

The eBay PEZ dispenser story is not true

Life poses an interesting enigma: Although we can make the atomic bomb, we still don't know the answer to simple things, like where do songs come from? Where do ideas come from? The epiphany, or eureka moment, is not what you think - it is not an isolated moment of 'aha'; it is preceded by years of what could loosely be called work. [1]

 By Sid Peimer 22 Jan 2014

An apple on the day

The story goes that Newton was sitting under a tree. An apple fell on his head - and so the idea of gravity was born. That's a myth. The 'epiphany' came after 20 years of work to explain gravity. Even if the apple story is true, he studied so many other things, that the apple would just have been 'the last straw' - and not an isolated incident. [1]

Tim Berners Lee, the man who invented the web, shares his thoughts:

"Journalists have always asked me ... what the singular even was that allowed the web to exist ... They are frustrated when I tell them there was no eureka moment... it was a process of accretion (growth by gradual addition)."

Dispense with the eBay myth

And then there's the myth of eBay. We all 'know' that the founder created the company so that his fiancée could trade PEZ dispensers. It's untrue - eBay came about by trying to create a perfect market economy. No one was interested in that story so eBay was largely ignored in its formative years. The media were less than impressed. However, when the PEZ story emerged (from somewhere), the media lapped that up - it was so much more interesting than trying to create a perfect economy. The PEZ element did play a part - it made the founder Pierre Omidyar aware that people are passionate about collecting things - just one milestone to the 'epiphany' of creating eBay. [1], [2]

There's a fine line between crazy and creative

Innovation is defined by the Merriam-Webster dictionary (I don't have the Oxford one - it's not online) as the act or process of introducing new ideas, devices or methods. Essentially innovation is about 'newness'.

Creativity, on the other hand, is defined as 'the ability to *create*'. That's not much help. But if we look at the definition of *create*, it does allow us to delineate innovation from creativity. 'Create' is defined as: *to produce something new by using your talents and imagination*.

So creativity is conception and innovation is newness. The conclusion to be drawn from that is that you first have to conceive something before you can innovate; you have to be creative to be innovative. But I don't believe that to be necessarily true. I've met some brilliant businesspeople who don't have a creative bone in their body, yet have produced remarkable innovations.

The talent for taking two unrelated objects and finding a connection between the two is called associative ability. Dean Simington, the professor of psychology at UCLA states (something like this): "Persons with low associative barriers may think to connect ideas or concepts that have very little basis with reality or that can easily be traced logically." Scott Berkun, the author of *The Myths of Innovation* encourages us to read that sentence twice, because it clearly explains the fine line between lunacy and creativity. [1]

The last piece of the puzzle

Berkun uses a lovely analogy to explain the epiphany: it is the last piece of the jigsaw puzzle, not the entire picture.

That's also why we categorise creative people as heavy, medium, and lightweight. It's based on the amount of jigsaw puzzle they've completed, because the more jigsaws you do the better you get - no matter what the picture is.

To find out how you can enhance innovation in your company, irrespective of your creative ability, imagine what it would be like to be part of the Innovation Generation - visit www.stratplanning.com or call Sid Peimer on +27 (0) 082 659 9167.

References:

1. Scott Berkun. The Myths of Innovation. O'Reilly Media, 2010.
2. [Interview with Pierre Omidyar](#).

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