

YES! AND... CREATIVE GORILLA # 59

Sometimes people accept second best solutions because they don't take the trouble to explore a little more....

Find the Optimal Solution...

"The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy." Martin Luther King



"Sign at the Tate Modern"

Are you satisfied or satisfied with some of your solutions?

In the Netherlands last weekend, I ran an Open University course on creative problem solving (I hope that's triggered good memories for the many of you who are OU MBA graduates). I had a brilliant group, very friendly and ready for some fun.

Our venue was great, however, I found a problem; it was a long way to the rest room. It was en route from the hotel reception to the classroom, but a long return trip from the classroom.

If I had to take a quick "comfort break" during an exercise (those of you who facilitate will know you often get no chance for a break at break time), I would exit the classroom, turn right and make a mad dash, sometimes a very mad dash! A most inconvenient convenience.

A couple of hours before the end of the course, I sent small teams out in search of space to draft giant maps of their learning. Ten minutes later I went looking for them, turned left, walked through a set of double doors and almost fell in to a rest room, just five metres from the classroom. I burst out laughing and used it, just because I could!

OK, going to the rest room is not a complex challenge, unless you're stuck in your car in a traffic jam (I have a solution but it won't get past the editor!), but this does highlight an issue many of us may find at work.

There's a problem. We're busy and focussed on other matters, so we find the first solution that works and use it, though it is not optimal. We carry on using it, perhaps unhappily. The academically minded call this "satisficing". To quote Wikipedia: "In decision-making, satisficing explains the tendency to select the first option that meets a given need or select the option that seems to address most needs rather than the "optimal" solution."

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SO

What could I have done to find the optimal solution? In this case I turned to the course materials for some inspiration (pp 96 – 119 in “Managing Problems Creatively” from Open University Business School course B822, Creativity, Innovation and Change).

First, I could have taken the time to step back and consider if there were other options (de Bono suggests setting a target number of other options to force some creative thinking). Alternatively, I might have exaggerated the problem, e.g. “What if there was no rest room en route?”

Secondly, I could have asked someone, especially as I found the students had been using the nearby rest rooms all weekend! Both are examples of using two creative principles: first, “explore the givens” and second, “involve others”.

ACTION

If you are only satisfied with something in your work or home life, have you explored all the options or discussed it with others? If not, make it your action for this week.

TO CLOSE

One of the students on the course wanted to take a picture of me on her mobile telephone. In high spirits I proceeded to prance about in ridiculous poses asking “Shall I pose like this...or this...or this?” but too fast for her to take a photograph.

Halfway through my fourth stupid pose a thought struck me and I stopped prancing. “You’re videoing this aren’t you?” “Yes!” she said with a big smile. “It’s on You Tube next week!”

Which proves another creative principle, that we should “value play” – as long as there’s not a camera about!

May you be satisfied with all your solutions this week. Avoid video cameras too!

.John Brooker | Facilitate, Innovate, Transform.



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