
----- WHAT'S UP, DOC? -----

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"Creating Leadership Solutions for Profit and Growth"

THIS MONTH'S THEME: CREATIVITY AND INNOVATION

The kids are headed back to school, and here in the nation's capitol, the first whiff of Fall is in the air. When the kids go off to school for a new year of learning, sometimes we adults can miss that feeling of new beginnings. So this month's newsletter is devoted to creativity - what it is and how to promote it - both for yourself and within your organization. Enjoy!

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THIS MONTH'S QUOTE:

"Creative minds have always been known to survive any kind of bad training."

-- Anna Freud

1. THE FOUR STAGES OF THE CREATIVE PROCESS

PREPARATION

This is the stage where the creative person or team becomes immersed in the problem. It's an information gathering stage, and when the effort is a collective one, it involves the forming of roles, areas of special individual interest and the (sometimes loose!) coordination of tasks. The creative process can sometimes stall - or temporarily appear to stall - at this stage, especially when lots of possibilities yield no immediate, transformative insights.

INCUBATION

In this stage, the original problem may appear to be on the back burner, even forgotten or neglected, but the mind is still at work. Not the logical, linear mind - the part we use most when awake - but the part that dreams, synthesizes, and makes new, weird, original connections. For a team effort, this can mean that the group may not meet for a while, appearing to let the project fall by the wayside. But people will still be thinking, or have ideas occur to them in the shower, or writing down thoughts on cocktail napkins, etc.

ILLUMINATION

Without warning, ideas or innovations can come any time - the “aha!” or “eureka!” experience. More commonly, there is no immediate “killer insight,” but some new angle that may occur, or some sudden, burning, unexplainable need to return to work on the problem - often a sign of creative “labor pains.” When the creative project has been a team effort, sometimes the only thing needed is to get the original group members together again after a period of time, and then “pow!” - the spontaneous exchange among them can bring forth an idea that no one member could articulate alone.

EXECUTION

This is the stage that separates mere creativity from successful innovation. New ideas require action, stubborn determination, and ability to build change coalitions while marketing the idea to critical skeptics. Perhaps more than anything else, it takes courage and persistence. Since the execution stage is more about social skill than it is about the technical skill that produces the innovative idea, this is the stage where organizational management can be most actively helpful in promoting business creativity.

2. FIVE WAYS TO PROMOTE ORGANIZATIONAL CREATIVITY

SELECT THE MOST PROMISING INNOVATORS, BUT ENCOURAGE UNEXPECTED SURPRISES

To build innovative “hothouses” in an organization, executives may want to cull out the most promising idea-generators and provide them with extra resources. Those are the people who can benefit most from the “buffer zones” in step two. But the other practices listed in this section should be generalized throughout the organization, if possible, so that innovators in unexpected places will have the room to produce ideas and results. Leaders should train other managers

to understand the stages of the creative process, and evaluate managers based on their ability to promote and shepherd through to completion new ideas that they encounter.

CREATE "BUFFER ZONES" FOR THE MOST INNOVATIVE PEOPLE

Creating “buffer zones” means building a kind of protective cocoon around creative people or around the innovative teams within an organization. That means eliminating the ways that policies or other work pressures get in the way or discourage the information gathering involved in the preparation stage. It also means being sure that the tools and resources are available when creative people go looking around for data or answers to questions. The executive leader for such a group should do the advance work and run the interference necessary to let creative people go through the preparation stage without interference or harassment.

GIVE INNOVATORS ROOM TO "PLAY"

For innovators, anything they can do to mess around with the kinds of data or projects that they see as worthwhile - will be helpful. That can be hard to remember when they seem to have lost their minds, or to have lost their focus! But during the incubation stage, activities that may look like useless diversions - that may not even look like work - are all necessary to allow the deeper parts of the brain to solve a problem and make new connections. For typical results-oriented executives, this can be hard to do - especially when the creative team happens to be a team of executives working to create a new business process. The senior executive who may have assigned the task may be hard pressed to let his innovative team have the time and space to produce truly transformative solutions. The key to letting people have room to “play” is to refrain from judgment of their activities or methods.

