

"YES, **BUT**..."



How to diffuse Killer Phrases and see unexplored possibilities.

By Chic Thompson

The Evolution of an Idea

“All new and truly important ideas must pass through three stages:

- first dismissed as nonsense,*
- then rejected as against religion,*
- and finally acknowledged as true, with the proviso from initial opponents that they knew it all along.”*



— Karl Ernst von Baer



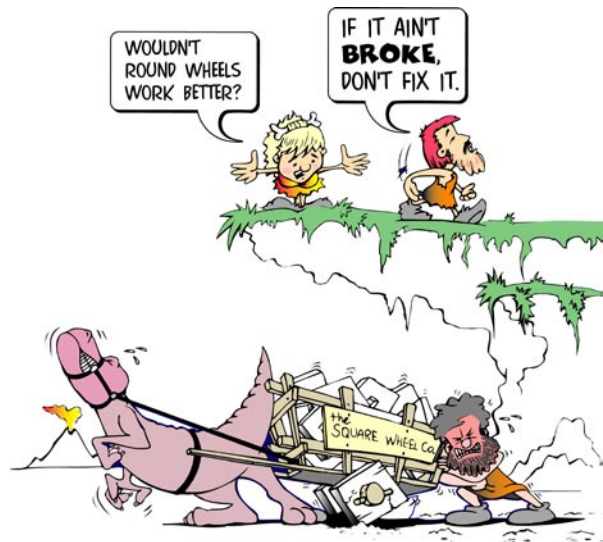
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“Be Curious First...” Idea Strategy

This morning while you are lathering up in the shower a little voice inside your head throws out a great new idea. Your body gets excited and you ask your mind to remember it.

Unfortunately, by the time you get to your desk... poof... the idea is gone. Then like magic, your new idea pops back into your consciousness while doodling through a boring meeting.

You quietly whisper your idea to the person sitting next to you. Within eight seconds they tell you what’s wrong with it; “It’s not in the budget” or “The boss will never go for it.” Your smile turns to a frown; you slump back in your seat... poof... your idea is gone again.

Being a “knowledge worker” in today’s environment requires persistence and an idea strategy. The “Be Curious First...” idea strategy is divided into the following five steps.

1) **Capture your ideas.**

Ideas are the currency of your future so write them down and keep them visible. The most creative people throughout history have carried idea notebooks.

2) **Be “curious first...”**

When a child thinks up or hears a new idea, their initial thoughts are all about the possibilities... the fun that they could have. But mature, educated minds usually see first what is wrong with a new idea. “Yes, but it’s too costly...” goes the voice in their head. Then to add insult, many times their inner voice even puts them down for thinking up the idea.



Several studies have shown that up to 83% of our inner voice is negative. Dr. Phil points out in his book, *Self Matters*: “When you have a negative conversation with yourself it can cut your functional IQ in half.” YIKES!!!!

“Yes-butters” are geniuses at coming up with excuses for inaction. Within seconds upon hearing a new idea they offer their criticism and this allows excuses rather than possibilities to drive your organization’s innovation process.



Just think if everyone had looked at the pitfalls before they leaped, we’d still be crouched in caves sketching animal pictures on walls. But creative leaders want to sketch a vision of possibilities.

If you are “curious first” you have the vision of possibilities still dancing in your head when you’re passing judgment. Even if the idea is an abysmal failure, you are aware of the idea’s potential and can apply that rightness to another challenge that you are facing.

3) Be “critical second.”

Before expressing your idea to the world, see the opportunities along with the obstacles. Imagine the expectations and needs of your target audience along with the top three Killer Phrases a naysayer would say.

4) Practice “de-fusing” the killer phrases.

Turn the devil’s advocate roadblocks into expected hurdles that you can confidently soar over. On the following pages are de-fusing strategies for the #1 Killer Phrase of our time “Yes, but...” along with the door-slamming “It will never work” and the conversation stopping “No!”



To help you become curious first rather than critical first, here are some simple phrases that will foster a dialog of possibilities.

