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Survey of Behavioral Characteristics

Survey of Behavioral Characteristics

Researchers have identified a number of behavioral characteristics in managers that likely influence managerial learning and productivity. The purpose of this survey is to help you to consider your own behavioral characteristics and the influence they might have on you as a manager. Please rate the items on the following pages in terms of how much a word or sentence describes you. When you complete the items, go on to the scoring and interpretation section.

NOTE:
DO NOT READ THE INTERPRETATION SECTION
BEFORE YOU COMPLETE THE ITEMS.
IT MAY INFLUENCE THE WAY IN WHICH YOU COMPLETE THEM.

Part I. The items in this section contain two words or combinations of words on each end of a scale. Please circle the number that most accurately describes you and your behavior.

habit bound	3	2	1	0	1	2	3	open minded
talker	3	2	1	0	1	2	3	listener
practical	3	2	1	0	1	2	3	innovative
exploratory	3	2	1	0	1	2	3	procedural
receptive	3	2	1	0	1	2	3	directing
factual	3	2	1	0	1	2	3	intuitive
organization person	3	2	1	0	1	2	3	entrepreneur
risk taker	3	2	1	0	1	2	3	risk averse
ritualistic	3	2	1	0	1	2	3	experimental
uninhibited	3	2	1	0	1	2	3	inhibited
leader	3	2	1	0	1	2	3	follower
poet	3	2	1	0	1	2	3	accountant

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Part II. In this section, each item contains a sentence on each end of the scale. Please circle the number that most accurately describes you and your behavior.

Left statement								Right statement
I develop new ideas.	3	2	1	0	1	2	3	I use others' ideas.
I like to influence other people.	3	2	1	0	1	2	3	I am influenced by other people.
I like to know how things will work out before starting something.	3	2	1	0	1	2	3	I don't mind uncertainty in a project
I like for plans to emerge based on what a situation may demand.	3	2	1	0	1	2	3	I like to plan in advance and stick to it.
In problem solving, I enjoy finding the one right answer.	3	2	1	0	1	2	3	In problem solving, I like to consider several possible answers.
I like doing things in new ways.	3	2	1	0	1	2	3	I like doing things in old ways.
I am attracted to change.	3	2	1	0	1	2	3	I am resistant to change.
I like to design objects.	3	2	1	0	1	2	3	I like to assemble pre-made kits.
I read one book or less a year.	3	2	1	0	1	2	3	I read twenty books or more a year.
I prefer logical step-by-step methods.	3	2	1	0	1	2	3	I prefer open-ended methods that allow unexpected outcomes.
I don't mind uncertainty.	3	2	1	0	1	2	3	I prefer predictable happenings.
I act on objective information.	3	2	1	0	1	2	3	I act on intuitive hunches.
I seek the "status quo."	3	2	1	0	1	2	3	I seek change.
I do detail work best.	3	2	1	0	1	2	3	I do creative work best.

The Theory

You have just completed survey items that measure some aspects of creativity. The idea of creativity is important because the extent to which an individual is creative can have an impact on individual, small group, and organizational productivity. We also believe that it is a significant component of one's ability to generate vision for an organization. If one is bound by historical views of an organization's capacities and directions, then one is less likely to be able to lead the organization through the inevitable changes of the future.

In the past decade or so, numerous researchers and practitioners in business have studied creativity or have created models for developing creativity in managers. The models vary considerably but there are common concepts that surface in all of them.

SEEKING SEVERAL POSSIBLE EXPLANATIONS: Historically, we have been educated to seek the one right answer instead of looking to several possible explanations. Consider secondary and higher education. Throughout our educational careers, we take many exams and quizzes for which we are expected to produce the right answer. The ambiguous world does not always lend itself to one simple answer. Thus, to be innovative in our thinking we must be open to different approaches.

TAKING RISKS: The creative person is one who is comfortable in risk taking. In business, for example, this is a person who may make decisions that may run counter to group opinion or to standards of the industry. Such actions, while not always successful, may ultimately prove useful in developing ideas in business.

CONSIDERING AMBIGUITY IN SITUATIONS: People who are creative are comfortable with uncertainty. They are comfortable with plans that emerge based on the situation rather than needing to anticipate a project completely before it begins. While ambiguity can be devastating in some situations (giving directions for example, or creating legal documents) there are other situations in which ambiguity can foster creativity. Ambiguity forces one to consider different meanings and alternate interpretations in a creative process.

CONSIDERING THE ILLOGICAL: Have you ever been in a situation in which you proposed a seemingly foolish alternative? What happened? People probably laughed or discounted your suggestion. They might have said: "That's not logical." But it often happens that the illogical suggestion becomes a viable strategy. In situations where new ideas are being generated, if you consider all possible alternatives and quickly eliminate them due to lack of "logic" then you forego potential options. Depending on the situation, the creative thinker must consider the illogical.

The instrument that you just completed was developed to awaken you to your inner creative abilities and to stimulate some thinking about how these abilities can have an impact on your personal and professional life. We'll outline some of the possibilities later, but first, let's score the data that you have generated.

Scoring Procedure

Step 1. Remove pages 47 and 48 from this packet. Place page 47 alongside page 49 and page 48 alongside page 50.

Step 2. The answers that you gave on pages 47 and 48 can be scored by circling the numbers *in the same positions* on the scales on this page and on page 50. For example, if you circled a 2 on the left for the first item on page 47, then you would circle a 2 on the first item below. If you circled a 3 on the right for the first item, you would circle a seven for the first item below. Please note that in the items below some of the scales are purposely reversed.

Step 3. After scoring all of your items calculate the subtotal for each page. Add your subtotals to derive your total creativity score.

