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7 Ways To Be Unreasonable

By Paul Lemberg

First decide what you really want to do. What would make work worth working at and life worth living. Then figure out how to do it.

Most people look to what they know they CAN do as a guide to what they WILL do; I think to get anything important done in the world, you have to look towards what you WANT to do, and then figure out how to do it.

When most people think about what they are committed to, they consider where they can build a bridge to from where they already are. What would happen if you chose where you wanted to go without considering your current circumstances and then worried about how to build that bridge?

There is nothing wrong with being reasonable, except that "what is reasonable" is a poor guide to action when designing actions to push the future. Being reasonable will help you feel safe in the sense of knowing that your actions will turn out pretty much the way you expect them to. But it is dangerous in that same sense of producing predictable results; what is predictable has, by definition, been done before. And what has been done before is unlikely to make much of a difference in the future.

Paul Lemberg

Seven ways to be unreasonable.

"The reasonable man adapts himself to the world; the unreasonable one persists in trying to adopt the world to himself. Therefore, all progress depends on the unreasonable man." – George Bernard Shaw

"Insanity is doing the same thing over and over expecting different results." – Rita Mae Brown

"So what else is new?" – Paul Lemberg

Being reasonable

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My dictionary defines being reasonable as being rational. Rational, it says, means being reasonable. A vicious circle: I know I'm in trouble already. Going further, reasonable also means being governed by reason; which in turn means explanations, justifications, underlying facts, good judgment, normalcy, plus the capacity for logic and analytic thought. Further, being reasonable means being within the bounds of common sense, as in arriving home at a reasonable hour, and lastly it means not excessive or extreme.

I'm all for logic and analytic thought, but does following the dictum "be reasonable" sound like a good way to build a breakthrough business?

The very idea of "being reasonable," prescribes something restrictive. It exhorts us to remain "within the box," to do what sensible people would do: not to over commit ourselves, to be cautious, to avoid risks, to hold our trump cards.

What is the alternative?

To be unreasonable, of course. Being unreasonable, like it's more cautious cousin, suggests multiple meanings. Here are seven applications of being unreasonable.

1. Think beyond what is normal, proper, and appropriate.

Typically, one of the first things prospective clients say to me is, "But you're not from our industry. How can you understand our problems, much less provide solutions?" My response is always the same: "That's the last thing you need. You already have plenty of people thinking similarly and use over-used ideas." What you need is thinking un-bounded by the traditional logic of your industry; ideas that can bring an un-reasoning perspective.

2. Eliminate the reasons why.

There are reasons why we have to do things a certain way. There are reasons why certain approaches to business are going to work and others will not. There are reasons why things should be the way they are and not some other way. Challenge the reasons why and ask people to set them aside. Ask, "Well, what if we did. What would happen then? Would that work? What would work better? What would really rock you?"

3. No more excuses.

When someone in your company doesn't produce the desired results—results to which they have committed, perhaps promised themselves and their departments—they usually have a reason why not. Looking at it this way, you always have one or the other: desired results or reasons why you don't. People act as if those reasons are almost as good as the results. How do I know this? Because they always say something like, "Well, it didn't work, but here's why not," or "We didn't get 'it' done, because..." Or, worse still, " We didn't even try because..."

Remove people's option to resort to reasons why not. Take away their option to resort to excuses. I

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think the entire working world would shift if there was no recourse to the "excuse" option—if all you could do was produce the desired result, or try another way to get the desired result, or try another way, and so on.

4. Set unreasonable expectations.

Ask people to go beyond what they think is reasonable or normal, Ask them to go beyond cautious commitments that hedge their bets, to make risky pronouncements that exhilarate them but might threaten the natural order of things.

Place big giant stakes in the ground—then figure out how to deliver. Figure out how to turn those unreasonable expectations into reality. Taking this approach will dramatically increase effectiveness and productivity—and ultimately cash flow, if it works nicely—in any business. Why should you settle—why should your customers settle—for what is reasonable and predictable? Why accept the norm, the average, the median? Apply unreasonable thinking. Set unreasonable expectations.

5. Make unreasonable requests.

This approach will aid every executive when working with vendors, contractors and employees. Remember "Just say no?" Try "Just ask for more." Keep asking for more, better, sooner. Up the ante. Ask people to perform beyond their best.

