

# EXECUTIVE Excellence<sup>®</sup>

THE MAGAZINE OF LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT, MANAGERIAL EFFECTIVENESS, AND ORGANIZATIONAL PRODUCTIVITY

VOL. 17 NO. 8

AUGUST 2000

**Gary Hamel**

*Resource Attraction*  
Shift from stewardship  
to entrepreneurship .....3

**Warren Bennis**

*The Future Has  
No Shelf Life*  
Success is based on  
imagination .....5

**Sheila Murray Bethel**

*Taking Risks*  
You need to lead  
mostly by example .....6

**Mitchell Dittkoff**

*Breakthrough Thinking*  
Learn to facilitate  
brainstorm sessions .....7

**Carly Fiorina**

*Spirit of Invention*  
We take strength from  
our fears and desires .....8

**Rosabeth Moss Kanter**

*A Culture of Innovation*  
Expect innovation all  
the time, everywhere .....10

**Richard Hadden**

*Think Outside the Box*  
Contented cows give  
better milk .....11

**Tom Peters**

*Staying on Top*  
Love what you do  
and keep learning .....12



*If today's technology is yesterday's magic,  
what innovative and creative things are  
you doing today to bring more excellence  
and excitement into your vision and mission,  
products and services? Set your mind and  
imagination free on a journey to capture the  
insights and ideas trapped inside your people  
and to succeed in the e-everything economy.*

**Robin Klayman**

*Inside Branding*  
Build brands around  
your best employees .....13

**Robert Spitzer**

*Collective Creativity*  
Most innovation comes  
from team synergy .....14

**Leo I. Higdon, Jr.**

*Leading Innovation*  
How friendly is your  
culture to innovation? .....15

**Ivan Seidenberg**

*Possibility Thinking*  
Broadband will usher  
in electronic magic .....16

**William Oncken III**

*Relaxing Under Fire*  
Take a moment daily  
to read and reflect .....17

**Stanley S. Gryskiewicz**

*Positive Turbulence*  
This is one way to  
create innovation .....18

**Robert L. Veninga**

*Inspiring Employees*  
Create a hopeful and  
healthy environment .....19

**Craig Taylor**

*Business Behind the Magic*  
If you want magic, support  
the creative process .....20

# Breakthrough Thinking



*To arrive at breakthrough thinking, you need to learn the skills of facilitating brainstorm sessions and then acting on ideas.*

**I**N TODAY'S NANO-SECOND, downsized business world, companies are demanding that "their people" find new and better ways of getting the job done. In past decades, an efficiency expert was called in to increase productivity and reduce costs.

This service evolved into an "organizational intervention" and was renamed "reengineering." Most company's "processes" are sadly misconfigured and have grown to convoluted proportions. Systems often are disconnected from needs, adding confusion and frustration. Undue resources are committed to working around unfriendly and counterintuitive work processes.

What reengineering enthusiasts forget is that the "genie/genius" that drives the company forward is all too often excised. The result? "Solutions" become overly "systems driven" and do not give proper due to the "genie"—the collective intelligence, creativity and brainpower of people who do the work.

Most quality programs assume that left-brained, analytical, continuous improvement tools and techniques are sufficient to generate major improvements. Root cause analyses, histograms, and fishbone diagrams do have a role to play in an effort to operate optimally. Indeed, when predictability, control and measures are the key drivers, continuous improvement tools can be very useful. However, predictability, control and measures are not the only parameters that guide a company's success.

Addition to continuous improvement ignores several principles of the creative process. Wasn't the universe created out of chaos? Invention, innova-

tion, ingenuity, and creativity are not merely "processes" that can be replicated by getting everyone to follow the dots drawn by some reductionist-driven consultant. For that, something else is needed, something that embraces chaos, paradox, and discontinuity. The invention of penicillin? A surprise to the inventor. Accidental. The invention of Teflon? An experiment gone awry.

Often breakthrough moments and ideas are preceded by a breakdown of the existing order. "You can't get there from here," could be their motto. Logic is replaced by alogic, analysis by intuition, fixed laws by mutable laws.



Would-be innovators, entrepreneurs and change agents need to be weaned from their addiction to organizational law and order to allow more discontinuity in their lives. Indeed, honoring the laws of discontinuity is the most responsible thing change agents can do.