Scoring Template for Page 47

habit bound	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	open minded
talker	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	listener
practical	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	innovative
exploratory	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	procedural
receptive	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	directing
factual	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	intuitive
organization person	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	entrepreneur
risk taker	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	risk averse
ritualistic	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	experimental
uninhibited	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	inhibited
leader	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	follower
poet	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	accountant

Page 49 Subtotal _____

I develop new ideas.	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	I use others' ideas.
I like to influence other people.	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	I am influenced by other people.
I like to know how things will work out before starting something.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	I don't mind uncertainty in a project.
I like plans to emerge based on what a situation may demand.	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	I like to plan in advance and stick to it.
In problem solving, I enjoy finding the one right answer.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	In problem solving, I like to consider several possible answers.
I like doing things in new ways.	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	I like doing things in old ways.
I am attracted to change.	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	I am turned off by change.
I like to design objects.	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	I like to assemble pre-made kits.
I read one book a year or less.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	I read twenty books a year or more.
I prefer logical step-by-step methods.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	I prefer open-ended methods that allow unexpected outcomes.
I don't mind uncertainty.	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	I prefer predictable happenings.
I act on objective information.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	I act on intuitive hunches.
I seek the "status quo."	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	I seek change.
I do detail work best.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	I do creative work best.

Page 50 Subtotal _____

Total Score (from pages 49 and 50) _____

Interpreting Your Score

The Survey of Behavior Characteristics is a twenty-six-item instrument with scores on each item that range from one to seven. Total scores (derived by adding up scores for *all* items) range from twenty-six to 182. A high score on this instrument means that overall you perceive yourself as a creative person. (Since the instrument is still new, "high" and "low" have not yet been specifically defined.) You probably enjoy such activities as brainstorming and experimentation and situations that are open-ended and somewhat ambiguous. As a person, you probably desire change in your personal and professional life, think intuitively, and work innovatively.

If your score is low (and this is not necessarily bad) you might be less exploratory and more procedural. In the workplace, for example, you could be more interested in following procedure, less interested in exploring new options. In problem solving, you might be more inclined to rely on tried-and-true methods than to act intuitively (on a hunch). If your score is moderate (high seventies or low eighties), this means that you have some creative tendencies, but not in all areas. For example, you may consider yourself an entrepreneurial person but feel some resistance to change and somewhat habit bound.

If you wish to learn more about individual creativity, innovation in groups, or organizational creativity, you may use the following list of resources to get yourself started.

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY ON CREATIVITY

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PETERS, T., and A. AUSTIN. *A Passion for Excellence: The Leadership Difference*. New York: Random House, 1985.

RAY, M., and R. MYERS, *Creativity in Business*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1986.

VON OECH, R. A *Kick in the Seat of the Pants*. New York: Harper and Row, 1986.

VON OECH, R. A *Whack in the Side of the Head*. Menlo Park, CA: Creative Think, 1983.

Steven Taylor's Survey of Behavioral Characteristics*

When Steven took this survey, these were the results he received:

Part 1	Part 2	Total
72	85	157

Carrie Baugh's Survey of Behavioral Characteristics*

When Carrie took this survey, these were the results she received and the notes she made:

Part 1	Part 2	Total
63	73	136

NOTES:

1. As compared with the class average of 122, Carrie scored a 136 (11.5% greater than average).

INFERENCES:

Carrie is a person who:

1. Might be more creative than her classmates.

Developing Your Creativity

by Charles Thompson

(After taking the preceding instrument and getting one measure of your creativity, you may wish to consider some ideas for developing your creative insights. Chic Thompson, a private consultant to industry on developing creativity in business, is writing a book, *Ready, Fire . . . Aim!* (Copyright © 1990 by Creative Management Group, to be published by Blue Jeans Press, Charlottesville, VA), that explores the creative process. Mr. Thompson worked formerly for Gore & Associates and Disney Productions and is presently the founder and president of Creative Management Group, Charlottesville, VA. This chapter is an adaptation from Mr. Thompson's new manuscript.)

> We need to make the world safe for creativity and intuition, because it's creativity and intuition that will make the world safe for us.
> —Edgar Mitchell, Apollo Astronaut

Consider this excerpt from a common cookie recipe and one reaction to it:

> Add ¼ teaspoon of baking soda
> for each batch of two dozen cookies.

One quarter teaspoon! What do you do with the rest of the box? The box just sits around on our shelf, next to the spices, until it . . . until it begins to smell like oregano? By Joe, the stuff absorbs odors!

Hmmmm. Let me think now. Where in our lives could we use a little of this odor-absorbing ability of baking soda? Car ashtrays, perhaps, running shoes, the cat's litter box, underarms, the refrigerator. Baking soda in a refrigerator. The whole box, not just a measly ¼ teaspoon.

Imagine what that great idea did to the sales of baking soda at Arm & Hammer. Consumer needs just expanded from ¼ teaspoon to the whole box. No, make that two boxes—one for the vegetable tray and one for the ice cream bin. How about a third box in the golf locker? Now, we're on a roll!

This little chronology of thought demonstrates my favorite Creative Rule of Thumb:

> The best way to get great ideas is to get
> lots of ideas and throw the bad
> ones away.

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We just don't often come up with the best idea right out of the starting gate. So, we need to figure out how to come up with lots of creative ideas. But then, what *are* creative ideas? And what personality traits, if any, prompt us to come up with such ideas? Do some people just naturally have this talent for creativity? Or do people follow a process? If so, what process? Here are our answers to these important questions.

What is Creativity?

Unless we know what it is, how will we know when we have it? Although "creativity" is difficult to define, we can begin with the notion of "creative thinking":

> Creative thinking is the ability to look at the same thing as everyone else but to see something different.

With this approach, anyone who is able to see things differently from the rest of the pack is expressing some creativity. That doesn't mean that different ideas are necessarily better than other ideas, just that by virtue of being unusual, out of the norm, nonstandard, *different,* they are creative. Of course, what we're looking for are creative ideas that are helpful, productive, applicable, and relevant to our situations. Yet, if we impose those filters too soon, we often discount or ignore "different" ideas that could really be helpful.

