

Creative vs. Judicial Thinking

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Every executive who has been in business very long has learned the value of a healthy skepticism. He has found the need to evaluate carefully what he's told, what he reads and what he sees. He develops a solid regard for facts and persists in getting them before making decisions, plans or proposals. He develops a questioning attitude toward opinions and unsubstantiated data.

All of this matures him in the sense that it contributes to safer decisions, better timed plans and careful executions. Coupled with experience in his particular field of work, the healthy skepticism helps him develop what is called good "judicial" ability. This ability to effectively weigh and decide is a requisite to individual progress and company success.

BUT herein lies a trap—the very forces that contribute to good "judicial" ability can be stifling another important requisite to individual and company success, the creative abilities.

Good judicial thinking is based mainly on experience, precedent, common sense and facts. Notice that all of these infer the past tense. Even facts are things

that happened yesterday. True, one of the best guideposts for the future is what has happened in the past. Some actions have proved to be basic and timeless in business.

There is, however, a vast area of possible actions wherein precedent and history cannot predict what will happen if the action is or is not taken. Successful action of this type is commonly called progress. The biggest contributor to progress is creative thinking.

WHY do we say that some of the forces that contribute to good judicial thinking can stifle creative thinking? To explain this properly would have us off on a complex journey into the psychological and emotional characteristics of man. Let's try a simple way. The new mechanical brain machines are frequently compared to the human brain. For the sake of illustration let's reverse the comparison.

The mechanical brain can solve problems only when fed all the component information needed to arrive at a solution. When this is done the different pieces of information fall into the proper slots and the machine feeds out the

answer. When a piece of information is missing, or when a component is fed in for which there is no slot, the machine rejects the problem unsolved.

Regardless of the wonderful technological advances represented by these machines, they cannot create, improvise, or solve problems based on data for which there is no precedent. Herein lies the difference between the mechanical brain and the human brain.

WHEN the human brain meets a problem for which there is no obvious precedent, it has the capacity to think up the missing part, to improvise or to create. This function of resourcefulness results in what are called new ideas. This is the creative thinking that contributes to progress.

But let's see what happens to some individuals in business. Preoccupied with developing good judicial ability through the exercise of a healthy skepticism and what is known as common sense, they often unconsciously start to think like a mechanical brain machine. Slots are formed within the brain, similar to those in the mechanical brain, which accept only that information with which the individual has had some prior experience. New ideas, thoughts, and information for which there are no slots are rejected. Psychologists call this the mental block.

Thus creative thinking is many times stifled by the mental habit patterns requisite to effective judicial thinking. Translated into our everyday work situation, what are we talking about? Are we disparaging of those executives who

have developed a keen sense of judgment and insight? No, they're the bed rock of our organization.

We are trying to make two major points. First there is the executive who exerts all of his mental effort toward patterned thinking at the expense of creative thinking who can easily develop into a closed-minded obstructionist. His skepticism can become unhealthy and his approach negative. He can become the type who devotes more thoughts to why something won't work rather than to trying to make it work. He can become cold to new ideas although he seldom has any himself. This discourages ideas from his subordinates and in the theoretical end would have him on the horns of a dilemma, a good judge with nothing to judge.

There are some few executive jobs that require aggressive skepticism. Those classified as control functions, for instance. On all other executive jobs we would like to stress the dangers of over-patternized thinking. Being human beings who grow more conservative with each passing year and, being creatures of habit, it is not hard for one to cross the line of happy balance between healthy and unhealthy skepticism.

THE solution to this situation sounds too simple: Ventilate the brain with creative thoughts. Develop the habit of spending part of every working week trying to think up new ideas that could be applied to your work and your job. You may not be the best idea man in the world, but you will avoid the pitfalls of negativism. The very process of exercising the brain through creative

thought works against the forces that tend to shackle and patternize your thinking. You'll find yourself in balance in this entire matter and able to keep your skepticism healthy.

