

Think Inside the Crate

by Randall Munson, CSP

While trying to be more creative, we have all been coaxed, encouraged, and cajoled to “think outside the box.” That is, to free ourselves from the self-imposed restrictions of conventional thinking.

However, wild unconstrained thinking can result in wasted time and yield sparse results.

Businesses have often been resistant to exercises in creativity. This is, in part, because they fear that the resulting creative ideas will be outrageous and impractical.

In a brainstorming session trying to find creative ways to improve the design of cell phones, one over-achieving creative mind tossed in the idea “Hey, we could make cell phones out of tomato juice and, uh, turkey gizzards. Those are cheap materials, you know. How’s that for being creative? I bet nobody ever thought of THAT before!”

Creative? Yes. Useful? Not particularly.

While brainstorming, raw unconstrained idea generation is necessary. But in order to develop practical, innovative ideas the participants must recognize such realities as laws of physics, limited resources, and delivery schedules. That’s why I encourage business to think outside the box but also think inside the crate. Break out of the box of conventional thinking but stay within the bounds of reality.

Staying inside the crate is the sweet spot of creativity. That is where the creativity and reality meet to produce ideas that are innovative, practical – the rich, breakthrough ideas that propel successful businesses and organizations past the competition.

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