

When Times Get Tough, the Tough Break Through

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When the market slows, innovating and finding new ways to make money are often obscured by anxiety, stress and a natural myopic tendency to focus solely on cutting cost.

What we often neglect to do is to use downtime to pursue “breakthrough” thinking, a level of thinking that stretches our cognitive boundaries and allows us to reach beyond ordinary logic. This is also known as “lateral thinking.”

When generating ideas or solutions, lateral thinking is characterized by the shifting of thinking patterns away from traditional or predictable thinking to unique and provocative thinking.

A new idea that is the result of breakthrough or lateral thinking is not always a helpful one, but when a good idea is discovered in this way it is usually obvious in hindsight.

For instance: *A man and his son are in a car crash. The father is killed and the son is taken to hospital gravely injured. When he gets there, the surgeon says "I can't operate on this boy; he is my son!"* How is this possible?

This is an example of an instant perception blocking the mind's ability to explore alternatives. In this case the instant perception is that most people imagine a surgeon as a male; this leads to the conclusion that either the surgeon or the "father" in the car crash was not the boy's real father. If you switch your perception to allow for a female surgeon then the answer is suddenly obvious, the surgeon is the boy's mother. Most people imagine a surgeon as a male, but in this case it is the opposite! Lateral thinking is the method of exploring beyond perceptual boundaries aka “outside the box”.

If you are experiencing a slow down in business take a different approach to re-designing your marketing plan and sales strategy. Look at ways you can allocate staff and resources differently.

Empower staff to redesign current processes to eliminate duplication and non-value added activity that will allow for more time to focus on generating new sources of income.

More specifically bring your people together to brainstorm and develop a new marketing plan that has specific short-term objectives, role-assignments, timelines, and clear and short-term metrics. Then, execute this plan immediately. And celebrate even the smallest wins.

Bring in outside sales trainers and specialist in innovation to help rejuvenate your staff and provide fresh ideas and best practices.

Some of the most successful companies are finding new ways to inspire their staff to innovate every single day. Many organizations are creating environments that look more like playgrounds than work places and the impact on idea development, morale and retention are very positive.

If done effectively, adopting the use of breakthrough or lateral thinking will unleash opportunities that will serve to accelerate even higher levels of success when the market swings back.