Now the question is, "Who can do this?" This is where people begin to part company.

Creativity and the Idea Person

Many people look with envy at "Idea People" and marvel at the seemingly endless flow of ideas they churn out without any apparent effort. Many people wish that they could be more creative but feel resigned to a fate of mundane thinking and existing. The Idea People, after all, they say, were just born that way.

I want to destroy that myth.

Creative thinking is not a trait monopolized by a few fortunate souls. Every person is creative, for creativity is the single trait that makes us all human. Creativity is just another way to describe adaptive intelligence and hard work. *YOU* have the capacity to be more creative than you are now. *YOU* have the ability to see things differently, to strengthen your unusual insights, to recombine your knowledge, and to create new thoughts, new theories, new concepts,

and new ideas. This is a mental and behavorial skill that you can develop if you work at it. This chapter will give you some ideas about how to generate ideas. But creativity is more than idea generation.

The Creative Process

The greatest idea on earth is worthless unless acted upon. Somebody must evaluate the quality of the idea. Somebody must "take the idea and run with it." Somebody must develop the necessary systems of people, machinery, finances, packaging, distribution, service, and marketing to have the idea become a reality. Those systems need ongoing management. Idea People alone are just not enough for "creativity" to be realized in the world.

To be creative is to have intelligence, to be able to gather information, to "see" the data in ways different from before, and to make decisions based on those insights. To be creative is to be able to perceive and recognize the world around us, to figure out what is not working well, to recombine the facts we see in new ways, and then to set about making those recombinations a part of a new world. To be creative is to find a niche or an approach no one else has found and to go about capitalizing on that newly discovered opportunity.

I hope you begin to see that creativity really isn't just a personality trait or a talent. It's also a dynamic process with identifiable steps and stages. I think of creativity as a process that includes these sub-processes:

> Generation . . . Promotion . . . Design . . .
> Implementation . . . Evaluation

Earlier I said that anyone can develop and improve his or her creative thinking, the generation part of this process. I called creative thinkers Idea People. As we consider the process of creativity from left to right, we can identify other types of people, each of whom has skills vital to that stage of the creative process.

The Idea Generator must generate the idea. *The Idea Promoter* must see an array of applications of the idea and set in motion the forces that can try out some of the more promising ones. *The Idea Systems Designer* must create the necessary organizations of people, machines, space, and money and get them rolling toward the perceived goal. *The Idea Implementer* must set about accomplishing the routine tasks necessary

for successfully reaching that goal. And all along the way, the *Idea Evaluator* must constantly question the quality and effectiveness of the way things work—and don't work.

Look around you and you'll undoubtedly see the hat or hats that you, your subordinates, your bosses, and your colleagues wear or have worn in the process of creativity. Idea Generators are typically the people whose main focus is on ideas themselves, not organizational advancement or status. One of their main drives in life is to deal with ideas and concepts. Sometimes they are individuals who choose not to develop other skills, including social skills, because their focus is so overwhelmingly on concepts and ideas. Their strengths primarily include their brilliance, insights, dedication, and consuming passion for discovery. These are the inventors, the tinkerers, the discoverers.

Look around and you'll see the Idea Promoters. They often take the idea of the Idea Generator, recognize its application and potential, and begin to put the wheels in motion for implementation. On the up side, the Idea Promoters are enthusiastic, resourceful, charismatic, and positive. They refuse to succumb to defeat. If something doesn't work, they'll try something else. They willingly take risks, whether the stake involves their own or someone else's fortune. On the down side, the Idea Promoters can be so single-minded that they fail to recognize reality. Often, they won't listen to opposing, negative views and won't hesitate to break institutional rules in pursuit of their dreams. Their enthusiasm can be exhausting and often overwhelming to other people.

Look around and you'll see the Idea Designers. Upon receipt of the idea from the Idea Generator and its application and vision from the Idea Promoter, the Idea Designer can see how to assemble the financial, human, manufacturing, or other resources necessary to make the idea work. These are the planners and the designers—the ones who can picture what's needed to accomplish a desired end. They can paint the broad strokes. They can picture what the organizational chart should look like. They can predict and plan each needed step along the way toward idea realization.

Look around you for the Idea Implementers, who relish making a thing work according to the design set up by the Idea Designer. They would rather "go by the book" than question the way things are. They want to know what the rules are, what the policy is, what the required procedures are. Given those rules, policies, and procedures, they will meticulously follow all necessary steps toward idea realization. Are they creative? Maybe not in the way that you

originally defined creativity. Are they essential to the process of creativity in an organization? Absolutely.

Finally, when you look around, not far away you'll find an Idea Evaluator. Evaluators have an opinion about everything. They're supposed to. That's what they do. They look at the way things work (or don't work) and form an opinion about *why* they work or not. They have their standards, whether dictated to them by the organization or created by them according to their own opinions. Whatever the source of these standards, they will apply them uniformly and consistently. They rarely accept things the way they are, but are always assuming that a flaw is just around the corner waiting for their discerning eye. They are always looking for a better way.

You might see yourself in many of these roles. Or perhaps you'll see that you do best primarily in just one. You may even see that you shy away from some roles altogether. If you're an Idea Implementer, you may resent the Idea Evaluator, envy the Idea Generator, and tolerate the Idea Promoter. If you're an Idea Generator, you'd probably rather do anything else rather than implement the nitty-gritty details of your own idea.

The Idea Generator is easily termed "creative." We've thought that all along. The Idea Generator just has the knack of coming up with great ideas. But what about the Idea Promoter? The Idea Designer? The Idea Implementer? The Idea Evaluator? Mustn't they be creative as well? Indeed, won't each participant in this creative process be more creative if each tries to develop the characteristics of others involved in the process? Certainly the Idea Implementer who takes on the characteristics of the Idea Generator will come up with some great ideas on improving the implementation process. And the Idea Generator who understands the ins and outs of implementation will become a generator of better, more workable ideas—ideas that are likely to be more efficient and more realistic than they otherwise would have been.

