



Fostering Innovation, Individual and Collective

By Mark D. Sauter, author, *Bringing Meaning into Monday™*

Let's face it; many people are products of their environment. At young ages they learn to follow rules, draw within the lines, and fit into today's societal or organizational box. While some people may resist conformity, and others are able to see outside the box, fact is, few people are willing to go there.

What a productive and meaningful society requires are people capable of sensing new possibilities and skilled and courageous enough to capitalize on them. People willing to become tomorrow's innovators, entrepreneurs and intrapreneurs (people capable of implementing ideas within existing organizations).

What distinguishes these individuals? What distinguishes organizations that collectively foster them?

Individually, people need to learn how to tap into their right-brain. Going beyond facts and figures (left-brain) and having faith in new possibilities, even dreams, without necessarily having the data to support them.

Daniel H. Pink, author of *A Whole New Mind: Moving from the Information Age to the Conceptual Age*, wrote how the Industrial Age relied on manual skills and was followed by the Information Age, which was dependent upon knowledge and intelligence – left-brain characteristics. He feels we are now entering the Conceptual Age, which puts a premium on creativity and integrative skills. He states, "Today, the defining skills of the previous era – the 'left brain' capabilities that powered the Information Age – are necessary but no longer sufficient. And the capabilities we once ordained or thought frivolous – the 'right-brain' qualities of inventiveness, empathy, joyfulness and meaning – increasingly will determine who flourishes and who flounders."

Collectively, innovation is only as good as the increased value that results from it. While innovation should be free to roam, exploring new frontiers and unconstrained by current norms, truth be told, creative idealism must also be tempered with a sense of realism. New ideas, even disruptive ones, must be encouraged and welcomed; however, to be actionable they should be shared in the context of how they add value – benefits, ease or cost optimization – to current or future customers and/or fellow coworkers.

In today's dynamic and interconnected marketplace, problems are increasingly more complex; therefore creative individuals and innovative organizations cannot work in isolation. This is easier said than done. Historically people tend to protect

and/or defend their self-interests. In the process they inadvertently prevent other pieces of the puzzle from materializing. Many ideas, good ideas, never get implemented due to the reluctance to include others in a co-creative and collaborative process. Answers to today's increasingly complex problems will be a result of crossbreeding not inbreeding; therefore creativity must extend beyond novel thinking and be open to variation and difference.

By emphasizing value creation and delivery, a greater and more dynamic sense of shared purpose will result. With that, creative differences and/or divergent perspectives, when shared in the context of how each contributes value, have a better chance of being reconciled. Synergies will more easily surface, as will greater emphasis on collaboration due to recognition of the interdependent nature of today's problem solving.

By its very nature, creativity must be resilient, capable of sensing, anticipating and responding to the ever-changing needs and priorities of the marketplace. Organizations, by structurally aligning individual agendas and work practices with organizational priorities, priorities that are focused on delivering value to others, will enable a more productive and creative work climate. As a result, relationship quality will improve and difference and variation will be valued, not simply tolerated. And, in the context of how they collectively deliver value, employees will be more collaborative, resourceful, focused and engaged. *Bringing Meaning into Monday™* offers a process that can help organizations achieve it.

Mark D. Sauter is the founder and president of GTP Associates, Inc. With over 25 years of business leadership experience, Mark's work, while with Dow Corning Corporation, was profiled in, *Value Based Marketing for Bottom-Line Success* – McGraw-Hill, 2003. In 2009, Mark released his book entitled *Bringing Meaning Into Monday™: A Sustainable Approach to Bottom Line Success*. Additional information is available at www.gtpassociates.com.