This is not a negotiating tactic. It is not "nibbling." It is asking people to perform beyond their own sense of what is reasonable. Sometimes people will fail to meet these unreasonable commitments—don't beat them up for it. Sometimes you will get stellar results you wouldn't have dreamed of previously.

6. Make unreasonable plans.

Does this sound like an oxymoron? Most companies plan to achieve reasonable results relative to past successes and failures, or even worse, relative to questionable industry lore. Instead of setting these kind of goals, begin with a more profound question: what would make a really big difference? What would cause a breakthrough for the company? What would dramatically increase shareholder value or profits? What would be "worth doing?" The answers may not be reasonable; they may instead take you down a path towards huge success.

7. Forecast unreasonable futures.

Most businesses forecast their results—revenues, growth rates and so on, based on prior year's results. They call this reasonable, and similarly they assume industry norms and consider them reasonable. But in the twenty-first century, driven by the incredible rate of change in all aspects of our: culture, industry, customer's businesses, our workforce, available technology—to think that anything dating from last year remains the same in this one—this isn't just not reasonable, it might be totally ridiculous.

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Take into account all the factors—bring everything you know about the situation up-to-date, add to it all the future changes you predict—and use that to forecast unreasonable results and make unreasonable plans.

So what to do?

Should you give up all pretense of rationality and logic? Should you step outside the norms and ignore the accumulated wisdom of your industry? "That would be great if it works out," you say, "but if it doesn't, my job is on the line." Right? Well, yes, but...

Unreasonable thinking does not mean un-thinking. Unreasonable thinking is about exploring. Pushing the envelope. Cross pollinating. Intuitive inventing. It may be that the line separating unreasonable ideas from ridiculous ideas lies where thinking is left behind. Or perhaps the line lies only in hindsight.

I think the fear of failing, the fear of jeopardizing your future, is the biggest obstacle to creating great results. Yet the only way to create big giant breakthrough results is to take the road less traveled—to create ideas and programs that are unreasonable—and going for it. If you fail people will—with perfect hindsight—call your idea ridiculous. But if you succeed... wow!

Visit

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Learning from Your Employees' and Customers' Complaints

By Etienne A. Gibbs, MSW, Management Consultant and Trainer

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Listening to complaints, whether they're reasonable or not, is a part of every manager's job. Sometimes complaints can be overwhelming. However, when we take them in stride with an open mind, we can learn much from our employees' and customers' feelings about the workplace.

After all, a complaint is nothing more than a person telling you that his (or her) needs haven't been met. As dissatisfied customers, they are giving us a second chance to correct something that should have been done properly the first time around. (In this case the customer happens to be your employee.)

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If you listen to them patiently and attentively, their complaints will alert you to a real or potential problem, or tell you of a better way to handle a situation.

We are not use, however, to coping with complaints. We let our emotions rule our thinking usually. Consequently, we let complaints wear us out because we take on the complaint as a personal attack on us. It is not!

The next time you are faced with an irate employee, here are some steps to consider:

- Try doing something new and different.
- Listen attentively, patiently, and with good nature.
- Even if the complaint seems unreasonable, don't tell him so. Keep it to yourself.
- Because nobody wants to be accused of being unreasonable, especially if it's true, admit that he might be right. (The implication is that you may be wrong.)
- Invite him to offer you in his own words a solution to his complaint. Say, for example, "If you were in my shoes, what would you do to correct the situation?" (Be careful not to call his complaint or situation a problem, because doing so might aggravate him to the point that he loses his ability to think and express himself clearly.)
- Listen carefully and actively. Read his body language.
- Use feedback questions or statements to let him know that you're trying to understand and meet his needs. (Begin responses with statements like, "If I understand you correctly, ...")

When you take the time to listen to your complaining customers or employee, you'll hear what he's telling you. Then you'll be in a better position to turn him into a satisfied and loyal customer.

Remember: When you maximize your potential and that of the complaining customer, everyone wins. When you don't, we all lose.

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Etienne A. Gibbs, MSW, Management Consultant offer a free health survey at <http://eagibbs.usana.com>; and Identity Theft protection at www.prepaidlegal.com/hub/gibbs54. Reach him at eagibbs@ureach.com or at 502-386-1175.

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