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Eight Ideas for Coming Up with New Ideas. Imitating Einstein, Churchill and Other Great Thinkers.

By Walter Burek

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The one thing that matters most in marketing communications for the Internet is coming up with new ideas. Yet so few of us are prolific at it. Oh sure, there are the lucky ones who were born with right-hemisphere brains and spew creativity like sheets off a printing press. But the rest of us, the 8 out of 10 who are left-brain dominant (fewer than 20% of all people, throughout history, have been right-brain dominant), don't have to be completely without luck. We just have to learn to mimic some of the thought patterns and techniques of those born to be inventive thinkers. Here's how...

1. SIMPLIFY.

Boil the problem down to its bone. Toss out all the details that aren't germane. Tseng Tsao, a 12th century philosopher said, "The nice thing about simplicity is its useful wisdom. It's wisdom you can get at." And Albert Einstein who was at least as smart as any Chinese philosopher said, "Everything should be as simple as possible but not simpler.

2. ESCHEW PERFECTION.

Winston Churchill said that "perfection is paralysis." Looking for perfection and executional detail while you're still looking for an idea is like counting the chickens before the eggs have hatched. Incidentally, Churchill could have become the greatest of all British copywriters. He had a portfolio full of great lines like "I have nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears and sweat " and "The action of Russia is a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma."

3. STAY OUT OF JAIL.

Edward DeBono, the Cambridge educator and thinker, talks about the "concept prison." That's where you get locked up when you believe you have to do things the way they always been done. Try attacking the problem obliquely. Allow yourself to color outside the lines. Try to think more playfully, less seriously. Be more serendipitous.

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4. THINK RIGHT ABOUT "THE RIGHT ANSWER."

No two ways about it, there's always more than one way to solve a problem. And as DeBono will tell you, "The purpose of thinking is not to be right but to be effective. Being right means being right all the time. Being effective means being right only at the end."

5. FURNISH THE UPSTAIRS ROOM.

The legendary ad man, James Webb Young, believed that in advertising, "an idea results from a new combination of specific knowledge about products, and people with general knowledge about life and events." That requires more than reading business memos, trade journals and The New York Times. It means doing things like getting out to the movies and theater often. Visiting museums. Reading books on odd subjects just for the fun of it. Re-reading classic novels. Listening to music, from classical to country to hip-hop. Do all of it or as much as you can. David Ogilvy encouraged his employees to be "relentlessly curious" about all knowledge that crossed their paths, so that they might "possess a

well-furnished mind."

6. COLLECT WORDS.

Words are ideas, too. The semanticist, S.I. Hayakawa, in his Language in Thought and Action referred to words as being symbols of ideas and, thus, "we can collect ideas by collecting words." James Webb Young, writing on this subject said, "The fellow who said he tried reading the dictionary, but couldn't get the hang of the story, simply missed the point: namely, that it is a collection of short stories."

7. SAY NO TO "YES, BUT..."

Coming up with a new idea is almost always only half the battle. Because just as sure as you are that your idea is different and unexpected, you can count on somebody being there to offer the comfort and safety of "yes, but-land." Don't go there. Resist. Build a strategy and fight. And keep fighting. Remember the words of wise, old Anonymous: "Every great oak was once a nut that stood its ground."

8. HAVE FUN.

Even though, at one time or another, you have probably blamed it for everything from your bad habits and insomnia to your kid's need for braces, you still have to admit that marketing communications is the toy department of the business world. Enjoy.

Walter is an award-winning advertising copywriter who writes, edits and publishes "Words @ Work", a FREE bimonthly newsletter of advice and information about writing that works. Subscribe by visiting www.walterburek.com or via e-mail to: walter@walterburek.com

Would Socrates Be A Celebrity Today?

By Maya Talisman Frost

Last week, as I was standing in the checkout line of my local grocery store, I found myself staring at the dozen or so magazines on display. As I gazed upon the various photos and headlines praising or trashing the celebrity du jour, I got to thinking.

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What kind of celebrity would Socrates be if he were alive today? How would we treat him?

In what way would he ask his questions in the 21st century? He never wrote much of anything—we know his ideas mostly through the work of his student, Plato. Would he give speeches? Would he have televised debates? Would he have his own talk show?

If so, who would be his guests?

Socrates was famous in his day. He was loved and admired for his ideas and his relentless questioning, and he was despised for the same things. Like all celebrities, he had his fans and he had his detractors.

Socrates himself said, "I am utterly disturbing and I create only perplexity." He understood his role as a provocateur, but he also had the best of intentions. He simply wanted to give people the opportunity to question themselves in order to become better humans.

Well, there are a lot of celebrities who push our buttons, but we don't tend to think of them as philosophers!

What if we did? What if we could separate the thoughts from the thinkers? We tend to dismiss the whole package—the persona—instead of taking a good look at revolutionary or inflammatory ideas. We marginalize our radical thinkers.

The rapper Eminem is a radical thinker, though many would say he is just plain radical. In his way, he is true to himself. He has broken through to mainstream consciousness because he touched a nerve—and got a lot of press.

Would Socrates be a rapper today? Would he be a professor? A performance artist? How would we regard him?

He was notoriously unattractive. Would photographers surround him, taking photos to sell to the tabloids? Would we care about him if he didn't make it on the cover of our favorite magazines?

At first glance, it may seem that we are sorely lacking in philosophers today. Perhaps we have an outdated idea of what a philosopher looks like. Not all philosophers have beards!

Do you think of Eminem as a philosopher?

Do you think of Julia Butterfly Hill, the environmental activist who lived at the top of a massive tree for two years, as a philosopher?

Do you think of Rush Limbaugh as a philosopher?

Well, they do think. They do question. They provoke discussion and argument, and they are passionate about their ideas. That makes them a lot like Socrates.

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Who inspires you today? Which thinkers make you think?

What is it about them that appeals to you? Is it their ideas or the way they are presented?

We've become quite savvy about packaging. We expect professional presentation. We discount the ideas of those who don't look the part of a thinker. Of course, there are exceptions. Albert Einstein could pull off that wild-haired look. Bill Gates isn't known for his sartorial splendor. Some might argue that Stephen Hawking is actually more compelling and impressive because of his physical challenges.

Whether we admit it or not, we each have our own biases about the appearance, age, sex, nationality, or religion of the thinkers of today. What are yours?

I'm afraid Socrates would need a good public relations team in order to be heard amidst the cacophony of thought-mongers today. The prescribed process for publicizing your ideas now goes something like this: write a book, get a publisher, do tons of interviews and book signings and readings, and cash in. It helps immensely if you appeal to the mainstream culture, or if your book manages to stir up a bit of controversy. Creating buzz is what gets thinkers noticed today.

Socrates was good at creating buzz, but he would face a lot of competition in the 21st century thinkers market. I like to think that he would find a way to be who he was and that we would appreciate his gifts.

Think about what you read, what you listen to, and what you consider worthy of your attention. As you do so, remember Socrates.

There are loads of passionate thinkers in our world today. Look for the ones who aren't shouting from the rooftops, and consider those who turn you off completely. Expand your view of what a philosopher is. In the process, you'll become a better one yourself.

Maya Talisman Frost is a mind masseuse. Her course, *Massage Your Mind!: Defining Your Life Philosophy*, has inspired thinkers in over 70 countries around the world. She is the publisher of the *Friday Mind Massage*, a free weekly ezine serving up a satisfying blend of clarity, comfort and comic relief. To learn more, visit

or

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