- Rather than “Yes, but...” which gives an excuse for inaction, say “Yes, and...” which allows a dialog.
- Rather than cast blame with “Why did we...,” say “How can we...” and discuss ways to move the goal forward.
- Rather than respond with “We tried that before,” discuss what’s different about the idea or the environment than before.
- Rather than “Get a committee to look into this,” say “Tell me more...” so we can find the right people to evaluate the idea.

5) **Sell with passion.**

Before selling your idea, you need to sell yourself. Ask and then passionately answer, “Why do I want this idea to succeed?” By answering this question with passionate statements you will clarify your vision and light a fire in your belly for success.

Then radiate this energy to others:

- Think like your boss to help your idea take wings and fly up the organization.
- Change shoes with your peers and the new hires to identify the best ways to encourage active involvement and buy-in to your idea.

“I have no special gift, I am just passionately curious.”

— *Albert Einstein*



- When it’s time to influence a wider audience, sell outside by telling family and friends, and publicizing your idea in the media.

Now sell with passion, the life of your idea depends on it.



“YES, BUT...”



The #1 Killer Phrase of all time.

A politically correct, sweet 'n sour, little two-step that gives with one hand as it takes back with the other.

a/k/a: Yeah, but...
Yahbut...*
You're right, but...



De-fusing Strategy for “Yes, But...”:

Look beyond the “BUT” to find the true message.

Handle objections. Often “Yes, but...” is a prefix for additional Killer Phrases, such as “It’s not in the budget” or “We tried that before.” Clarify the concern – image, cost, past failure – and address it.

Be a detail person. If “Yes, but...” is a request for more information use examples or a demonstration to make your idea come alive.

Stay open. Use the information after “but” to make your idea even stronger. Work together to create an alternative solution that incorporates the new perspective.

Check it out. People frequently use this phrase as conversational filler, like “you know.” If you can substitute “Yes, and...” for “Yes, but...” without changing the meaning it’s not meant to be a Killer Phrase.

“Yes, and...” allows a dialogue. “Yes, but...” offers an excuse for ending the discussion. Replace “Yes, but...” with “Yes, and...” in your own conversations and watch the empowered responses.

“YES, AND...”



* The Yahbut rabbit from elementary school.

IT'LL NEVER WORK!



A door-slamming, ego-deflating idea squasher suitable for business, home-repair projects or play.

- a/k/a: It'll never fly.
- It'll never sell.
- It'll never win approval.

De-fusing Strategy for "It'll never work.":

Open doors and minds to a new way of doing things.

Create a "working" definition. Often the core issue is different definitions of the verb "to work." Does "to work" mean:

- 100% perfection?
- Zero defects?
- Leaping tall buildings in a single bound?
- Producing a desired result?

Does the naysayer's definition match yours? If not, establish criteria for success. Ask how well the initial idea has to work to be beneficial.

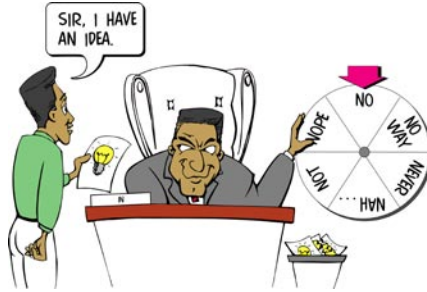
Change the rules. From bumblebee flight to quantum physics, some of life's greatest achievements shouldn't work. Often, the only thing not working is our old way of viewing the problem.

Replace "It'll never work" in your own conversations with:

WHAT WILL IT TAKE
TO MAKE IT **WORK!**



NO!



Nyet. Não. Non. Nein. Ner. Throughout history and around the globe, this one word can bring conversation and innovation to a full stop.

a/k/a: No way.

I don't think so.

That doesn't have a snowball's chance in hell.

De-fusing Strategy for “No!”:

Use your know-how to move from “NO!” to “Let’s go!”

Remember, you ≠ your idea. Before taking this Killer Phrase personally, find out if the naysayer is simply having a bad day.

