

Openings: Having an idea, especially a significant idea, is often illustrated through the metaphor of a light bulb turning on. This metaphor is very appropriate as we can all relate to the experience of light bringing clarity of vision into the dark. Following this imagery further, whose finger operates the light switch?

Spotlight: One certainty of today's business environment is that it is dynamic. In the span of only a few decades, we have come from expecting more of the same each day to expecting something new each day. Our expectations today leave us with a sense of the need to be constantly innovating. Once continuing to do what we did well yesterday was enough to ensure success and now we must think about what we can do well tomorrow. While creating an exciting workplace, this situation also can create anxiety. Can you think of what is the next thing that you will be doing? What if the business is not particularly good at providing this product? Even if you determine what next to do, can you do so again, and again, for the rest of your career?

As a member of an enterprise, there is a responsibility to participate in evolving the enterprise and all stakeholders share this responsibility. Unfortunately, that it is a shared responsibility is often not acknowledged which results in the loss of much human potential. In every organisation, there is a division of responsibility. In the best situation, the load is distributed according to individuals' capacity. Through experience and mastery, a person builds his value to the enterprise and therefore takes on greater responsibilities. Still, from the most junior position and newest recruit, the burden of responsibility must sit squarely on each person's shoulders. At no point should anyone feel that there is a "them" or "boss" directing his or her day. We are autonomous individuals and even when we choose to work together, we are fully responsible for our workday.

There are many outdated models of organisational behaviour in use today. Their genesis was in the command-and-control theories borrowed from the military and formalised by 20th century business schools. In all cases, these models rely on a leader who knows what is best for those under his charge. While it certainly is not acceptable in our public life, the idea of a business leader as benevolent dictator is applauded. The greatest harm that viewing leadership in this way does is to diminish the participator responsibility of employees. There is no one we are waiting for to give us direction; the enterprise needs everyone to be self-directed.

Quote: French clergyman and author Ernest Dimnet said it simply and succinctly:

"Ideas are the root of creation."

Musings: The oldest residents in my neighbourhood are the Garry Oak trees. Some are more than five hundred years old and I have come to know that until they begin to bud, spring is not officially here. When they do bud, they are quite unusual. No flash of bright green, just a drab olive that ever so slowly unfolds. Unlike the transplants such as the Japanese plum tree, the Garry Oaks are in absolutely no rush to bloom.

Garry Oak group together in meadows and these meadows are mostly in areas with little soil or surface water. When an acorn falls and is buried, it first sends a taproot deep into the ground before breaking through the surface with a green shoot. By the time the first leaves are noticeable on a juvenile tree, the roots can be several meters in length and firmly anchored into crevasse in the rock. With a lifetime measured in centuries, taking the time to establish a strong footing is a good investment. Even once established, they grow at such a slow rate that their grain is one of the tightest woods.

The longevity, patience, and tenacity of these trees, my neighbours, are inspiring. They are beautiful, gnarly testaments to the value of conscientious hard work. I have no idea of the reach or staying power of my work and just in case it is close to that of the Garry Oak, I want to infuse my work with the qualities so well modelled by these trees.

Tools & Techniques: One of the great challenges regarding creativity is that it demands an artist's freedom, a scientist's rigour, and a theologian's faith. Short of a renaissance education, there are tools that can assist in unlocking these potentials within you. Mind maps are such a tool and one of the more interesting implementations of mind maps is TheBrain (www.thebrain.com). Not only does it organise information in a unique manner, it also provides ways to "wander" through your thoughts, "forget" thoughts, and retrieve "forgotten" thoughts.

Links: Visit MIT professor Eric von Hippel's website, <http://web.mit.edu/evhippel/www/>, for some resources on innovation. You will find papers, books, and even videos that shed some light on the innovation process.