In this chapter, we will address some ideas relating to the first two stages of the creative process, generation and promotion.

Creative Generation

THREE KEYS TO INCREASED CREATIVITY: I firmly believe that the keys to developing great personal and organizational creativity are as follows: first, the ability to recognize that all these types of people are necessary to the creative process; second, the ability to see yourself as you are and as other people most likely see you; and third, the desire and willingness

to try other creative roles, to practice them, and to become more proficient at them. As we develop and mature, we see those areas in the creative process that naturally attract us. If we are to become more creative, we must try out the skills needed in the other areas. We need to flex, to stretch, to exercise unused creative muscles. We need to trust the words of Oliver Wendell Holmes:

> The human mind once stretched to a new idea never goes back to its original dimensions.

If he was right, then trying to be creative will stretch our minds in ways that will leave us forever different, more creative. This chapter will help you do some mind-stretching; it will teach you some techniques for coming up with new insights and ideas, ideas that are not light-years ahead of their time, but fifteen minutes ahead. For in the words of Woody Allen:

> The best idea is the one that's fifteen minutes ahead of its time. Those that are light-years ahead just get ignored.

When and Where Do Ideas Come From?

The most commonly asked question in my workshops on creativity is, "Where do ideas come from?" And the answers that thousands of seminar participants have given when asked the same question is "while showering," "while hiking," "while running," "while driving," "while walking," "while falling asleep," "while dreaming," "while daydreaming." All are examples of what I call "divergent thinking." These are the times when we are not focused on solving a problem, but are allowing our minds to drift free of concentrated, conscious effort. When freed up in this way, often at unsuspecting times, our minds, being the wonderful entities that they are, ebb and flow and suddenly hit on a neat idea. We can recognize, develop, and use this phenomenon; we can use this free-form thinking. As a process to be used on command, I call it

Ready, Fire . . . Aim! thinking.

Traditionally, many people would say that ideas come from "brainstorming," but, as it is often used in companies, brainstorming by itself is not enough. It is sometimes too scattered and unfocused, sometimes too forced or structured, as if the discussion leader were saying, "Okay, folks, *now* we're going to be creative!" Ready, Fire . . . Aim! thinking is similar to brainstorming, but different. It follows a one-two-three process.

1. Define the problem (Ready),
2. Come up with as many ideas as possible without criticizing them (Fire), and
3. Sift, synthesize, and choose (Aim).

Creativity begins with coming up with tons of ideas, not just that one great idea. At the outset, these ideas are typically not focused. They are not, in a word, "aimed." They don't come from clenched-tooth concentration. They don't require a lot of effort in their creation. The technique of idea making, then, requires the Idea Person to get ready, fire away, wait for the smoke to clear, and then look around and see if anything worthwhile was hit. Then she looks at all the bullet holes (ideas) and sees whether any is worth consideration. If none is any good, she reloads, gets ready, fires again, and then . . . aims. Maybe this time the Idea Generator will hit something.

The divergent thinker often thinks in terms of opposites and differences. Instead of concentrating inwardly on a problem or goal, divergent thinking looks elsewhere for solutions: up, down, under, over, far away, backwards, inside out, outside in, downside up. The divergent thinker looks for the vision that sees the problem solved. The divergent thinker plays mental "what if" games and is likely to imagine a refrigerator in dire need of two boxes of baking soda.

Many people, on the other hand, use a convergent-thinking method of idea making. They look at what's wrong with their situations, their environments, their companies, their bosses, their organizations, their spouses. By focusing on the current state of affairs, they tend to limit their views of the possibilities. Convergent thinkers tend to focus on similarities rather than on differences. The convergent thinker, for instance, would try to find new ways to use baking soda in cooking, never thinking about noncooking applications. By trying to come up with immediate, satisfactory, short-term solutions, they often actively prevent myriad solutions. By using only analytical and deductive reasoning, they force themselves down what can be a rigid path of linear reasoning. Convergent thinkers follow the pattern, Ready, Aim, Fire.

The better way is "Ready, Fire . . . Aim!"

FIRST, GET READY: Before coming up with ideas to solve a problem, you must describe what your

problem is. Sure, this step is obvious, but you would be surprised at the number of people who won't take the time to articulate what the problem is. Not everyone views a given situation in the same way. Some look at a situation and don't see any problems at all. So task number one becomes problem articulation.

Are there creative ways to articulate just what the problem is? Of course! For instance, I encourage my workshop participants to write a "Dear Abby" letter describing a particular problem that needs their own or their organization's attention. The letter should read just like a "Dear Abby" letter you find in the newspaper. It should state what the problem is and should include as many concrete examples of the problem as possible. This device works wonders because it forces people to simplify the problem in order to be able to explain it to others.

Furthermore, as mentioned above, to be ready for creative thinking the mind must be relaxed, not tightened up and overly tense with concentrated focus. As with a muscle that cramps after too much exertion, the best preparation for additional effort is to relax. There are many ways to do this: closed-eye exercises, physical exercise, meditation, listening to music, and so on. Interestingly, many of these methods are seen as "weird," "soft," "irrational," "unprofessional," or "unanalytic." Yet preparation that releases the mind for divergent thinking, for seeing things differently, is essential to being able to think in this way.

Note that participating in activities that relax the mind does not mean that you are permanently giving up a controlled, analytical way of thinking; you are simply learning a new skill. If you are successful, you will have an expanded repertoire of abilities to apply to the problems that confront you. It's like adding another club to your golf bag rather than playing with the same one all the time regardless of the course terrain.

