

# The basis for effective strategy can't be fun. Can it?

I was watching my nephew play soccer, when two young ladies - primary schoolers, no more than 10 years old - strolled past in exasperated discussion: "Why don't they just spell it b-u-t-i-f-u-l?!"

 By Sid Peimer <sup>27 Sep 2005</sup>

It was a fundamental understanding of the rules of language that enabled the young lady to voice her frustration at academia's obvious inability to make a more rational choice. She had, I inferred from her tone, been sorely let down by society, a society that had no respect for her busy schedule, forcing her to include 'eau' when a simple 'u' would do. Do we have neau idea of fun?

Strategy seems to depend on a linear, time-dependant approach, where the skills and knowledge required for the job seem to be laboriously hoisted from the well of 'extensive research' (sic). Whether the strategist is having fun or not, seldom enters the equation. However, I would posit that enjoyment and efficacy share strong correlation in the field of strategic planning.

Some may proclaim my inclusion of fun as somewhat 'peripheral', however my personal experience has been otherwise - the strategy we enjoy putting together seems to find an audience that enjoys its consumption.

Without any prompting, the first thing we do as a group when commencing to play a game is to determine that everyone knows the rules. Interestingly it is a focus on the constraints imposed that precedes the process of enjoyment.

In the same way, we need to know the parameters of the environment in which our strategy needs to 'perform'.

Although you may have been employed for overcoming constraints to the point of breaking the rules, I have yet to experience an enjoyable game with someone who makes up their own rules as they go.

Here are 10 tips for ensuring the process is fun:

1. Know nothing. See everything as a voyage of discovery. Research shows that clients do not choose suppliers who 'know more', but have greater understanding of their personal needs.
2. Play with others. If you are part of a team, share your info as you develop your argument. Don't consider feedback as a challenge, but as signposts especially for you.
3. Get to know the rules intimately. This entails getting to know the constraints in the value chain: the flow of goods/services, the motives of each player in the chain and the perceived proposition of the target market.
4. Make a mess. Just dump info as you go.
5. Clean up the mess (you'll feel as good as you did after you cleaned your room).
6. Arrange the mess into a story with a beginning, middle and end. Imagine your audience sitting around a campfire listening to what you have to say.
7. Rehearse your story. You can't enjoy telling a story when you know as little of what's coming up as the audience. We all lead pressured lives, and I know you have the street-smarts to talk a slide without preparation - but it's just not as much fun.
8. Use toys - they're fun. Remote presenters are great - they also empower you to focus on the story as opposed to the laptop.

9. There are no universal strategic tools. If the story is better told outside the parameters of your 'proprietary model', no one ever got punished for enhancing clarity and enjoyment. Also, the audience does not see much fun in being shoehorned into a one-size-fits-all model - we like to be treated as individuals.

10. Don't introduce 'false fun'. Showing a funny TV ad in the middle of your presentation is like giving me an ice cream, but only after I've been to the dentist. The strategy itself should be fun.

## ABOUT SID PEIMER

Sid Peimer's mission is to put the fun back into the fundamentals. He writes from Cape Town, South Africa, occasionally venturing out to play strategy with a number of blue-chip clients who like seafood with his wine. Sid can be found loitering at [www.stratplanning.com](http://www.stratplanning.com)  
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