

Creativity Training

A Testing Program That Became a Sales Training Program

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When my attention was called to Dr. Robert McMurry's article in the *Harvard Business Review* on "The Mystique of Super-Salesmanship," I was warned that there would more than likely be parts to which I would strongly react—some favorably and some unfavorably. That is exactly what happened.

In discussing "The Selling Spectrum," Dr. McMurry points out that the classification of salesmen into creative and maintenance type selling is not so black and white simple but, rather, ranges over a spectrum from one extreme to the other. He said, "Thus, thinking particularly of creative skill, I find it useful to array salesmen in terms of positions requiring increasing amounts of that ingredient, from the very simple to the highly complex." In his seven-point range from where the job is predominantly to deliver the product (milk, bread, fuel oil, etc.) to what he rates as the most difficult, requiring the creative sale of intangibles (insurance, advertising, education, etc.), he feels that the former requires only courtesy whereas the latter calls for salesmanship.

Here is where I differ with him. Every business wants to grow and I firmly believe that, properly motivated, every individual wants to grow. His

greatest potential for growth is in the exercising of his creative capacity to think up new ideas, to take new approaches to life whether it be business or personal. Furthermore, I believe that people respond to this situation for it is not a question of their being taught to be creative, it is a matter of getting them to feel their creativity power and develop it through exercise.

Why A Lack of Creativity?

Business literature is replete with the statements—yes, the pleadings—of key businessmen asking for more creativity, forecasting a tremendous future if that release of creativity does come about. Somehow or other people look upon it as a mystical something. When they stop to consider, it actually is not mystical at all, although it is certainly very much an almost minus quantity in the lives of most people. The question is why?

One of the conclusions that I've arrived at is that most people exercise a minimum of creativity because they have been "shushed to death." From the time they first exercised their innate curiosity as children, they started asking questions, questions which were usually sound, provocative and, also, embarrass-

ing to parents and elders. Yes, and to teachers, too. The result is they were "shushed." "Children should be seen and not heard!" Unfortunately, they grew up into adults who still felt that they should be seen and not heard, that their ideas were wild or weird, that their questions were unfair or embarrassing. This is the type of person with whom sales trainers are forced to deal. Whether forced or not, we want to deal with them because, here again, our greatest opportunity for services lies in tapping this tremendous potential.

Some misleading ideas have developed. These we have to overcome or at least neutralize. For example, E. L. Stentz, vice president and general manager for Packaging Corporation's Eastern Region, said, "It has been wisely, and mistakenly, assumed that you merely analyze a problem. Ideas for improvement will come automatically." The great fallacy in this is that people frequently do not even know how to get started on possible solutions to a problem.

The Anatomy of Selling

Since back in the mid-forties when Alex Osborn's first book on creative thinking, "Your Creative Power," came into being it has been our endeavor to utilize his approach in awakening the creative power within the people who have come into Reynolds sales training programs or who are in our sales and management organization. We were always haunted with the fact that nearly every successful idea requires two successful problem-solving efforts: (1) arriving at, or creating the idea, and (2) selling the idea. The minute we leave the realm of order taking and enter the realm of order making, we recognize

that a successful sale starts with an idea. As Herbert Swope puts it, there are three why's of selling. First—why do it at all? Secondly—why do it now? Third—why do it this way?

For years we have had a constant consciousness of the necessity for cultivating within our people the habit of asking questions, the courage to have an idea and stick with it and, equally important, the capacity to sell that idea to others. We have been ever seeking new information and inspiration to help promote this most worthy cause.

So frequently we meet the salesman whose philosophy is, "I'm trying." But the salesman who is most successful is rather easy to identify. He is the individual who tackles his problems by asking the question, "How many *other* ways might it be done?" Since the Reynolds Metals Company's motto is "He succeeds best who helps others succeed," it is natural for us to ask, "How can you help others succeed?" The answer, of course, is do more creative thinking in his behalf.

Mr. Robert Leander has said, "Where there is trouble, there is opportunity." Since every salesman seems to feel that he has an overdose of trouble, it is sales training's job to show him how to convert it into opportunity. Our task is to get their imaginations working. To give them a formula for creative thinking. Or, as Mr. Throgmorton said at the ASTD Conference in Dallas in 1962, we need to "turpentine their imaginations."

Testing for Creativity

It was our good fortune to have our eye arrested by an article in *Look* maga-

zine. It started our company on what some people call a testing program, but what I prefer to call one of the most successful sales training programs we have ever held.

