Think Like a Lazy Person

Most of us have had to go to a workshop, team-building exercise, brainstorming session, offsite retreat, etc... at some point in our careers. Usually they'd result in a list of goals the managers hoped you'd bring back to your job and carry out. In other words, there was a lot of wishful thinking going on. Sometimes the workshops even produced the opposite of what managers were hoping for, like the time an IT dept I worked for was forced to go to a company-wide workshop based on the book 'Who Moved My Cheese'. I'm sure the goal was to get people to embrace change instead of being afraid of it but the managers didn't really understand IT people. We tend to like change so all it did was make us take a look at our jobs and decide we could find better ones. In less than 3 months everyone except the manager had found a new job and quit.

This article will describe a different kind of workshop, the kind you've probably never been to because its goal is to teach you to think like a lazy person. Not 'lazy' in the sense of 'how can I get away with not doing my job', but in the sense of 'how can I do my job faster so I'll have more free time to talk on the phone, check out Facebook' - things like that, In other words, how can I be more productive for both my benefit and the companies.

Here's a bold prediction. By the time you finish reading this article I guarantee you'll have read something you've never read before, or heard of for that matter. And it all begins with a simple question that would be asked at the beginning of a workshop - "Wouldn't it be easier if....."

Believe it or not it's not easy to get into the habit of thinking like a lazy person. It takes a stream of consciousness where two totally unrelated ideas can be put together to come up with something new. In other words, it takes divergent thinking. Here's a short description of what that means - "Creativity makes use of **divergent thinking**, which is solving problems with many possible solutions, as opposed to **convergent thinking**, which is solving problems with a single, correct answer."

The goal for the participants is to increase their ability to do divergent thinking with an emphasis on making their lives easier at their jobs, while the goals for the managers is to identify the people who are excellent at that kind of thinking so they can pull them in when other problems need solving.

As with all good workshops, it takes some priming of the pump to get the process going. In this case I'll throw out several ideas where divergent thinking is used in a non-work setting, and then flow from there into a work-setting. Each idea will begin with the phrase "Wouldn't it be easier if" followed by an idea. Here goes.

Wouldn't it be easier if the battery on cordless drills was separated from the drill itself so it could be hung from you belt to carry most of the weight on your waist? That way you wouldn't get tired of drilling as fast because you'd only have to lift the drill itself and the cord connecting it to the battery.

Wouldn't it be easier if they made a mid-priced lawnmower that you could kick-start instead of having to pull the cord on cheaper ones or deal with electric ignition systems that are prone to failure on more expensive ones?

Wouldn't it be easier to protect your house from a wildfire by having a decorative tube running along the top of the roof that contained fire-retardant chemicals installed ahead of time? That way you wouldn't have to hope you could keep watering your house until the fire no longer threatened it or a plane flew overhead to dump the same chemical all over your neighborhood.

Wouldn't it be easier for amateur fishermen to have a crossbow fishing pole that could cast their line out as far as expert fishermen can cast theirs? In addition to getting the line out there easier it would also keep them from accidentally hooking bystanders when they're trying to cast their lines.

Wouldn't it be easier to clean out a plugged-up toilet with a combination salad shooter and plunger? It would just drill its way through the clog.

Wouldn't it be easier to calm crying babies by putting them into a crib that vibrated like a car driving down the street while a deep, James Earl Jones voice, quietly talked to them? (It would be the Darth Vader Baby Crib.)

Wouldn't it be easier to build a carbon monoxide detector right into an air conditioner so if it detected the gas it could automatically start pumping fresh air into the house while the alarm was sounding?

Wouldn't it be easier to have an odor sensor built into a microwave so it would automatically shut off when it smelled it and keep the office from smelling like burnt popcorn the rest of the day?

Wouldn't it be easier to pull up a 'Saved Seat' flag at the movie theater when you want to save a seat for a friend instead of being asked several times if that seat was taken?

Wouldn't it be easier to have an app on your phone that could use its camera to identify edible plants so you wouldn't have to take a chance on eating poison ones if you got lost in the back-country during a hike?

Wouldn't it be easier to prevent cars from being hit by trains by adding a set of metal prongs that come up when the gates go down at railroad crossings? They use them at car dealerships with good results.

Wouldn't it be easier to evacuate cities in the path of a storm if you had bus booties on hand that would fit under buses and let them use the train tracks to get out of town?

Wouldn't it be easier to wait for rescuers while wearing a life-jacket that was designed for both comfort and success? A hood rolled into the collar like regular jackets would let you pull it up over your head to keep the sun/rain off of you. A segment attached to the back could automatically inflate into the shape of a lounge chair so you could kick back and relax while you weree waiting for the rescue (air mattresses don't take up much space when they're empty). Telescopic plastic poles on each side of the

life-jacket holding a big square piece of plastic between them could help you feel like you were getting somewhere when the wind was blowing. A small bottle of bright yellow dye could be used to spread around and give searchers something bigger than a little orange dot of a life-jacket to spot. And most importantly of all, several packs of the minerals they use up north in hand warmers that heat up when you crush them could be in the jacket itself to keep hypothermia from setting in before rescuers could arrive.

I could go on and on but the ideas above should be enough to prime the pump and get people thinking about the kind of 'Wouldn't it be easier' things they could do at work. Here are a couple of examples from the real world.

One plant at a company I worked for was complaining about how long it took them to do a physical inventory each month so I went down to watch how they were doing it. The plant made hangers and the paper capes used on them were one of the things that had to be counted (if you've ever had your laundry done by a cleaner you'll have seen what I'm talking about). In order to count them someone had cut a piece of PVC pipe exactly 12" long and walked it up the side of the pallets all of the paper capes were stacked on. Every 12" equaled 'x' number of capes. My suggestion to speed up the process was this – if they didn't have a tape measure they could use to do the same thing with then they could take a much longer piece of PVC pipe, mark it off in 12" segments, and then just hold it up against each pallet to get the count for the pallet.

At another company they ran a monthly close-out process that required 53 programs to be run manually in order to finish the process. Each program had a display screen that had to be filled in. The opportunity was, almost everything that was keyed into the screens could be calculated ahead of time. We just wrote a program to do those calculations, skip the screens, and cut the process down to 3 programs.

At another company the VP of Operations had to periodically go to the worst performing plants and basically instill fear into the plant managers to get them to perform better. In order to fix that we just created display programs that all of the plant managers could see showing where their plant ranked for the most critical

benchmarks. The VP didn't have to go on any monthly criticizing tours after that because the plant managers started managing themselves. No one wanted to be at the bottom of any metric two months in a row, especially when all of his peers could see it, and those who ranked at the top of a metric tried as hard as they could to make sure they kept that position.

Hopefully the stream-of-consciousness ideas presented in the first half of the workshop will get the people attending it to start thinking in a lazier way and figure out ways like those in the second set of examples to make their lives easier and their companies more productive.

By the way, if I failed to live up to my guarantee at the beginning that you'd read something here that you've never read before please let me know. I've got another couple of hundred examples I can use to get you into a lazier frame of mind :) You can reach me at info@all400s.com.