

# Think 'business unusual'

The marketplace today calls for you to think differently – here's how

IF THERE is a dominant theme among all the leaders, managers and small business owners that I meet, it is this: Business-as-usual thinking will not be enough in these times.

You have to think differently to create new customers and to constantly add value for your existing customers, employees, partners and investors.

This begs the question: how do you think differently?

The starting point is to realise that being able to think in an innovative way is a skill and, like any other ability, it can be improved with the right tools, practice and encouragement.

So with this in mind, let me show you how you can think differently in minutes. How many different uses can you think of in the next 60 seconds for a mobile phone?

In my workshops, most people list from five to seven items – text, phone, camera etc. These are the business-as-usual responses.

But what if I changed the challenge to, how many unusual uses can you think of for a mobile phone? For example, it can be used to hold open a door. Suddenly, you discover a new range of possibilities.

Now what if I asked, how might an ant use a mobile phone? You might answer, as a dance floor or a shelter, and so on.

These might not be practical ideas but who would have thought a few years ago that you could use a mobile phone as a watch, camera or video?

My point is this. Being able to think differently is a question of choice. You can choose to think in a usual or a different way. If you choose to think in a different way, you have two different strategies:

## 1 Try and redefine the challenge

In the example above when I inserted the word "unusual", then most people's minds opened up.

## 2 Look at the challenge in a new way

In the mobile phone example, it is when I ask the question, how many different uses would an ant have for a mobile phone?

The mobile phone example

tries to show that most people are trapped into thinking in a particular way. Our mind is like a patterning system that organises information into existing patterns (an Edward De Bono insight).

This makes you quick and efficient in processing information but can lead to rigidity in your thinking and you can only create incremental ideas.

For example, let's imagine that you are trying to improve your customer service. Another way of defining this challenge might be to ask: "What can I do so that my customers love dealing with me?"

Now which problem excites and engages you? Which problem definition is more likely to open up new possibilities? Can you see that by simply using a different way to define the problem you can become unstuck?

I have found that by simply reframing the challenge in more emotional language, you can open up new possibilities. The language of business is rational, – efficient, cost-benefit – yet the language of customers is emotional.

So restating your goal or challenge in emotional language will help you better understand your customers and will increase your probability of developing a

new and different solution.

As mentioned, your second creative strategy is to look at the challenge with a new set of eyes. So if you feel stuck, then ask yourself how Virgin boss Richard Branson might look at this situation? Or a child? Or your competitor or a supplier?

The lesson is this. The marketplace today calls for you to think differently. This is a skill that you can learn and gain an edge on your competition. You can choose to win by learning to think differently or be left wondering what happened when your competitors run past you.

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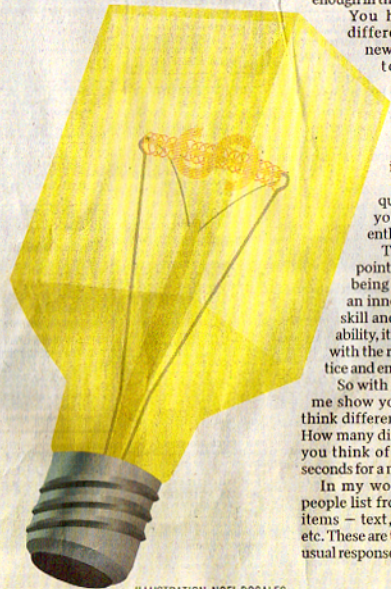


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