The article was entitled, "The Creative Child." Dr. E. Paul Torrance, Psychologist at the University of Minnesota, said in this article, "If we were to identify children as gifted on the basis of intelligence or scholastic aptitude tests, we would eliminate from consideration approximately 70 percent of the most creative." He went on to point out that IQ tests do not measure the child's flexibility, originality, depth of thinking or intuition. Creativity tests, however, do this thing. It takes no brilliant mind to be challenged by such a startling statement and wonder what the situation is in regards to adults.

Therefore, I wrote to Dr. Torrance and asked him, first—would the test he used on children be applicable or adaptable to adults. Secondly, could we get permission to use it. A prompt reply was received saying—first, it was an adult test adapted to children—secondly, yes—we could use it. And, in the third place, that they had a doctoral candidate who would like to make a study of an industrial population to see what the creativity test might identify under such marketing circumstances. Would we be interested? After studying the information, reviewing the test, and talking with management, we wrote back and said indeed we would.

The result is that we have administered the test to approximately 500 of our field salesmen and supervisors, as well as quite a number of our headquarters marketing group.

We consider the program an unqualified success and don't care too much about the statistics that we may get later. The balance of this article explains why.

The Test and Its Use

A copy of the test, as well as pictures of the two principle objects used in five of the six parts of the test (the sixth part is found in the test itself and has to do with the circles) is included at the end of this article.

It takes 41 minutes to administer the test. We usually administer it in groups of around 18 or 20 people. This is because it is the number of people who are usually available in a particular office or at a particular time.

At the conclusion of the test, we spend about 25 or 30 minutes in reviewing the tests and pointing out facts which, as a result, make this experience for our men extremely meaningful as it was entertaining.

In a session following the test, we point out that creative thinking consists of: (1) fluency of ideas, (2) flexibility of ideas, (3) originality, and (4) elaboration, improving on your own or others' ideas. We explain that every answer is weighted on the basis of one to four, depending upon its originality or its complexity, and that there are no wrong answers but better and poorer answers.

Having experienced the test, they are still filled with the sense of frustration which occurs in dealing with each of the six parts of the test. It is easy for us then to emphasize what five facets of creative thinking are or, should I say, what the tools of creative thinking are, namely, the asking of questions—

particularly "w" questions—second, guessing causes—third, guessing consequences—fourth, suggesting improvements—and fifth, suggesting unusual uses.

"Horsie Hollow Candy Shops"

First let us consider the Dun & Bradstreet picture (Figure 1.) which is used for the first three phases of the test. Five minutes is devoted to asking questions about facts that can not be answered by looking at the picture. Since the picture we used was in color, such a question as "What is the color of the smallest boy's hair?" was answerable by examining the picture, therefore, not qualified. But, asking his age, where he lives, what his father did, where they got the material, why they were building the shack, where they got the candy, etc., are all applicable questions.

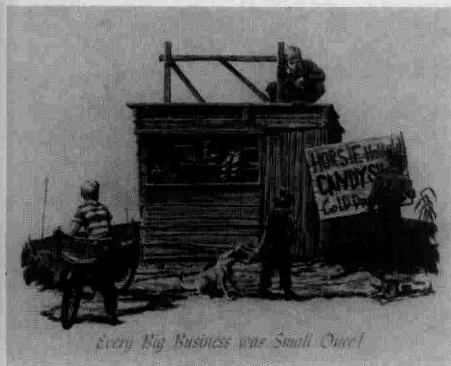


Figure 1

The second part has to do with guessing causes for five minutes. These are the facts that led up to the present situation. The third portion of the test is a five-minute period in which they guess as many of the possible consequences as they can. In nearly every instance, people run out of questions long before they run out of time. On the other hand, when we point out to

the participants that all they would have needed to have done would have been to ask questions about each piece of material, its source, each person, his future, etc., they would have far more questions than they could write in the allotted time.

In sales this is extremely important. A man needs to know who and what influences him and influences the people with whom he is dealing. They need to know the past history of the company as well as being able to foresee possible results if his prospect will follow his suggestions. As one or two people in each group usually expressed it, one of the lads in the picture might catch fire to the idea of creating Horsie Hollow Candy Stores all over the country. This man is thinking big, but most of them are unable to even foresee that the dog might grab the all-day-sucker in the hand of the small boy—dogs being dogs.

We show pictures of the first Reynolds Metals plant in Louisville and, also, a picture of J. L. Kraft's first wagon in which he delivered cheese. We pointed out that it took imagination to envision the large corporations that those pictures now represent.

