



## A Penny for Your Thoughts

I have three questions for you. You have to get two out of three correct to be qualified to read the rest of the article.

1. If I have a penny and you have a penny and we swap, how many pennies does each of us have? If you answered one, you are correct and can proceed to the next question.
2. If I have an idea and you have an idea and we swap ideas, how many ideas does each of us have? If you answered two, congratulations, you have qualified to read the rest of the article regardless of how you answer question number three, which is a little tougher. (By the way, when you swapped your one idea and ended up with two, you just got a 100% return on your investment. Not bad.)
3. There are two people. Individual A has 100% good ideas. They never miss. Individual B only has 50% good ideas and can come up with some of the craziest things you have ever heard of. Who do you want working for you?

If you picked Individual A or B, you are incorrect. The correct answer is, "It depends." It depends on the number of ideas that you get. If Individual A, who has 100% good ideas, gives only two ideas per year, you get only two good ideas. If wildman, Individual B, gives 100 ideas in a year, with 50% being good, then you would get 50 good ideas. Under this scenario, obviously the best choice to work for you is Individual B.

Consider the following four individuals and their "off the wall" ideas.

### James

James was born in New York City, grew up in Pennsylvania until he left to thumb and boxcar his way across the country. He worked in carnival shows and by the time he was 20 years old, he had visited all but three of the states. He went to college, did well, and ended up editing textbooks for a New York publishing firm. His career was interrupted by World War II and he joined the Navy. From his wartime experiences in the Solomon Islands in the Pacific, he had an idea for a book. He sent it to his former publisher who said:

"You are a good editor. Don't throw it all  
away trying to be a writer.  
I read your book. Frankly, it's not really that good."

The writer was James Michener. The book was *Tales of the South Pacific*. Michener won a Pulitzer Prize and the book was turned into the famous musical, *South Pacific*, which ran forever on Broadway.

### Bill

Bill was born in Hannibal, Missouri, as an only child, then moved to Chicago where he dropped out of

school in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade. He joined the Navy serving as a radio operator. He was good at electronics and designing aerospace instruments such as the auto pilot. He had an idea about mass producing business jets. An aeronautical engineer evaluated the design for the jet and said,

“It’s a huge risk. It will never fly.”

The idea came from Bill Lear, eighth grade drop-out, the founder of the Lear Jet, the first mass-produced business jet.

### **Ted**

Ted was born in Cincinnati, Ohio, but grew up in Savannah, Georgia. He attended Brown University where he was commodore of the Yacht Club. He piddled around in the family advertising business, but in 1980 he had an idea for an around-the-clock news network. Network executives said,

“A global, 24-hour news network will never work.”

The idea was Ted Turner’s, founder of **CNN, Headline News, TNT, Turner Classic Movies, and CNN Radio**, not to mention being the owner of the Atlanta Braves baseball and Atlanta Hawks basketball teams and one of the most influential philanthropists of our time.

### **Fred**

Fred was born in Memphis, Tennessee, where his Dad died when he was four. He attended Yale University and wrote a paper about a business idea he had. The professor found the premise improbable and rewarded him with a “C.” He went into the Marine Corps, served two tours in Vietnam, where the business idea continued to grow. He left the service and started an express transport business. He had an idea of building an overnight package delivery business. Advisers, consultants, and experts said,

“There’s no market for it. If there were, major airlines would already be offering it.”

The idea was Fred Smith’s, founder of Federal Express. Today FedEx has 148,000 employees and a fleet of 643 planes delivering 3 million packages daily to 210 countries.

What would have happened if these four people had listened to the “naysayers”? As leaders we have to encourage creativity. So often we discourage it by saying the wrong things when people have an idea. Have you ever said the following:

“That will never work.”

“It costs too much.”

“We’ve tried that before.”

“Top management will never agree to that.”

“Are you crazy?”

“Your job is to produce, not to come up with wild ideas.”

“It’s too hard.”

“Don’t fix it if it ain’t broke.”

If we say things like this over and over to people who are trying to innovate, it can embarrass them and sooner or later they will shut down and never give another idea for that next Lear Jet, FedEx, great book, or great TV programming. After all, very few people are paid according to the number of ideas they produce. When the risk outweighs the reward, that's when innovation and creativity cease, with a corresponding drop in morale.

As parents we are guilty, as well:

"Don't take a chance."

"Don't rock the boat."

"Don't invest. Save for a rainy day."

"You might get hurt emotionally or financially."

"You don't have the grades."

"That's not your strength."

My leadership challenge to you is: during the coming weeks, anytime someone has an idea, whether at work or home, say,

"That's a great idea!"

You're not saying you're going to do it because, let's face it, a lot of ideas won't fly for lots of reasons. However, by saying "that's a great idea," we are encouraging innovation and creativity. The underlying message may become that although every idea will not work, we are encouraging the individual. After all, Babe Ruth led the league in both home runs and strike outs.

Maybe with encouragement and reward we will keep Individual B coming up with 100 ideas and motivate Individual A to get the number of ideas up. Now that's a great idea!

I encourage your response to these thoughts. [farlgroup@aol.com](mailto:farlgroup@aol.com)

Have a great day!

Please forward this on or send us the e-mail addresses of co-workers, friends or family members who might enjoy a monthly leadership thought.