NOW FIRE!   The most productive way to fire is to reframe the problem. It's really quite a simple process, and creative people have been using it throughout history. Dr. Jonas Salk, for example, when contemplating the mysteries of the polio virus, began thinking about it this way:

> I entered into a dialogue with nature and asked, "Is it possible?" I put it to nature in the form of an experiment and nature replied, under these conditions, yes, it would work.

This perspective, this reframing of the problem as a dialogue with nature rather than a more tradi-

tional attempt to overcome nature, set Dr. Salk on the path toward discovering the vaccine for polio.

The reframing device breaks down into three precise techniques you can begin to use right now to come up with some great ideas:

1. Envision the future,
2. Create a metaphor,
3. Challenge assumptions.

These approaches are different manifestations of the same thing—taking a problem, turning it inside out, upside down, or downside up, and completely changing the way you look at it. Let's examine each technique.

TECHNIQUE #1: ENVISION THE FUTURE: I was playing golf with sports psychologist Bob Rotella one afternoon and started to become tentative in my putting, invariably failing to reach the hole. After four-putting a hole, I asked for advice. He shared with me a trick he'd used with various PGA champions: "Don't putt until you know you can make it."

I replied, "But Bob, I'll be here all day waiting for that moment." He laughed and said, "Just picture yourself as making the putt. You're picturing yourself missing the putt. Make the putt. Make the putt in your mind." Well, I didn't make the putt that time and still don't make every putt I attempt, but using Bob's method helped me recover from a bad hole and par the next one.

Managers are finding out that the same method works to help solve problems. The device can be one of the most effective sources of ideas. Whatever problem you have, picture it solved; whatever goal you have, picture it already achieved. Under this circumstance, what does your future world look like? What does the future business or work environment look like? What does the solution look like? What features does it have? How did it get there? How did it come into being? What had to take place for the problem to be solved, for the goal to be reached?

The visualizer then works back incrementally to the present, to try to envision what steps were taken to produce that image. The Envision-the-Future approach thus breaks down into four easy steps:

Step 1: Identify the Problem or Goal.   The most effective way, I believe, is the "Dear Abby" Approach. To get different perspectives, it's often a good idea to ask colleagues and subordinates to do the same thing.

Step 2: Fix a Solution or Achievement Date.   Decide when the problem must be solved or when the goal should be achieved. The goal or problem might be

a long-term, (desirable sales levels to reach in a five-year plan for example) or short-term, (perhaps current problems or organizational miscommunication).

Step 3: Visualize the Problem Solved or the Goal Reached. Close your eyes and picture what things will be like when the problem is solved or the goal is reached. Don't picture "near misses" or "maybes." Picture only success. If the goal is a certain sales level in five years, what is the precise mix of sales required to achieve the goal? What do prices look like? What steps have your competitors taken to react to your success? What is the news media saying right now about your company's or organization's performance? Did it make Eyewitness News? If so, what did the news anchor say?

Step 4: Come Back from the Future. Now return from the future incrementally, one step at a time. Try to picture all the motions you or the organization had to make to reach the desired result. Executives of Apple Computer call this technique "Back to the Future" Planning. They envision what the industry will be like, what consumers will be demanding, what the competition will be doing. They identify a desirable and reachable goal for Apple's participation in this future computer industry and then work backward, step by step, to the present day, all the while, keeping track of the precise steps needed for goal achievement.

TECHNIQUE #2: CREATE A METAPHOR: In the late 1980s Jack Welch, CEO of General Electric, declared war on "junk work," those unnecessary reports, approvals, meetings, measurements, and policies that often burden workers in a bureaucracy. His stated goal was to put speed, simplicity, and self-confidence into his employees' work. To get his ideas across, Mr. Welch used a most effective metaphor to describe the need for speed. He asked a group of top managers how many had moved their residences within the past ten years. Most raised their hands. He then asked how many had moved half-full cans of paint and pairs of stained sneakers as part of their relocation. Most raised their hands. He then asked how many had ever used those cans of paint and sneakers ever in their new homes. Only a few hands appeared.

Mr. Welch then pointed out that the same thing happens when people change positions. They take previously necessary reports, measurements, memos, plans, and policies with them to their new jobs. It was these, Mr. Welch believed, that slowed people down. What was needed instead was a healthy "spring cleaning." The General Electric spring cleaning then constituted a ten-year plan to speed up per-

formance and foster a new mindset of constant improvement. By focusing people's minds on the metaphor of half-full paint cans, stained sneakers, and spring cleaning, the General Electric CEO worked to create an environment of speed and self-renewing innovation.

As you can see, the Create-a-Metaphor approach to idea making can be quite effective. The process is simple. Using General Electric as an example:

Step 1. Describe your problem. (We need to be more productive to compete. People spend too much time doing junk work.)

Step 2. Distill the problem down to a single word or phase. (Junk work.)

Step 3. Dream up some metaphors by completing this sentence: [the problem area from step 2] is like a ... (Junk work is like half-full cans of paint. You keep moving them and you don't ever use them.)

Step 4. Use the metaphorical image and try to solve the metaphorical problem. (What do we do with old, half-full cans of paint?)

Step 5. Act. (If they're not being used to good advantage, throw them out!)

All sorts of ideas will emerge from the process, and the best part of it is that by using a common metaphor, all levels of your organization will understand the problem and the intended action plan. People can understand and remember well-chosen metaphors much more easily than they can a dry description of the underlying concept.

TECHNIQUE #3: CHALLENGE ASSUMPTIONS: Once I was served the wrong dinner entree. When I mentioned the problem to the waiter, he gave the expected response and apologized. When he brought my new entree, the waiter also brought back the menu and asked me to select a free dessert. I found myself thanking the waiter. I thanked the waiter for his mistake!

