haul, we can be ready if lightning does strike—often a matter of luck and a niche market. When we think about it, creativity is the heart and soul of venturing.

I begin this first column with some thoughts about that fascinating process of creativity. It is also complex and multi-faceted. Some of history's greatest creative minds (and some of the nameless) have had these things to say about it:

"People cannot discover new lands until they have the courage to lose sight of the shore." Andre Gide.

"I cannot understand why people are afraid of new ideas. I am frightened by old ones." John Cage

"The world is but a canvas to the imagination." Henry Thoreau

"If at first an idea is not absurd, then there is no hope for it." Albert Einstein.

"...opportunities are never lost; someone will take the ones you miss." Anon.

From these it is easy to conclude that it takes knowledge, courage, perspective, vision, and an open mind, tempered by strong doses of reality, to achieve truly creative results. Most of us find this combination hard to achieve. Can we discard our preconceptions, allow our brains to make ridiculous associations, and drop our mindsets? In short, can we free our thinking and emotions from the mundane experience and focus needed to get through each day? I know of no better way to achieve mind relaxation than by practice. In that regard, patience is its own reward, for changes in mindset do not come quickly or easily.

For those of us who are perpetually curious, education comes from watching, listening, and reading with practiced awareness. We build new concepts upon old ones. Without a proper awareness, we might forever spin our wheels chasing an anti-gravity device that cannot exist, at least in this universe where gravity is the glue that holds all things together. A degree of knowledge is surely a vital ingredient to the creative process. Bricks have to be made before the wall. But however necessary, curiosity and knowledge are not sufficient, as we shall see.

It is also easy to draw up a list of bromides such as: poke fun at carefulness, borrow ideas from distant fields, try multiple solutions, observe analogies from nature, dare to be different, think about that DUMB question, resist dogmatic thinking, choose what is best, or learn from mistakes. These are all well and good, but no recipe book can turn me into a chef. A recipe book can do no more than lead me through the motions; it cannot give me the feel for ingredients I need to create a tasty new dish. Do you want a paint-by-number life or are you working on an original?

Creating an original takes something of a different order, something more than knowledge, and certainly less tangible. That something is insight. We are not born insightful, nor do we become so by rote learning. Rote learning is not bad, of course. We all benefit from it. In itself, rote learning is simply not a creative process by its very definition. For example, a straight A student may become an accomplished surgeon, doing what others have already done, without ever extending his/her techniques in novel ways. Meanwhile the innately curious one, who cares not so much for grades as for understanding what lies beneath, may indeed revolutionize the world.

Insight, by the way, often comes only with experience. This may be why some cultures value the wisdom of their elders. Early on, it was they who remembered not just where the hunting grounds and water holes were but also figured out how to prepare against famine, build castles, and forge Damascus steel. Insight is more than just experience, more even than ability to think deductively. Insight enables inductive thinking—the ability to visualize, intuit, or feel new ideas yet unproven. The more knowledge and insight one has, the more able s/he is at inductive thinking with creative results.

Even this is not enough. It is one thing to become educated to some degree and develop insight; it is quite another to follow through on a concept. Who among us has not met someone with a clever and insightful zillion ideas, but who never followed through? Call the missing ingredient drive, or the sum of motivation, perseverance, and ambition with maybe a little humility mixed in. In a practical sense, without some real spirit, it is hard to commit to all the hard work venturing a new concept entails, whether it is business, art, or new mathematics. But drive

and commitment are also necessary ingredients. At least this has been my experience.

Margaret Mead said: "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it's the only thing that ever has."

Finally, an idea can occur in a flash, or, like wine, take time to ripen. It was Edison who said perspiration is 90%, inspiration is 10% of invention. In terms of time spent on the overall process of innovation, he was certainly right. It seems then that while we certainly need training and rote knowledge, we also need the innate features of curiosity and drive to venture a new idea.

All this is not to say that everyone must be highly creative or that the highly trained do not belong—for who would perform the surgeries, grow crops, and repair the gutters? In our society, these all take equally valid and important mindsets.

This rendition is far from complete. But it can provide a conceptual base upon which to discover the world of venturing. We just need to be sure each element is there—curiosity, knowledge, insight, drive, and commitment. No one can do it for us. We must each find our own ways and do it ourselves.

In future columns I will explore the issues involved in reducing ideas to practice, protecting them legally, developing and breathing life into them, and then how to go about funding, staffing, developing processes and products, and growing new ventures.

Meanwhile, some web sites worthy of browsing:

<http://www.howstuffworks.com/>
<http://www.ozemail.com.au/~caveman/Creative/>
<http://www.quantumbooks.com/Creativity.html>

Thanks for joining us.

© Copyright 2000 by Harry Rosenberg. All rights reserved.