Make it easy to say “yes.” Or even “maybe.” Begin with simple points of agreement to get naysayers saying “yes” immediately.

Check your negatives. Before your presentation, spend time thinking of all the reasons someone else would say “No” to your idea. Are you prepared to counter their arguments?

Don’t create a win-lose situation. Allow adversarial opinions to coexist with yours to create a stronger solution.

“No” is the first thing many of us remember our parents saying. Is it the first thing employees remember you saying?

Do a self-check. How many times per day do you say “No”? (Parents average 432!) Is your “No” really “No,” or just a test to see how committed the idea proposers are?

Be specific about what it would take to turn your “No” into:

YES!

Unlearning the Rules of School

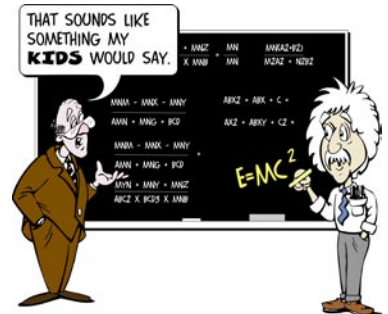


How often does voicing a new idea at work seem like being in school –raising your hand out of turn, challenging the teacher, or asking a dumb question?

I believe the rules of school still plague us.

- “The boss will never go for it” sounds a lot like “The teacher is always right.”
- “That isn’t your responsibility” is just the grown-up version of “Keep your eyes on your own paper.”
- And my favorite “Be realistic” reminds me of my English teacher saying “No daydreaming.”

The educator John Holt said we enter school as question marks and graduate as periods. I believe we enter work as question marks and retire as periods. And maybe not raising your hand in school is equivalent to not submitting a suggestion at work.



School rarely allowed collaboration. It’s no wonder that today’s self-directed teams struggle. Working on teams, we want to be able to borrow, we want to pass notes, we want to all share early in the process.

We don’t want to always act like a relay team passing the baton from one department to another. We want to act more like a jazz group continually improvising.

So, what can we do?

In your next staff meeting ask everyone to write down the rules of school

that they remember. Then ask if any of those rules stifle creative thinking for your group. If so, challenge the offending rules and create new guidelines for your discussions.

“The difficulty lies not so much in developing new ideas as in escaping from old ones.”

— John Maynard Keynes



Old Rules of School

- The teacher is always right.
- There's one right answer.
- Keep eyes on your own paper.
- Raise your hand.
- Grade by report cards.
- Stay on the subject.
- Work alone.
- Stop daydreaming.
- No spitballs.

Guidelines for Creativity and Innovation

- Solicit opinions from those doing the work.
- There are several right answers.
- Collaborate and share ideas.
- Ask “What do you think” to introverts.
- Don't measure everything.
- Allow for divergent thinking.
- Form self-directed teams.
- Envision problems as solved and work backwards.
- Throw paper balls at naysayers.

Killer Phrases have been around since the dawn of time. In 1899, the Director of the U.S. Patent Office declared, “Everything that can be invented, has been invented.” and tried to close the Office down.

But now, more than ever, we need great ideas. We need them to revive our economy, to restore our family, to empower our employees and to reinvent our schools.

Be curious first... the life of your idea depends on it.



More Killer Phrases

Are you putting me on?... Because might makes right... Business is business... But, mom... But with the economy... CYA... Don't get me wrong... Don't give up your day job yet... Don't overload your plate... Do you think we're made of money?... Eat my shorts... Go soak your head... Have you lost your marbles?... I could care less... I don't want to hurt your feelings, but... If it doesn't work, I won't back you up... If you weren't so lazy, you wouldn't be thinking of an easier way... Is it supported much... think you've got a or the highway... It's not a blue sky... It's too late... a tangent... MEN!... makes a product like yeah, I had that idea ago... Our place is too



...RIGHT?!... Sounds half-baked Sure it will... That's some hairdo you That's pie in the sky... That's too hard... of the month?... That will screw works... The computer is down... idea has to get instant results... The IRS will catch you... The only problem with that is... There's no community support...