It then dawned on me what the restaurant had done. I asked him how they had come up with the idea of giving away free desserts. "Simple," he said. "We had a meeting about mistakes that give customers a hassle. We wanted to come up with some ideas on reducing that hassle. We all agreed we should apologize. Someone then said, 'Why not get the customer to thank us? If our mistakes hassle the customers, let's make it up to them and give them something for that hassle. That way, they'll end up thanking us.' We tried it," the waiter said. "It's unbelievable—now our customers thank us when we make mistakes. And our performance has actually improved, because we're thinking about customer

service, not worrying about screwing up an order."

This restaurant used a terrific device for thinking up great ideas—it challenged ingrained assumptions. The original assumption was that if the restaurant made the mistake, the customer would be angry and nothing the restaurant could do would undo the mistake; by then, it would be too late. The customer was simply hassled, and no apology could take that hassle away. The assumption was that we would make mistakes, the customer would complain, and we'd just have to accept that. Challenging that assumption, believing that there was something to be done, led to trying to find ways to transform the customer's complaint into gratitude. The great idea of the free dessert did the trick.

The Challenge-Assumptions Approach is quite simple:

Step 1. Challenge the normal assumptions one makes when dealing with such problems or defining such goals.

Step 2. Write down all the assumptions you would ordinarily make.

Step 3. Challenge each of these assumptions by stating their opposites or by assuming the reverse.

Step 4. After studying the challenged assumptions, write down suggestions to solve the problem or achieve the goal.

These three approaches to idea making share a common element—they all require you to reframe the problem and look at it in a different way. The Envision-the-Future approach requires you to picture the problem already solved. The Create-a-Metaphor approach enables your mind to expand by looking at your problem as something that it clearly isn't. The Challenge-Assumptions approach teaches you to turn normal rules upside down, to identify all operative assumptions, and to challenge each one head-on. Changing your point of view will change and improve the quality and quantity of your ideas.

TECHNIQUE #4: IDEA MAPPING: When I go through airports and take my seat in planes, I notice the unbelievable waste of time going on around me. People will thumb through *Flight Lines*, read a novel, or just snooze. I notice this unproductive time especially on commuter flights. Recently, I've concluded that air travel time is the ideal time to create great ideas. The time is confined, the space is limited, and there isn't much else to do.

Of course, some business travelers use the time wisely. They haul out their $5,000 laptop computers or dictaphones. Here's what I do. I reach for a plastic ball point pen and a cheap legal pad. My favorite "Fire" technique is called Idea Mapping, a form of pre-outlining. Idea Mapping relies on word association as the idea-generating device.

Say you have five minutes to come up with a memo. You have to organize your ideas fast. With Idea Mapping, you write the central topic in the middle of the page, circle it, and then allow yourself to free associate. Remember, it takes preparation to do this; you must *release your mind* from the forced-concentration mode, perhaps by napping or daydreaming for five minutes. Once you've written down the central idea in the middle, you write down words or ideas all around the central word. You can circle them for clarity's sake if you like. Don't prioritize, don't judge words, just write anything that comes to mind. Quantity counts! A sample idea map about stress appears in Exhibit 1.

Exhibit 1

A Sample Idea Map
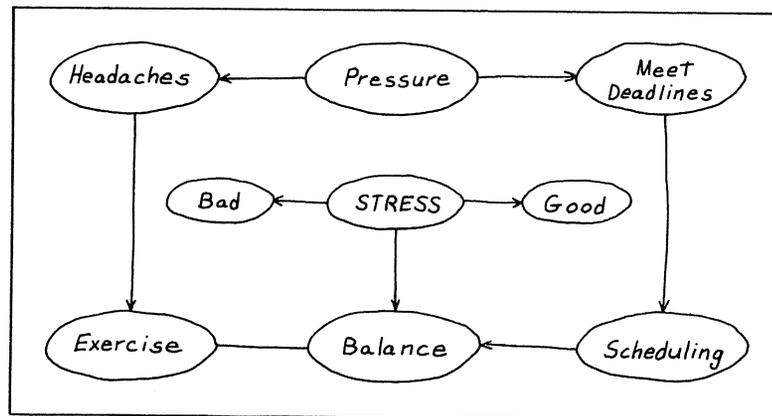
After two minutes or so, a certain order emerges on paper; your mind will begin to see the connections between your ideas. The ideas can be tied together with arrows. After you've made line links between the related word-balls, then number your words according to how you think they are important. Which ones are critical? Which ones less so? Don't be too hasty here. Think about how each might be important. Your freely wheeling mind will teach you some amazing things! Finally, you can make a linear outline from your map, which is where most convergent or traditional thinkers *begin*.

Think back to when you were in school, writing a term paper. You were supposed to write a linear outline first, then write the paper. Most of us wrote the paper first, then the linear outline! Linear outlines such as

I.
  A.
  B.
  C.
II.

don't generate ideas, they only organize them. Idea Mapping generates them. I use this approach in seminars all the time, and most people, given ANY topic, can outline a very good extemporaneous five-minute talk in less than five minutes.

USES OF IDEA MAPS: You can take this technique of Idea Mapping and expand its use to cover a host of situations and to serve as a catalyst for positive organizational change. Consider the following variations of Idea Mapping:

Team Mapping: Use huge Idea Maps on flip charts or markerboards as a means of eliciting ideas from a group in a meeting.

Vision Mapping: Put your five-year-plan goal as the focus word in the center of a large Idea Map, surround it with empty circles, hang it for all to see, and challenge your staff to fill up the circles.

Comparison Mapping: If you want to synthesize the views of differing management perspectives, draw a quick Idea Map for each perspective and then look for interrelationships. This device works wonders when you are comparing reports, or dealing with conflicting regulations or competing uses of limited resources.

The Living Map: Create an ongoing Idea Map to elicit suggestions from staff or department heads. Position the Living Idea Map in such high-traffic areas as snack rooms, cafeterias, and exercise rooms.