RESIST THE TEMPTATION TO LOOK FOR IMMEDIATE RESULTS

Any team can develop incremental solutions or recommendations. There is no business or technological process that can not be improved through study and modification. But to build a culture that truly encourages innovation, the pressure to get immediate results will yield only incremental improvements, and the need to meet deadlines can sometimes kill the creative process before the illumination stage. While it is true that deadlines can focus creative teams and encourage timely ultimate illumination, setting deadlines should not be overused because they often will interfere with the creative process. Close communication with creative people working on a project can help leaders develop a feel for when setting a deadline will help, rather than hinder the process.

COMMIT TO DRIVING THE BEST IDEAS THROUGH TO IMPLEMENTATION

Innovators are seldom the best salespeople for their ideas. They are, by nature, more likely to work in isolation, play with their ideas, or generally rub others who are less creative the wrong way. The business leader who want to encourage innovation must act as the first-line filter to test the best ideas and solutions, choosing which ones are the right ones to see through to fruition. Then the executive advocate must commit to the internal sales and marketing project to build coalitions that will bring the new idea into a reality. This takes courage and persistence, and an ability to work the political and social process involved in getting others to adapt to innovation. This is important, not only to reap the rewards of innovation in practice, but to encourage other innovators by showing them that their best efforts will actually be adopted and see the light of day - in your organization, and not your competitor's!

3. RECOMMENDED BOOKS AND FILMS

BOOK: "Days of Grace: A Memoir," by Arthur Ashe, Ballantine Books, New York, 1993 (paperback).

This former #1 New York Times Bestseller is still worth reading. Arthur Ashe wrote his memoir as he suffered terminal illness from AIDS - before the advent of our current treatments - and what shines through the book is the gentle humanity and dignity of the man, under all circumstances. A true champion on and off the court, Ashe deserves to be remembered again and again - and with U. S. Open underway in Flushing Meadow, New York, now is the perfect time. The original New York Times review said, "Gripping. . . Moving. . . Admirable. . . And what makes it so is Ashe's capacity for evaluating himself and the world with intelligence and honor. . . Honesty is visible on every page."

FILM: "My Big, Fat, Greek Wedding"

First I noticed it at the local arthouse cinema. Then I saw a positive review in the Washington Post. Then a client had seen it and spoke highly of its madcap humor. Then I began to hear more terrific word-of-mouth, and finally went to see it - at the big screen multiplex not far from my home! This is the sleeper, word-of-mouth comedy hit of the year. I won't give you more

details. Just take a friend or family member and go see it!
You'll never look at Windex the same way again. . .

Read the reviews at <http://www.metacritic.com/film/titles/mybigfatgreekwedding>

4. CHUCKLES

This month's joke may be a little on the blue side, but this is a newsletter for grown-ups, after all. Mail from all offended parties will be promptly read and answered!

Gym Class

In a high school gym class, all the girls are lined up against one wall, and all the boys against the opposite wall. Every ten seconds, they walk toward each other exactly half the remaining distance between them.

A mathematician, a physicist, and an engineer are asked, "When will the girls and boys meet?"

Mathematician: "Never."

Physicist: "In an infinite amount of time."

Engineer: "Well... in about two minutes, they'll be close enough for all practical purposes."

5. SUBSCRIBER SUCCESSES

TO SHARE YOUR SUCCESS, send your story to AJ@SchulerSolutions.com
Unless your message states otherwise, we will assume that your story is NOT FOR PUBLICATION. If you do authorize that your success can be shared in upcoming editions of "What's Up, Doc?," then please include in your message the following sentence: "I authorize Schuler Solutions to publicize my success story in the newsletter 'What's Up, Doc?'"

6. ABOUT DR. SCHULER

A. J. Schuler, Psy. D. is a speaker, consultant and leadership coach who helps people and organizations become more effective, profitable, focused on their missions and able to maximize their opportunities that lead to growth. Dr. Schuler, President of Schuler Solutions, Inc., accomplishes this through speeches, seminars, consulting and one-on-one coaching focused on developing excellence in both leadership and team performance. He has served diverse organizations in the private and public sectors, including The Ritz-Carlton Hotel Company, Sony Development, Nomura Securities and the Executive Office for Immigration Review. A graduate of the Wharton School of Business, Dr. Schuler has successfully led the profitable growth of a dynamic, international consulting firm while serving as Operations Director, and has successfully coached over five hundred CEO's and corporate executives.

7. HOW TO SUBSCRIBE OR UNSUBSCRIBE

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P.S. - Remember to send in your comments and successes, and to forward this newsletter to at least one friend! -- AJS