How then, does a company introduce "discontinuous improvement" into their culture? How does a company intentionally challenge the status quo, and catalyze breakthrough thinking? How can executives make the shift from left-brain analytical control to whole-brain thinking. How can they access the "genie" that drives the engine? How can they awaken a level of intelligence and collaboration that enhances their ability to survive and thrive? They need to become brainstorm leaders.

## 10 Personas of a Brainstorm Leader

Facilitating a brainstorming session is a multi-faceted task, requiring a variety of sensitivities. The skilled brainstorm facilitator is more like 10 people than one, exhibiting a broad spectrum of personalities as needed to get the job done. As you read the following "persona checklist," note which personas are your strengths and your weaknesses. Then rate yourself on a scale of 1 to 10 to identify which areas you need to work on.

**1. Conductor.** A skilled facilitator knows how to orchestrate powerfully creative output from a seemingly "dissonant" group of people. In the conductor mode, the facilitator makes sure to include everyone, evokes even the subtlest contributions from the least experienced member, and offers immediate feedback to anyone who tends to "get lost in their own song."

**2. Alchemist.** A good facilitator transmutes lead into gold—or helps people "get the lead out." This talent requires an element of wizardry—the ability to see without looking, feel without touching, and intuitively know that within each brainstormer lives a hidden genius just waiting to get out.

**3. Dancer.** Light on their feet, brainstorm facilitators move gracefully through the process of sparking ideas. Able to go from the "cha cha" to the "polka" to the whirling dervish spinning ideas, enlightened facilitators take bold steps when necessary, even when there is no visible ground underfoot. They make the path by walking on it.

**4. Mad scientist.** An impassioned experimenter, the brainstorm facilitator—while respecting the realm of rational thought—is willing to throw it all out the window in the hope of triggering a "happy accident" or a quantum leap of the imagination. Indeed, often these nonlinear moments produce the kind of breakthrough thinking which logic can only describe, never elicit itself.

**5. Diamond cutter.** Recognizing the precious gem of imagination (as well as the delicacy required to set it free), the skilled brainstorm facilitator is an excellent craftsman—focused, precise, dedicated. Able to get to the heart of the matter in a single stroke without leaving anything or anyone damaged.

**6. Actor.** Brainstorm facilitators are "on stage" whether they like it or not. All eyes are upon them, as well as poten-

tial critical reviews. Often, the facilitator's "audience" will only be moved to act (perchance to dream) if they believe the facilitator is completely into his or her role. If the audience does not suspend this disbelief, the play will close early, and everyone will wish they were home watching T.V.

**7. Environmentalist.** Brainstorm facilitators are recyclers. In their relentless pursuit of finding value in the imagination, they waste nothing. No thought, no idea, no inkling of a possibility is "trashed" without being acknowledged for some alternative use. To them, there is no such thing as a bad idea—only ideas whose usefulness have not yet been fully explored.

**8. Officer of the law.** Facilitators enforce law and order once the group

gets roaring down the open highway of the imagination. This is a fine art, for in this territory, speeding is encouraged, as is running red lights, jaywalking, and breaking and entering. Just as thieves have their code of honor, however, so too should brainstormers. The facilitator's task is to keep this code intact, stating the groundrules up front, and reinforcing them as the session proceeds.

**9. Servant.** Some facilitators, intoxicated by the group energy and their own imagination, use their position to foist their ideas on others or manipulate the group into their way of thinking. Oops! Brainstorm facilitating is a service, not a personal platform. It is supposed to be a selfless act that enables others to arrive at their own solutions.

**10. Stand-up comic.** Humor dissolves boundaries, helps participants get unstuck, and shifts perspective just enough to encourage everyone to open their eyes to new ways of thinking. Trained facilitators are always on the lookout for humorous responses. Humor often signals some of the most promising ideas. Giggles, guffaws, and laughable sidetalk frequently indicate a rich vein of ideas to explore. Humor also makes the facilitator more "likable" which makes the group more amenable to the facilitator's direction as the session proceeds. **EE**

*Mitchell Dittkoff is president of IDEA CHAMPIONS; 914-679-1066, [www.ideachampions.com](http://www.ideachampions.com).*

*Excellence in action: Try using one or more of these 10 personas when you facilitate breakthrough thinking.*