

# YES! AND... CREATIVE GORILLA # 138

*How to avoid common mistakes when exploiting opportunities ...*

## Exploit Opportunity Better...

*"Here is Edward Bear, coming downstairs now, bump, bump, bump, on the back of his head, behind Christopher Robin. It is, as far as he knows, the only way of coming downstairs, but sometimes he feels that there really is another way, if only he could stop bumping for a moment and think of it." A. A. Milne.*



*Wheelie Bin*

Do you have any obscure rituals you carry out in secret? I confess I perform one every week, the ceremonial "wheelie bin stomp".

This is not a dark practice overlooked in Harry Potter novels, but a practical solution to the problem that there is too much bulky waste packaging and too little dustbin. So I step on the garden wall, climb in the bin and begin stomping so we can push another week's worth in the bin. Too much waste and too little bin - when someone has a problem, it means there is an opportunity to exploit with a sound proposition.

Having admitted my secret and defined an opportunity, let's move on to the core of this article. All leaders in organisations have opportunities. They may be in areas requiring new policy, meeting a need in a new market, or dealing with waste packaging, etc. Some people exploit them well and some do not.

### SO

Here are my thoughts on how you can exploit opportunities more effectively at lower cost and with less effort.

#### USE A STRUCTURED APPROACH TO THINK IT THROUGH

This will ensure that you create a proposition that is acceptable to a wider range of people, meets less organisational resistance and requires fewer resources to implement. I take 3 days with teams. That is much less time and cost than you need to fix problems during implementation.

#### ENSURE YOU HAVE ENOUGH CHOICE OF OPPORTUNITIES

Often, organisations identify opportunities on an ad hoc basis. Like buying a winning lottery ticket, this can sometimes work, but it is much better to have a richer choice of opportunities so that you can choose those that will give most payback. To do this, you need a systematic way to find them. You also need to introduce some unpredictability in to your search. If you only ask customers about their problems, you are likely to find the same opportunities as your competitors do.

#### EXPLORE THE OPPORTUNITY THOROUGHLY

It is tempting to rush on, once you have a glimpse of the problem, especially if you have glimpsed a solution too. However, this can lead to the right solution for the wrong problem. You must understand well the challenge the problem owner has. Identify what you know, what you wish you knew, whether your assumptions are correct, etc. This will also provide you with information to help focus your opportunity.

#### HAVE A CLEAR FOCUS ON WHAT THE OPPORTUNITY IS

You must understand the level of the problem the client wants to tackle, before you exploit the opportunity. If not it can lead to the wrong solution. What is the level of problem I (the "client") have? Is it the embarrassment of stomping in public? No and I will not buy a screen to hide my stomping (one solution). So my problem is a higher level: My bin is too small? There's too much or too bulky packaging? I put bulky packaging in the bin? I buy too many products with packaging? etc. Can you sense how these will lead to broader or different solutions?

#### CREATE ENOUGH SOLUTIONS AND OPTIONS

*"Here is John Brooker in his dustbin, stomp, stomp, stomp on the soles of his feet. It is as far as he knows... (See above)"*

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Unfortunately, many people who love to take action stop at the first solution they devise and begin implementing it. Too late they find the first solution is not the best, when they have expended much resource. And remember, it says “create enough solutions”. At some point you have to stop creating solutions and move on.

## HONE YOUR PROPOSITION WELL

When you have created a number of solutions, you must evaluate and hone them, to ensure success. Again, there is the temptation to speed on and skip evaluation, leaving you open to embarrassment when a key person spots the major showstopper in your solution (the TV programme, Dragon’s Den, has shown many examples of this issue).

## SHAPE YOUR STRATEGY

It is easy to think that more resources and harder work will fix things if you run in to difficulties. Much better to understand in advance what you are trying to achieve, the Critical Success Factors and what will help you to achieve them.

## PLAN TO WIN SUPPORT

Often, a good solution fails because you have not considered well enough how you will win the support of key stakeholders. Consider the benefits and issues that your solution brings to other stakeholders. How might you increase those benefits and overcome those issues?

## INVOLVE KEY STAKEHOLDERS IN YOUR THINKING

What do you think or feel when someone asks you to support a solution you have not been involved in developing? If it is something you have strong opinions or feeling about, it is likely you will be harder to win over. Involve people in the thinking stage and implementation becomes much easier.

## DEVELOP A REALISTIC ACTION PLAN

If you do not have a separate project team to develop and implement your solution, you will be competing with the day to day work people have. Set small realistic actions that people can achieve and review progress regularly.

## ACTION

Think about an opportunity you have. Might any tips here help you to exploit it more effectively?

## TO CLOSE

Like Edward Bear, I know there must be another way to rid myself of the problem, if I just stop stomping for a moment and think of it. I wished I had a different solution the first time my neighbour walked out of his door to find me stomping in the bin. In that marvellously British way he didn’t ask me what on earth I was doing, he simply nodded, said “Morning John” and walked on.

Which made me wonder what else he has observed me doing which made stomping in a bin seem normal practice for me!

Have a stomping good week.

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