The Toy Dog Picture

Now let's take a look at the toy dog (Figure 2.) and what it taught our salesmen about creative thinking. Quite likely, the most important single lesson they learned involved the dog. I can now report to you with statistical accuracy a finding that is startling but also a stimulus for constructive action. At the time that they were given the assignment (8 minutes is allotted for each part of the test concerning the dog) to suggest improvements for the dog as a

toy (to make it more likable to children) we would carry the dog to the various tables and show it to the individuals.



Figure 2

And—here is the startling discovery! On an average, only 2 out of 20 would reach for the dog to handle it. They made no attempt to have physical contact or explore it through the sense of feel, no attempt to discover its operating features—or lack of them.

We then told them the story of the little boy and girl who were playing doctor. The little boy with the stethoscope was examining the little girl's doll. When she asked him, "What is her trouble, Doctor," he replied, "She has tired sawdust." This story usually produced smiles or laughs. But, this attitude quickly passed when we pointed out that 18 out of 20 of them did not know whether the little dog had tired sawdust or not. In fact, they had no idea what material was used as stuffing. How then could they make any suggestions in that phase of improvement?

We make it a point to remind them that they have not been restricted as to size, cost, materials, practicality, color, feel, smell, or taste—and, yet, they run out of ideas early.

It was also pointed out that in most instances people do not ask themselves how wild, weird, or unusual could it be made? Or, how could it be used by salesmen? Or, how could it be used by your wife? Or, how could it be used by a minister? Or an attorney? Or, an astronaut? Or whoever—or, how could it be used to promote a product or a service? Here again we emphasized that creative thinking starts with curiosity . . . and curiosity has as its best food the asking of questions, especially the "w" questions and by the manual manipulation of an article. If our salesmen or your salesmen were to take apart the product; were to read and study the service or the material, the advertising; were to dig into the history of the company, the background of the people with whom they deal—all of these things and many more could change their whole approach. Such actions would develop the valuable quality of uniqueness. It tailors the proposition to the individual making it more serviceable, more truthful and, also, more pleasant.

The Circle Test

The test involving the circles demonstrates several very important facts about creative thinking. First of all it emphasizes the possibility of getting in a rut. It also points out how ruts can be helpful. For example, one man was caught allowing his eyes to rove all around the room trying to find something that was round. He couldn't find anything new, although the buttons on his coat and the door knob were round, they simply didn't register. At last he stuck his hand in his pocket and a bright light came to his eyes—coins. He started marking one circle one cent, another five cents, and

then a dime, a quarter, a half dollar and a dollar. Then he ran out of coins until he remembered his French coins. He started over again. Basically, he was in a rut. But here is an interesting fact. He had been looking for an opportunity to promote an idea inexpensively. The test reminded him that a certain South American country had a small copper coin which he could buy eight for a penny. This enabled him to cut his "gimmick" cost to one-eighth of a cent and add to it the romance of a foreign coin. Thus, thinking in a rut did have its value.

Another man was so distressed because he couldn't think of another use for any of the circles. He finally removed his glasses, laid them on the paper on top of the circles and rubbed his eyes. Finally he put the glasses back on just as time was called. I happened to have observed this performance and so I asked him, "Did you draw a pair of spectacles?" He looked very sheepish and acknowledged that he hadn't. Two circles in the form of two lenses, laying directly on top of the circles but he did not see the relationship between reality and an idea.

Summary

Now let's summarize. Why do we feel this testing program was an extremely successful training program? First of all, it *was* a training program. The people felt their involvement. They knew their limited performance. We didn't even have to grade the papers. They knew that they had not had as many ideas as they now knew they could have had. Secondly, they discovered the means for creating more ideas. They felt the importance of ask-

ing "w" questions. They sensed the significance of investigating causes and guessing consequences. The importance of suggesting ideas . . . lots of ideas . . . weird ideas . . . ideas that other people would not be likely to think about took on reality. They learned that even getting in a rut can sometimes be helpful as long as you are endeavoring to think creatively about a problem. They learned that having ideas is frustrating and involves effort. Therefore, frustration *can* be an encouraging signal indicating progress toward creative thinking success. And, most important of all, they learned and felt the vital fundamental that there is no one answer to any problem. Rather, there are a multitude of answers and it is well to try and think of as many answers as you can, as many suggestions as you can, before you exercise judicial judgment and determine what answer you are going to propose. It gives a man a great deal of confidence to know that if one idea doesn't work, he can come up with others, any one of which will be equally as successful as the one that didn't work and maybe, a whole lot more successful.

