

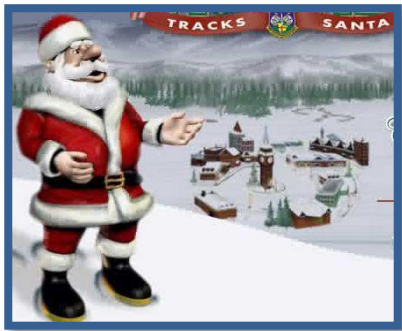
YES! AND... CREATIVE GORILLA # 12

If you are looking for a way to challenge conventional thinking, try this technique...

The What If? Technique ...

"Not even the fastest, most modern jet can come close to matching Santa's speed."

Petty Officer Bev Allen, NORAD



NORAD Tracks Santa

What If Santa Were Real?

If you are looking for a way to challenge conventional thinking, might Santa give you food for thought? On Christmas Eve my children had great fun (me too!) tracking Santa's progress towards London on the web site www.noradsanta.org (NORAD is a US / Canadian military radar defence organisation. If you have young kids, do check out their Santa site next year).

As we watched videos of Santa crossing many different cities in the world the children marvelled at the speed at which he progressed and the idea for this article sprang to mind. Thanks for the unexpected present Santa (and the people at NORAD).

A technique you can use to challenge convention is to ask the "What If" question. What if we had to deliver these goods to millions of

customers in the world in one night? (Wonder where that idea came from?). What if we could reduce the lead-time for this process from sixty days to one? What if we had a policy of NO redundancies?

If you examine these questions, you should see that they are challenging accepted norms, the "rules" and the assumptions (which may be implicit) about a situation. "It takes sixty days to process this form". "If business slows down, we make people redundant".

You can use the question as a stand-alone technique to aid your creative thinking but I find a more structured process helps. That is, you write down all the rules and assumptions about a situation, (you can also do this with products) and then ask "What If" for each of the rules.

For example, three (a small number to minimise the size of the article) rules for using text messaging on a mobile telephone might be:

- You can't send a text if you have no credit left on your pre-paid card
- There's a maximum of 160 characters per message
- You use the mobile telephone key pad to write the text

Now challenge that first rule: "What if you have no credit left but you COULD send a text - how might we make that happen?" *Could we in some way enable a text message credit to be sent to the telephone? Yes! And... perhaps we could*

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enable people who send a text message to pay for the reply (like a reply paid envelope). Parents might pay for that.

SO

It's a great technique but when you use it you may find a couple of challenges:

- It can be difficult to identify some of the more implicit or hidden rules / assumptions. To warm people up prior to working on your situation, have them generate rules for a product that people use regularly and then challenge these rules e.g. Playing cards are oblong (what if they were round?)
- It may seem as if you are criticising somebody's work (e.g. the person who developed a process). Edward de Bono in his excellent book, "Serious Creativity" writes about "the creative challenge" - a way to explore possibilities, as opposed to the "critical challenge" which seeks to identify weakness. Position what you are doing as a creative challenge and you should diffuse any defensive response.

ACTION

1. To practise, create challenges for the additional rules on text messaging above
2. For work, think about something at work that is working fine and use this technique to create some new possibilities
3. Aside from de Bono, a books you might like to read which covers this topic is:

["Smart Things to Know About Innovation and Creativity"](#) by Dennis Sherwood

TO CLOSE

Whilst writing, I had an idea to help you make this technique fun for your colleagues. Have them write the rule on a piece of paper with a challenge, e.g "what if x didn't happen". Pop it inside a Christmas cracker then swop crackers round, have your colleagues pull them and start generating ideas. That should liven up your next meeting and get you all cracking (sorry) on challenging those rules!

Enjoy Christmas.

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