

THE UNAPPRECIATED "AHA": WHY THEY DON'T LISTEN TO YOUR CREATIVE IDEAS

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Don't you just hate it when you get a great idea and nobody listens?

You are excited and energized by the idea, but the other person just doesn't respond. After enough experiences like this, we come to see ourselves and all creative people as living in an uncreative, unappreciative world.

Maybe it is as creative to see the possibilities in a new idea as it is to come up with the new idea. Maybe there is a special form of creativity we can call "appreciative" creativity. Unless we are blessed with bosses, colleagues, spouses, and children with a high degree of this creativity, we had better learn how to help them get "appreciative AHA's".

THE KEY: INSIGHT NOT IDEAS

One way to look at creativity is to try to picture that "AHA!" experience, that tremendous feeling we get when a new idea emerges in our minds. In a very real way, each AHA moves us into another reality, another way of seeing the world.

You may be familiar with this picture which we use to explain creativity as a shift of perspective. The cloud above is the "real"

problem, the complex interaction of wants, wishes, and reality which is only approximated by our viewpoints and problem statements (represented by the flashlights).

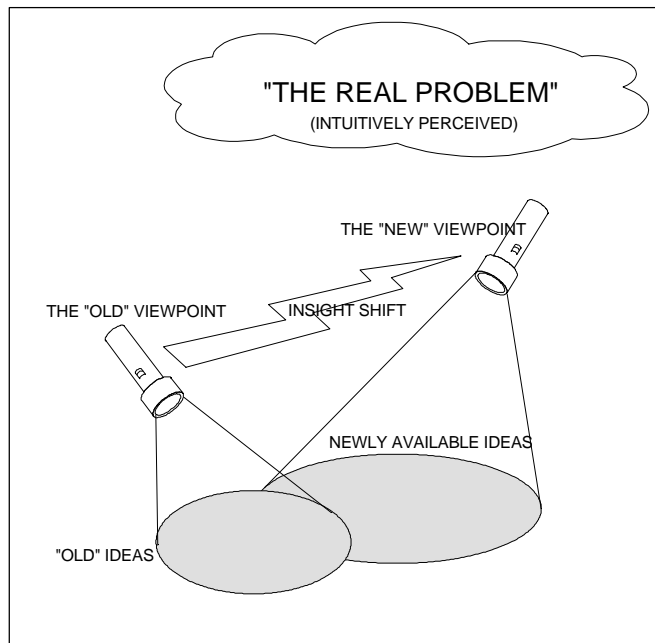
Our old perspective illuminates one set of ideas. The lightning bolt of insight leads us to a second perspective which we instinctively know is closer to the real problem. Some of the alternatives made obvious by the new viewpoint are better than the best of the old ideas.

Of course, to a person with the old viewpoint, these ideas make no sense.

The "AHA!" we feel when the shift happens is a very real experience. Its strength seems to depend both on how much we care about the problem and on how much better the insight seems. If we care a great deal about a problem (or the person with the problem) and/or if the insight seems especially profound, we feel a tremendous surge of excitement, joy, and satisfaction. If the idea is one we can implement alone, we can use that energy to take action and solve our problem. But if others are involved in its implementation, their appreciative creativity is just as important.

In the classic creative idea of "Don't raise the bridge, lower the water", the creativity involves recognizing that lowering the water could be an effective approach. Once you have this insight, any number of ideas are obvious, which before the shift made no sense. If I ask you to design a bridge, and you begin describing the building of a dam to lower the water level, I have to wonder about you.

Although most people think of creativity as ideas, since the new and better ideas are made obvious by the shift in perspective, we can argue that the "AHA!" shift in perspective, the insight, was the critical event. Since the full creative event involves both the generative shift of the "inventor" and the appreciative shift of the decision maker, those decision



makers are your co-creators. After all, their shift of thinking is just as difficult and just as important as the one getting the idea.

SELLING IDEAS

Lets look at how seeing creativity as insight fits our experience with ideas. For example, an *ad hoc* cross-functional team works hard on developing some improvements in a product or process and professionally presents them to the key decision makers. When several of their favorite ideas are rejected they are angered at this "resistance to change".

But lets look at this in a different way. The decision makers sent the team off with a certain perspective on the problem, as represented by the first flashlight. By gathering information, sharing expertise, and intensively analyzing the situation, the team has shifted their perspective on the problem, revealing some of their best ideas.

It took them weeks of work and hours of deliberation, probably under the leadership of a skilled creativity facilitator to shift their thinking. Isn't it a little unfair to expect decision makers to make the same shift in an instant? Shouldn't we expect that they need a similar amount of information, time, and facilitation to get the insight? It certainly seems that we must build this insight shift for the key decision makers into our creative process.

THE CO-CREATIVE TEAM

A co-creative team process may be the most effective way to handle the "acceptance problem". Those at the meeting participate in the shifted perspective, which makes the proposed ideas obvious and implementation immediate.

When we cannot get our "co-creators" into our creative sessions, we must work on getting them to make the shift in perspective before we explain our ideas. Otherwise our "obvious" ideas seem awfully silly. Whenever we present ideas, these people are best thought of as team members who missed the meetings. We need to realize that they need at least as much help as the team did to make the creative shift to the new perspective. Of course, we also need to recognize that they may know something about the problem which we did not include in our

solution. Only when we respect these others do we deserve and get the action we hope for.

PRACTICING "APPRECIATIVE AHA'S"

Trying to open ourselves to the insights hidden in other people's ideas might be a good way to understand the dynamics of "appreciative AHA's". When someone gives us an idea which doesn't make any sense, talk to them as co-creators to understand their insight shift. Doing this with children is a real experience, preparing you to move on to your subordinates and colleagues at work. When they make proposals which clash with your reality, talk with them to discover the AHA they had. You may actually find yourself agreeing with them, or you may be triggered to a new AHA which integrates their new viewpoint with your knowledge and perspective.

Doing this for a while may set a new standard for communication in your organization. It will certainly teach you a lot about how others think, and that knowledge will help you prepare them to get appreciative insights for your ideas.

SUMMARY

Creativity is a shift to a more advantageous perspective, one which makes better ideas obvious, and creative action can only happen when all those involved can make the shift. By understanding the difficulties others have in understanding our new and better perspective we can help them get similar insights. By treating them as co-creators, we contribute to better ideas which get put to use. Isn't this what we are really after?

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