Idea Promotion

Suppose that now that you've got a great idea. You know it's a good one. No one else has thought of it, it's yours, and it looks good. It has all sorts of potential, all sorts of applications, all sorts of positive "impacts" on your organization. So now what?

IT'S TIME TO "AIM.": You know that no idea is any good unless somebody does something with it. Somebody has got to adopt it, accept it, put it into action, run with it. That somebody, of course, is often someone other than you. Implementing great ideas, as we discussed before, requires a team effort.

Step 1. *Tell somebody else about your idea.* It's time for your idea to make its grand entrance, but if you've ever tried to bring up new ideas to other people, you know that your great idea will be met with either thunderous applause or derisive laughter, or perhaps just a shoulder shrug.

Two things can happen to your great idea—either it succeeds or it fails. What, then, determines success or failure? Three things: the quality of the idea, the quality of its promotion, and the timing.

BEWARE OF KILLER PHRASES: If the idea is a poor one, then you want failure. You want the idea to fail and fail fast. If it doesn't fail fast, count on it eating up precious time and resources. Assuming your idea is a good one, however, you want it to succeed. What out there might make it fail despite its worth? What might shoot it down before it has the slightest chance to stretch its wings and soar? Somebody may shoot down your great idea with one of those well-known responses that I call Killer Phrases. Somebody, somewhere, at some time, will come up, gun loaded, aim carefully at your head, and say:

> "It's not in the budget."
> "We don't do it that way around here."
> "We've tried that before."

Bang! Zap! Blast! The Killer Phrase can not only do in your great idea, it might even kill your interest in generating any more new ideas.

From conception to fruition, successful ideas tend to follow a path of grudging but ultimate acceptance. This is not a new difficulty to overcome. Machiavelli, in 1513, noted that

> The innovator has for enemies all who have done well under the old, and lukewarm defenders in those who may do well under the new.

And think of all the changes that have occured since 1513! All along the way, Killer Phrases dive in from all angles, seeking to obstruct, demean, diminish, counteract.

They have been around since the dawn of time. They are uttered by seers, pundits, pessimists, naysayers, doomsayers, leaders, bosses, husbands, wives, siblings, coaches, writers, teachers—indeed, everyone around you. They've become part of our history, part of our culture, and part of our language. As we look back on many Killer Phrases, they seem ludicrous:

> Consider what the director of the United States Patent Office said in 1899: "Everything that can be invented has been invented."
>
> Consider President Grover Cleveland's astute observation in 1905: "Sensible and responsible women do not want the right to vote."
>
> Consider what Harry Warner, president of Warner Brothers, said in 1927: "Who the hell wants to hear actors talk?"
>
> As I sit here in my home and compose this article on my Mac II computer with 40-meg hard disk and five megabytes of memory, I consider the words of Ken Olsen, president of Digital Equipment spoken in 1977: "There is no reason for any individual to have a computer in his home."

Killer Phrases are part of our culture, part of our upbringing, part of our language. All around us, practically from the first breath we take, we are bombarded by Killer Phrases. They make up our history, our home life, our school life, and they accompany us to work. One study showed that negative, no-can-do statements are all around us, outweighing positive, can-do statements by substantial margins. At home, parents say, on average, eighteen negative statements for each positive one, usually to a naturally inquisitive child trying to find out how something works. "Don't touch." "Don't play with that." The same study showed that teachers display a 12-to-1 ratio of negative to positive statements, perhaps to students eager to answer or ask a question. "Be still." "Don't talk." "Don't do that." In the national media, the ratio of negative statements to positive ones is thought to be lower than in most conversations, but it still weighs in at 6 to 1—murder, corruption, scandal. Bad Press, it's called. What about the good news?

Exhibit 2 shows my list of the "Top Forty" Killer Phrases.

Killer Phrases can serve a useful function. They can force us to reexamine both our ideas and our resolve to implement them. John Stuart Mill noted, for instance, that "Truth emerges from the clash of

Exhibit 2

Common Killer Phrases

1. "Yes, but '. . .' "
2. "We tried that before."
3. "That's irrelevant."
4. "We haven't got the manpower."
5. "Obviously, you misread my request."
6. "Don't rock the boat!"
7. "The boss (or competition) (or spouse) will eat you alive."
8. "Don't waste your time thinking."
9. "Great idea, but not for us."
10. "It'll never fly."
11. "Don't be ridiculous."
12. "People don't want change."
13. "It's not in the budget."
14. "Put it in writing."
15. "It will be more trouble than it's worth."
16. "It isn't your responsibility."
17. "That's not in your job description."
18. "You can't teach an old dog new tricks."
19. "Let's stick with what works."
20. "We've done all right so far."
21. "The boss will never go for it."
22. "It's too far ahead of the times."
23. . . . laughter . . .
24. . . . suppressed laughter . . .
25. . . . condescending grin . . .
26. . . . dirty looks . . .
27. "Don't fight city hall!"
28. "I'm the one who gets paid to think."
29. "What will people (the board) (the boss) say?"
30. "Get a committee to look into that."
31. "If it ain't broke, don't fix it."
32. "You have got to be kidding."
33. "No!"
34. "We've always done it this way."
35. "It's all right in theory, but. . ."
36. "Be practical!"
37. "Do you realize the paperwork it will create?"
38. "Because I said so."
39. "I'll get back to you."
40. " . . . " (Shocked or unbelieving silence).

adverse ideas." More often, though, they simply kill the idea and the Idea Generator's motivation for creative thinking. Killer Phrases squelch good ideas, retard progress, inhibit innovation. They often stem from our natural reluctance to change. They come from an organization's preference for doing things

in established patterns, using known procedures and habitual policies. They come from society's tendency to cling to the known and to fear the unknown, the untried, the new.

