

Soft skills in innovation: Part 2 of 3

Free up your mind

Multitasking can make your brain too busy to be creative

IN LAST Friday's article, I said that for innovation to take root, you need to remove three mental barriers standing in your way, and I discussed the first barrier – finding the courage to begin the process and choose that good idea.

Today, we look at the second mental barrier to innovation – time.

Time to develop ideas

You need a sufficient amount of time to let ideas develop and flourish in a safe and nurturing environment.

Creativity brings peace of mind once it is achieved. Yet it needs a mind of peace to be nurtured. This is the mental challenge: Contentment kills creativity.

Notice how colleagues, friends and family members seem umbilically tied to their electronic devices? Whether it is for e-mail, IM, MSN, Tweets, Facebook or LinkedIn, they seem to be "always on" in today's mediated world.

Most may think that multitasking is a productive friend, yet science reveals another angle: No matter how powerful your brain, it is capable of only doing one important thinking task at any one given moment.

Stanford University published a

study in 2009 which showed how multitasking made the brain unproductive.

It is fascinating to learn that the research was conducted on Gen-Y students, the very people perceived to be the modern-day gurus of multitasking.

Multitasking creates an intensely busy mind.

Yes, a hectic mind is a powerful spur for greater performance.

However, busy-ness is not good when you wish to focus your mental energy on creativity.

Creativity needs a relaxed mental state, thus you need to quieten your mind. Your biggest hurdle is in finding better ways to manage your time.

Once you can achieve this, your creative juices will start to flow in that more tranquil, nurturing and creatively safer environment.

To be creative requires less time than you might imagine.

So a good first step is to set goals – say, freeing up around 15 minutes each day for some creative space.

Three things to avoid

To create a little more time to nurture creativity, address these three cardinal sins of time management:



FILE ILLUSTRATION

1 "What to do?"

Have you ever found yourself staring into space, wondering what to do next? Does every next job feel like it is the job you want to do least?

If so, stop procrastinating by focusing on completing your current task. Don't waste time worrying yourself into the mood. Just put your head down and get on with that task, then the next.

You will quickly realise that you are making progress, and this becomes very motivating.

2 "Too much to do!"

Do you find yourself making little impact on your daily mountain of work? Do you feel that no matter how long you stay at the office, there is no headway?

If so, begin to set some priorities in your day by focusing on the important tasks.

Take five minutes at the beginning of each day to list key tasks and set priorities. Stick to your plan with the best of intentions and you will begin to see progress.

3 "No choice!"

Do you find your day is constantly mapped out by demands from others?

Do you feel that whatever you do, your input has no bearing on events?

If so, start to make some options for yourself by taking ownership of some decisions that impact your performance.

Free up only five minutes a day to ask yourself what is the one thing you would like to change, work out a plan to make that change happen and then execute it.

Make time for creativity

Creating extra quiet time in your day for creativity will quickly become easier than you think.

Start by overcoming your tendency to procrastinate, set yourself some key priorities and aim to have more control over your routines.

The tide of time will start to swing in your favour and you will begin to use the quietness that this releases to invest your time in nurturing more creative thoughts.

Next week: How influential are you?

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