Alex Osborn in his book, *Your Creative Power*, lists some other road blocks that discourage creative thinking and cause negativism. Avoid them:

- Ill-timed judgment
- Fear of failure
- Passive reading
- Spectatorship
- Excessive modesty
- False dignity
- Perfectionism
- Day dreaming
- Worry
- Self discouragement

Our first objective was to point out the dangers of all-judicial versus no-creative thinking. Our second will be to point up the positive benefits of a happy combination of both types. As we have already dwelt on the value of effective judicial thinking, let's consider the positive aspects of creative thinking.

Creative thoughts result in ideas which in turn can result in progress. Progress is a high-sounding word needing clarification. In our opinion, the first-line supervisor who thinks up a successful slogan contest to improve quality in his section is contributing to progress. This situation can be labeled with this exalted word just as is the creation of a successful new overall dynamic selling plan by the advertising department.

Many times we shy away from creative thinking believing it is a luxury to be enjoyed only by a talented few. Or we may feel it's not our responsibility to disturb things as set up now. There are many reasons we can use to rationalize ourselves away from creative thought, but the biggest factor is one we hate to admit: Creative thinking is work, and most of us are not willing to devote the mental energy to it.

If there was ever an open field to individual advancement it's in this area of creative thought. There are thousands upon thousands of practical new ideas and adaptations of existing ones floating around in the outer space of business just waiting to be had.

The effect of any one of these ideas put into successful execution may be relatively small. It's also a fact that only about 2 new ideas out of 10 will work. What difference does it make? Someone who has the persistence and curiosity to keep thinking up new ideas will contribute more to his own and his organization's success than the individual who is content to ride along on the coat tails of precedent and past experience.

The experts tell us that the average executive in business has developed good judicial ability. Conversely, they quickly point out the crying need to develop the creative abilities.

Two excellent books have been written on this subject, *Your Creative Power* and *Applied Imagination*, both by Alex Osborn. We strongly recommend these books to you.

(Continued on page 60)

CREATIVE VS. JUDICIAL THINKING

(Continued from page 20)

According to Osborn some habits that tend to create ideas are:

- Curiosity
- First hand experience
- Travel
- Reading with purpose
- Personal contacts
- Self education
- Taking notes
- Keeping files
- Solving puzzles
- Self encouragement

And now let's put this entire matter of creative versus judicial thinking in balance. Some may think we have tipped the scale too far and are suggesting the mass production of ideas for ideas' sake. This would result in scatter-shot thinking which is even worse than no creative thinking.

Let's look at it this way. Consider your brain to have two major parts, the creator and the tester. Use the creator to feed out ideas according to your own opportunistic or planned system. Then use your tester to evaluate the ideas in terms of workability and overall effect. "Reality test" your ideas in the light of all known evidence. If your creator is truly productive and your tester truly objective, you'll find yourself making progress on your job. You'll resist negativism, you'll develop good ideas and—you'll have more fun, too.

MR. STEINMETZ GOES TO WASHINGTON

(Continued from page 11)

prior to the 12th Annual Conference in New York City, and also that they are much interested in ASTD's annual institute.

While here Steinmetz also talked to training officials of Civil Service Commission and many other Government agencies.

He was welcomed enthusiastically and it was apparent that the government was interested in the progress and activities of ASTD. His visit has sharpened this interest.

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Free copies of *The Role of Visual Communication* by Joe W. Coffman, President of Tecifax Corporation, Holyoke, Massachusetts, may be had by writing to Mr. Coffman direct. This pamphlet contains a speech given at the 75th Convention of the Photographers' Association of America last summer. The chart showing characteristics of some "lightwriting" techniques which it contains should be of interest to all training directors.

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The ASTD-St. Louis Chapter, the University College and the School of Business and Public Administration, Washington University, sponsored a joint conference on Training in Business, Industry and Government on the University Campus January 26.