

Probortunity - By Ian Harvey

The easiest way to dis-empower someone is to stifle their ideas. Conversely the way to empower people is to give them the opportunity to explore their ideas through expression of creativity.

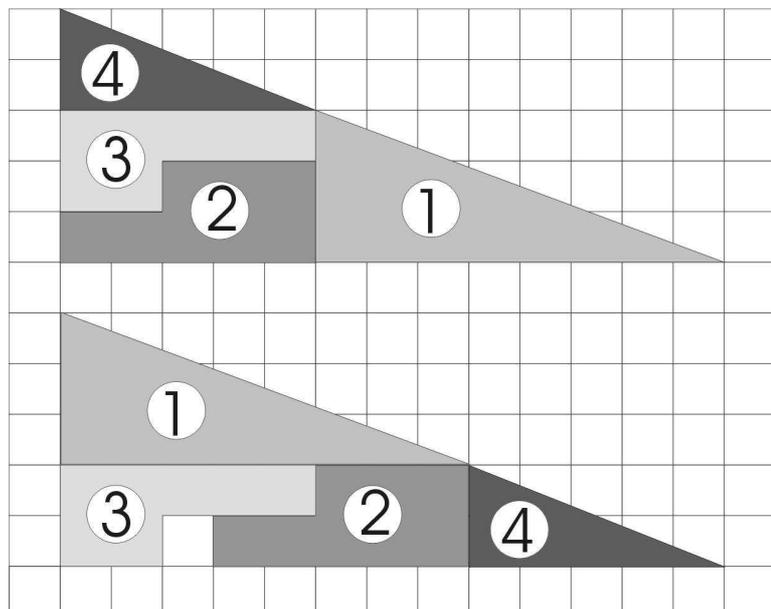
There is a hopelessness and resignation that exists when ideas are suppressed, when no future can be seen, when it appears that one is just a part of a big machine with no individual value.

Unlike the brains of animals which merely control bodily functions and drive instinct, we are problem solving machines. Our brains have been designed to think, to create, to wonder. Every product or process that has ever been produced has been developed especially to solve a specific problem and is the result of creative thought.

Unfortunately the “system” seems be designed to make us so comfortable that we do not need to think. We could be moderately comfortable without a lot of thought if we wanted to, as long as we don’t mind being brain dead. At first look it would seem that every opportunity has been taken up.

Look at the first of these two triangles. It is made up of 4 pieces (two smaller triangles and two sets of blocks). Each piece fits together to make a whole in which no spaces exist. A bit like our world where all opportunities seem to be filled. Without the ability to see opportunity we might conclude that there is none.

But rearrange the pieces (as in picture 2) and without covering any greater area you have managed to create a window of opportunity that was otherwise invisible.



Opportunity exists everywhere. It’s just a matter of being able to “see” it, to rearrange the pieces so that the opportunity becomes visible. History is full of examples of people who enriched others, and themselves, by seeing opportunities that others did not.

How can you spot opportunity? First you have to find a problem. Then look for the real issues behind it.

For example, I really hate those automatic answering phones which tell you to ***“press 1 for sales”, “press 2 for service”*** and then after making your selection you are told ***“unfortunately all our operators are busy right now but your call is important to us and you have been placed in a queue, please hold and you will be attended to by our next available operator”*** The implication being that if you don't hold you will lose your place in the queue and have to start all over.

Behind the frustration for me is the constant thought that with all this sophisticated technology, it must be possible to monitor the peak hours and make sure that personal service is available. It would be a real thrill to have an un-virtual person answer the phone. This automated, non caring, non listening, impersonal response is adding to my collective frustration and increasing my stress levels, and I don't need that.

The issue behind the problem is that, as a customer, I want instant satisfaction or at least personal attention, and I don't get it.

So here is a problem, and an opportunity. Because there are so many negative implications around the word "problem", the word "probortunity" has been created.

A probortunity can take any form: challenge, question, mystery, concern, problem, puzzle, difficulty or opportunity. Probortunity is an all inclusive word to describe something you want to improve or change for the better.

We are increasingly becoming an impersonal, automated, isolationist society. The company or individual who can provide real personal attention will win. And all it might take is some creative thought and systematic approach.

The answers to the above and other probortunities may be found in an effective brainstorming session. Here are the fundamentals of a brainstorming session.

1. Define your problem. Write out your problem concisely and make sure that everyone in the session understands the problem and is in agreement with the way it is worded.
2. Give yourselves a time limit – maybe around 25 minutes although larger groups may need more time to get everyone's ideas out.
3. Everyone shouts out solutions to the problem while one person writes them out There is ABSOLUTELY NO CRITICIZING OF IDEAS. No matter how ridiculous they may seem, they must be written down. Laughing is to be encouraged. Criticism is

not. Why? As soon as participants begin to fear criticism of their thoughts, they'll stop generating ideas. Many ideas that first seem crazy may prove to contain the gem of a great solution.

4. Once the time is up, select the five ideas that the team like best.
5. Write down five criteria for judging which ideas best solve your problem. Criteria should start with the word "should", for example, "it should be cost effective", "it should be legal", "it should be possible to finish before Dec 12th", etc.
6. Give each idea a score of 0 to 5 points depending on how well it meets each criterion. Once all of the ideas have been scored for each criterion, add up the scores.

The idea with the highest score will best solve your problem. Keep a record of all the best ideas and their scores in case your chosen solution turns out to be unworkable.

With an effective brainstorming session you, and your people will come up with the solutions to problems that would otherwise remain unsolved. You will see opportunities that are invisible to others.

Opportunity knocks, but you have to open the door

If you are interested in a more creative approach to your business challenges call me I can explain where the extra space (opportunity) comes from.

Ian Harvey is a speaker, trainer, author and designer with over 30 years experience in the importing, manufacturing, IT, automotive and distribution industries. The author of several books, Ian's unique delivery style guarantees involvement and real take home value.

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