There have already been some by-products showing up. For example, we learned that certain people give a high percentage of negative responses when they take such a test. Others have a preponderance of optimistic reactions, so we find that by this sampling people are revealing their personality tendencies.

We also found that some men tend to focus their responses on problems related to the business enterprise. For example, they will ask: How will they cool the drinks? How will they pre-

serve the candy? Where will their customers come from? How can the boy handle the sign without touching wet paint? What time of day is it? Is it summer? What is the dog's name? It makes us wonder if there isn't some significance in an individual's choice of pertinent questions.

We also learned that there were a lot of common response items. Some gave fewer but nevertheless important, less common, or what we might call, original items.

We also find that there seems to be a tendency which issues a warning—the more creative people tend to be less appreciated by the supervisors—at least, generally speaking. They are not conformists. They are more individualistic.

They are not as easy to control. They do not give pat answers. They insist on additional facts. They require or request or insist upon additional services.

This has been one of the very shortest of our successful sales training programs. It required an hour and a half, at the very outside, but definitely a producer of specific identifiable changes in people. People who are now trying harder to get more ideas, to ask more questions, and to solve more problems.

And, we are also finding, as the months grind by, that by feeding them with additional creative thinking material, by reminding them of what they experienced in taking the test, the initial experience is revived with a beneficial effect to all.

CREATIVE THINKING TASKS

Cooperative Research Project

Reynolds Metals Company and the University of Minnesota

Introduction: These tasks are a test of your ability to use your curiosity and imagination, to think of new ideas. There are no "right" answers in the usual sense. You are asked to think of as many ideas as you can. Try to think of unusual, interesting, and clever ideas—ideas which no one else is likely to think of.

You will be given six tasks to do and you will be timed on each one, so do not waste time. Work as rapidly as you can with comfort. If you run out of ideas before time is called, wait until instructions are given before going on to the next task.

TASK 1. ASK AND GUESS. The first three tasks will be based on Figure 1. The first task will give you a chance to show how good you are at asking questions. In the spaces below, write down all of the questions you can think of about the things you see in the picture. Ask the questions you would need to know to understand what is happening. Do not ask questions which can be answered just by looking at the picture.

1.
2.
3.
4.

TASK 2. GUESS CAUSES. In the spaces below, list as many possible things as you can which might have caused the action shown in Figure 1. You may use things that might have happened just before the event in the picture, or something that happened a long

time ago that had an influence on the present event. Make as many guesses as you can. Don't be afraid to guess.

1.
2.
3.
4.

TASK 3. GUESS CONSEQUENCES. In the spaces below, list as many possibilities as you can of what might happen as a result of what is happening in Figure 1. You may use things that might happen right afterwards or things that might happen as a result long afterwards in the future. Make as many guesses as you can. Don't be afraid to guess.

1.
2.
3.
4.

TASK 4. PRODUCT IMPROVEMENT. List below the cleverest, most interesting, and most unusual ways you can think of for changing the toy dog in Figure 2 so that children would have more fun playing with it.

1.
2.
3.
4.

DO YOU DARE TO CALL IN A TRAINING CONSULTANT?

Recently the president of one of our client firms told his Training Director, "If you need these people to help you, I'm going to replace you and get someone who can do the job." Sounds bad? So why are we scaring you?

A recent survey of our client contacts indicates that over the past three years half of the people who contracted for our services have the same job they had when we met; the other 50% have been promoted within their company.

Teaching Systems Corporation has rendered valuable service to several of the largest firms in the country. We haven't had a dissatisfied client. We think the reason is that we are businessmen first and behavioral scientists second. Our approach makes a firm money or saves a firm money or we don't want to get involved. One major firm has utilized over 20,000 copies of programed sales manuals which we prepared and has made them an integral part of sales training.

We are also developing a correspondence course entitled *Astrology: A New Management Tool for Sales Forecasting*.

For further information and samples of our work, contact Richard G. Flaherty, Vice President

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TASK 5. UNUSUAL USES. List below the cleverest, most interesting, and most unusual uses you can think of for this toy dog in Figure 2 other than as a plaything.

1.
2.
3.
4.

TASK 6. CIRCLES. In ten minutes see how many objects you can make from the circles below. A circle should be the main part of whatever you make. With pencil, add lines to the circles to complete your picture. Your lines can be inside the circle, outside the circle, or both inside and outside the circle. Try to think of things that no one else will think of. Make as many things as you can and put as many ideas as you can in each one. Add names or titles if it is hard to tell what the object is.

