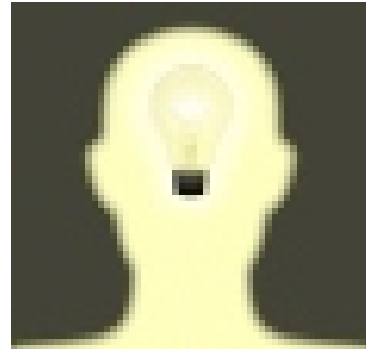


# Inspiration in Business

By Tom Evans, Author, Bookwright, Seer

We all have days when we get up and feel inspired. Conversely, there are days when nothing seems to go to plan. Ideas don't flow and external events appear to conspire against you so that, at best, you stand still that day or, worse, you feel that you even went backwards.



I am guessing that you would like all your days to be of the inspirational variety. With just a few simple techniques, the good news is that inspiration is something that can be tapped into on demand and you don't have to rely on mere chance, or what's written in your stars.

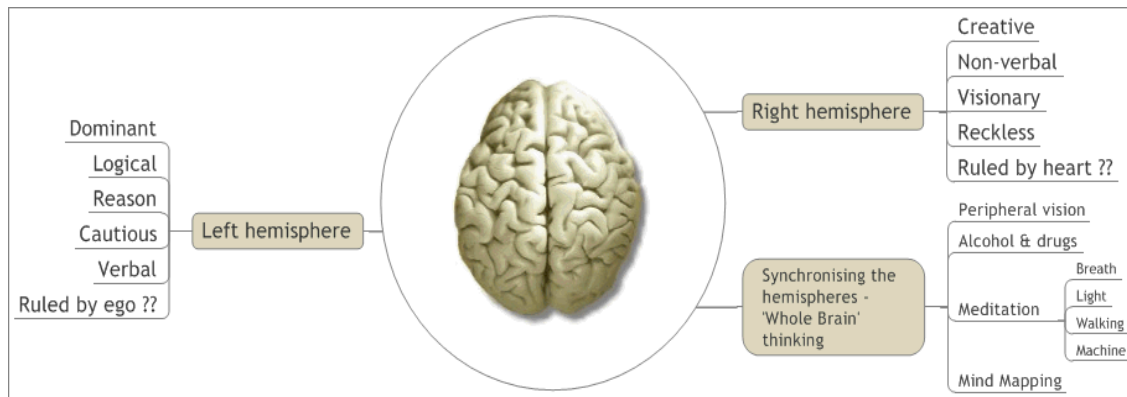
It's perhaps somewhat ironic that Edison who invented the light bulb didn't exactly have a light bulb moment in finding the material for the ideal filament. Apocryphally, he tried 10,000 or so materials before he came across tungsten. Imagine if he could have saved himself all that effort - what else would he have had time to invent?

The clue to tapping into unlimited inspiration might at first sound a bit counter-intuitive but creatives around the world will testify to this. We need to get our conscious minds out of the way to access the unconscious mind. By definition, we must be unconscious of such inspirations until they appear. When they do they appear the best ones seem to come from nowhere and, in less than a fraction of a second, you get the whole picture and vision.

Writers, painters and musicians who are 'in the flow' report that they forget about time and enter almost a dream-like state when they are at their most creative.

Such creative activity builds on existing concepts in new ways, whereas when inspiration happens, the solution to a problem is perceived in its entirety.

A useful, and simplistic, model that explains this phenomenon is the left and right hemisphere structure of our brains. The left brain is the home of logic and reason and the right, where our creative muse resides.



The first key to tapping into the inspiration stored in our un-conscious is to get our minds into a state where we are 'whole brain thinking' where both hemispheres are working to their optimum and communicating with each other effectively.

There are many ways to synchronise the hemispheres but only some that are pertinent to a business environment. A workforce under the influence of alcohol might be fun but unsafe or unproductive. Likewise, meditation may be frowned upon in the workplace which is a bit of a shame as it not only is one of the best methods but it has so many health benefits.

What does work very well though is the use of mind maps. The diagram above is an example of one. A mind map keeps the logical left brain happy as it gives it a structure and an order. While it's busy analysing and constructing the map, the creative right brain seems to sneak in to do its best work. What's more, the mind map is much easier to remember as a whole as opposed to a list or document. You can use colour, images and relative position to enforce and highlight salient areas. Mind maps seem to imprint themselves in our memory and, for this reason, are being used increasingly in schools - especially at revision time.

Note that there are also many software packages available but be aware that, for some, using a computer can get the user back into left brain mode. Grounding ideas on to paper with a pen seems to make them come alive.

The second key is to lose ego. This is not just so you suppress egotistical behaviour per se but because if ego is in operation, it is a tell tale sign that the conscious brain is active. In a business context there is another mode for collaboration and discussion which fosters the suppression of ego. It is called parallel thinking.

Parallel thinking means that instead of taking the whole task on at one time, you break it down in to modes of reflection and analysis. There are formal techniques you can follow such as Walt Disney's Three Rooms and Edward de Bono's Six Thinking Hats but in essence they all boil down to the same thing. That is to get all team members pulling together in the same direction, at the same time. For example, in Six Hats you look at all the upside and downsides to a project separately as well as the dangers and positives. You then leave all the blue sky thinking (or Green Hat in de Bono's case) to the end where no idea is judged and full creative freedom is unleashed. This occurs at the same time egos are massaged and managed.

These techniques become even more powerful when they are combined with positive thinking techniques such as Appreciative Inquiry. This is where you focus on all the things that work in your organisation and then get them to them work even better.

By far the best way however to encourage inspiration to occur is to practice regular meditation. Sadly, introducing meditative practices into the business environment is often frowned upon, which is sad. When I first started meditating, the thought of 'wasting' 20 or so minutes of my busy day sounded ludicrous. Now, if I don't meditate, I know I will waste hours in the day and, if I can, I meditate 2 or 3 times a day. In addition, I teach people how to use their dream-time to solve real world problems.

The upshot of the regular use of such techniques is to engender culture change from the ground up. Instilling a culture of innovation from inspiration is vital to any business that wants to survive and thrive in an increasingly competitive environment.

There is an urban myth that the US President visited NASA and met an office cleaner and asked him what he did. He answered, "I fly rockets to the Moon."

Now that's what I call inspirational.

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Tom is a published author and poet and he mentors other authors how to use inspiration to write by getting the conscious mind out of the way.

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