



THE BIG SECRET

Finding the Underlying Principle

by Mitchell Ditkoff

Sometimes the best part of a poem is the silence it evokes. Sometimes the best part of school is lunch. And sometimes the best part of a brainstorming session is the stuff we ignore – the seemingly trivial, laughable or absurd. Sad to say, many aspiring problem solvers – obsessed with the bottom line – miss out on tons of potential solutions because they're unwilling to explore what they think is "beside the point." Too bad. Because the "point," for many people, is simply the spot they've created that marks the end of their search.



Indeed, breakthrough ideas are frequently beside the point – or at least preceded by what appears to be a distraction from the work at hand. Spontaneous laughter, for example – whether "appropriate" or "inappropriate" – is often a clue that a friendly **AHA!** is lurking nearby. Exaggeration, too, can herald a quantum leap in the making – not to mention kidding around, wisecracks, sidetalk and a healthy dose of the surreal. Each has a role to play in the creative process. Each can serve as a valuable clue to re-focus your ideation efforts. That is, *if* you know what to do with them.

If you really want to be a breakthrough thinker, you must be willing to invite these moments of seeming distraction – not just for comic relief, but for building a bridge to deeper levels of intuitive knowing – the realm where your subconscious mind already has the answers. At this stage of the game your challenge is not to invent, but to translate. Why? Because your subconscious mind has a language of its own, often using humor, illogic and the surreal to get your attention. Like an undercover agent, it

speaks in code. Your mission is to decipher its code and use it as a catalyst to make sense out of the seeming unknown.

How? By searching for the **UNDERLYING PRINCIPLE** hidden within ideas that don't seem to make much sense at first blush. The concept. The gist. The essence. For example, if you say the only way to get closer to your customers is to "marry them," you may be on to something. The literal idea sounds silly, but the underlying principle implies a direction worth exploring – that is, spending more time with your customers ...or getting closer to them in various ways. If one of your co-workers suggests that "becoming the CEO" is the only way "things are going to change around here," don't just blow them off. Dig deeper. Find out what the underlying principle is of this seemingly far-fetched idea. Maybe it's as simple as your co-worker making the effort to become more empowered. Maybe it's a "role exchange day." Or maybe it's coming up with a new way of gaining access to the movers and shakers inside your organization.

In either case, the initial idea – however off-the-wall it sounded when first pitched – has hidden within it the power to trigger an entirely new line of thinking – one that may just be the key to your company's future success.

What oddball idea, recently shared with you by a friend or co-worker, may have – hidden within it – an underlying principle worth considering?

*This article is excerpted from **BANKING ON INNOVATION**, a 172-page workbook that accompanies Idea Champions' 2-day creative thinking training. Log onto www.ideachampions.com/banking_on_innovation.shtml for more info.*

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