WHEN WILL KILLER PHRASES MOST LIKELY EMERGE?: Killer Phrases can occur throughout the idea-generation process. Even while an idea is cooking, the Idea Generator is often filled with self doubt. How often, during the course of a scheme or plan, have you said, "It'll never fly," or "I'll look stupid," or "I'm too young," or "I'm too old," or "Somebody has already done it," or "I don't have time."

We might call these Internal Killer Phrases. How often have you had a great idea but failed to follow through? How often have you put off writing that memo needed to change a system or try a new strategy? When was the last time you started working on a project but talked yourself out of it?

HOW TO OVERCOME KILLER PHRASES: You, however, like many who have gone before you, can resist and thwart Killer Phrases. And when you do, the sequence will probably look something like this:

1. It's irrelevant to this situation.
2. Ok, it's relevant, but it's unproven.
3. It's proven, but it's dangerous.
4. It's safe, but it's not sellable.
5. It'll sell—what a simple idea!

"Simple!" you say. "I'll show you 'simple.' " And you get your gun! The first weapon against Killer Phrases is the focus on its opposite. If self-doubt nags at you, write down all the negative Killer Phrases that get in the way of your creativity. Put your list in the left-hand column of a sheet of paper. Then write down the opposites of these negative statements in the right-hand column. For example,

"Too young.".........................."Too old."

The process is designed to make you realize that in reality you're neither, for instance, "Too Young" nor "Too Old." You're somewhere in between. Now ask yourself how you would submit an idea if you were "Too Old." You might have someone else write it down for you and then co-sponsor it. Wouldn't this also work if you were "Too Young"?

After you get over the hurdles you erect with your Internal Killer Phrases, you must then be prepared to encounter and overcome External Killer Phrases. Successfully overcoming these Killer Phrases requires a systematic approach.

Step One. *Identify the typical Killer Phrases around you—the chances are that they have been institutionalized.* By knowing in advance what the negative responses will be, you can devise a plan of counterattack or accommodation.

Step Two. *Determine if the person is simply asking a question.* For example, the Killer Phrase, "It's not in the budget," might be the disguised question, "How much will it cost?" The Killer Phrase, "We've tried that before," might be the disguised question, "What's new and different about your approach?" If the Killer Phrase is really a question, the strategy is simple: Answer it.

Step Three. *Determine its source.* Who are the stakeholders who might be agreeing with the Killer Phrase? Do you need to sell your idea upward, downward, or outward? Successful selling requires you to marshal your political forces, to seek the input and assistance of others, to capture their imaginations with the idea, and to anticipate their concerns and potential objections.

Step Four. *If the Killer Phrase is coming from a terminal pessimist, the strategy is to agree, ignore, and proceed with your idea.* (If the pessimist is your boss, proceed on your own time.)

Smart Questions To Ask Before You Sell Your Idea

YES	NO	
___	___	Do the facts support my idea or eliminate some of my uncertainty?
___	___	Can I fall out of love with my idea or am I hopelessly lovesick?
___	___	Have I described my idea to anyone? Sometimes painting the picture will make things clearer.
___	___	Is there a second right answer to the problem? If so, what is it?

NOW, IT'S TIME TO SELL: If you've generated a new idea, introduced it, fought off the Killer Phrases, and still find yourself convinced and courageous enough to proceed, now you need to find support for it. So, how do you capture imaginations? How do you get your department behind your new idea? The best approach in our over-communicated environment is to simplify your message. "Less is more" or, as Lee Iacocca says,

Effective communication is talking to
them plain and simple.

To accomplish this you need to concentrate on your end users' perceptions. You need to sell your ideas as if your audience were purchasing them. Indeed they are, since your ideas require the time and effort of others to blossom. You need to get others to fall in love with your idea. Therefore,

- Show it off to everyone.
- Display it everywhere.
- Brag about its creators.
- Use it yourself.

SELL UPWARD: To communicate your new idea to your boss, team, or board:

- Encourage them to offer input to your idea. Send drafts with wide margins, allowing room and permission to edit.
- Anticipate their concerns and make them feel comfortable with your idea.
- Make your idea easy to grasp. Paint a picture of how your idea blends into a vision of the future. Use a metaphor or an Idea Map.
- Portray the idea as a winner. Create a fast test for your idea. Then show through initial analysis how your idea fits into the organization's strategic plan.
- Make your idea strong. Be positive by eliminating all "but . . . "s from presentations.

SELL DOWNWARD: To communicate your idea to your employees:

- Make your idea open for employee suggestions. Publish it in a newsletter and request reactions. Listen to how others think your idea will affect them, then modify it.
- Make your idea part of the work environment. Show your idea in photos or posters. Hang them on the walls of your office and meeting areas.
- Make employee buy-in possible by assigning implementation of the idea to key staffers.

SELL OUTWARD: To communicate to your consumers:

- Get news editors excited about your idea. Create a unique press release that gets noticed. For example, include a packet of tea or instant coffee in the mailing and suggest that the editor take a break while reading your release.
- Make your community aware of your idea by supporting a local cause that ties into the philosophy of your idea.

If you're uncomfortable selling your newly generated idea because you feel selling is like bragging, remember:

The peacock that sits on its tailfeathers is just another turkey.

The Importance of "Word of Mouth"

Most people judge an innovation by subjective evaluation from other individuals who have already adopted the innovation. It has been shown that innovations really take off after word-of-mouth communications have spread the positive subjective evaluations.

Conclusion

Creativity is a process. It has several steps, and each demands a different set of skills. Beginning with creative thinking, you can practice these skills and learn to be more creative. You can recognize your own creative abilities and develop them. You can recognize the value of creative (divergent) thinking in others and learn to manage it without fearing that it will take you over. And you can begin to promote your ideas with a greater confidence than you now may have. I hope that this chapter will have helped you realize these things and given you a head start in becoming more productive by being more creative.