

YES! AND... CREATIVE GORILLA # 37

Check your assumptions if you want to avoid mistakes...

Check Assumptions...

"If we all worked on the assumption that what is accepted as true is really true, there would be little hope of advance." Orville Wright



"I'm assuming you know how to get out of this?"

Are you checking your assumptions sufficiently?

It's likely you make assumptions all the time, consciously or unconsciously. After all, you have to assume when you leave the house a meteorite won't hit you on the head - otherwise you wouldn't leave.

I was reminded of assumptions at lunch the other day. Chatting to a German student who grew up in Berlin, I mentioned that I had been back there a couple of times since the wall came down, but the city no longer had the frisson of excitement present when I lived there in the seventies – when people imagined that Russian tanks might rumble down the Kurfurstendamm tomorrow.

There was a momentary pause in the conversation, which puzzled me until I realised later that he had grown up in the Russian zone of Berlin. I made the wrong assumption and once again my foot had an unexpected visit to my mouth. The positive result was that it made me think about the assumptions we make all the time.

It appears to me that when tackling challenges there are two types of assumption:

- The "liberating assumption" - that which frees us to move forward, e.g. "people will read this article"

The "blocking assumption" - that which stops us moving forward e.g. "we will never get the resources for this".

SO

- When exploring situations, the creative leader should question both types of assumption to establish if they are correct. That is - check the facts.
- Checking a liberating assumption can ensure you don't end up looking foolish if your assumption proves wrong and you can't do what you assumed you could. Checking a blocking assumption can broaden the scope

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for solutions and enable action if you prove the assumption is wrong.

- (Are you putting off doing something right now because of a blocking assumption?)
- More difficult to check are the unconscious assumptions we all make. One technique I have found useful to surface these is to write out a definition of the situation and for each word in the definition, ask "Does this word imply some kind of assumption?" For example the simple question "How can we increase sales?" has some hidden assumptions (see if you can spot them – view my interpretation at the end).

ACTION

For a situation in which you feel blocked, ask yourself, "Am I making a blocking assumption I don't need to make or that might be wrong?" Use the technique I just described.

TO CLOSE

Last night my football team lost. This morning I had some unwelcome news in my e-mail which was dispiriting. I then took the children to school with that wonderful blocking assumption "something else is bound to go wrong today".

I sat enjoying some wintry sunshine when one of my son's classmates walked up to me and said shyly, "I really enjoyed Andrew's birthday party". I asked him what he enjoyed most. His face lit up in a sunny smile "making the birthday cake - what was your favourite bit?" I thought back to the party, held last weekend in a bakery. "Having a quiet cup of coffee upstairs." I laughed.

"I thought so" he said. The bell rang for school, he ran off and I left, my spirits lifted.

He has also reminded me of another technique to rid yourself of blocking assumptions. Change your state by focusing on something good. Even better, why not help someone else remove a blocking assumption?

May your week be full of liberating assumptions.

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