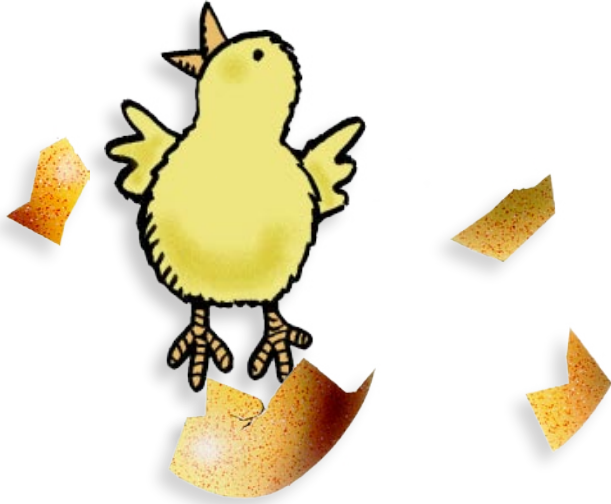


There you go, sticking your neck out... Too academic... What a hare-brained idea... What you are really saying is... What's behind that suggestion?... When pigs fly... Who cares?... Who do you think you are?... Why start anything now?... WOMEN!... You can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear... You can't save everyone... You don't know what you're talking about... You don't understand our problem... You're setting yourself up for failure...

Innovation Keynote Address/ Creativity Workshop



*“A goal of every living creature
is to break out of the box.”*



Become the change you seek in the world.

— Mahatma Gandhi

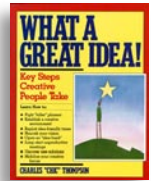


“Break out...”

...with the creative strategies of Chic Thompson. Chic’s passion is inspiring executives, MBA students and children to be “**curious first... critical second**” while problem solving.

He is president of Creative Management Group and is an adjunct faculty member at:

- The University of Virginia’s Darden Business School
- The YPO University (Young Presidents’ Organization)
- The Brookings Institution
- The Federal Executive Institute



Chic’s first book, *What a Great Idea!*, published by HarperCollins, was a main selection of the Executive Book Club and is also published in Japanese, Portuguese, Chinese and Spanish. Chic’s second book, “*Yes, But...*” is a guide to overcoming the bureaucratic language that stifles continuous innovation.

In 2001, Harvard Business School released a case study on the speaking career of Chic Thompson entitled “What a Great Idea!®.” In 2004, Darden Business School awarded Thompson a Batten Fellowship in Entrepreneurship.

Chic received his B.S. in Chemistry from the University of Delaware and his Masters in Education from the University of Virginia. He then worked in new product development and marketing for:

- W.L. Gore and Associates (Gore-Tex®)
- Johnson & Johnson
- Walt Disney



During the last 20 years, Chic has given over 2500 presentations and has teamed up with talent ranging from Tony Robbins and Stephen Covey to Cirque du Soleil and Second City.

Creative Management Group

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“What others have said...”

“Chic is the world’s greatest creativity workshop presenter.”

Doug Hall, New Product Inventor
Author, Jump Start Your Brain



“Mr. Chic Thompson is a creative genius.”

Dr. Yoshiro NakaMatsu
Inventor of floppy disk, CD and digital watch

“Your keynote presentation was extremely well received! The survey results are the best we have ever received...”



William C. Thomas
CEO, Vision Council of America

“Chic has crafted a creative process to move almost anything from what is to what could be.”



Rick Goings
President, Tupperware

“Chic is a breeding ground for new ideas!”



Charles Prather, Ph.D.
Former Director, DuPont Center for Innovation

“What a phenomenal presentation! I don’t think I’ve ever laughed so hard while learning so much!”



Mary Ellen Joyce
Leadership Program Director, Brookings Institution

“Chic has a knack for getting people to see ideas that have been staring them in the face.”

Robert J. Rotella, Ph.D., Sports Psychologist
Author, Golf isn’t a Game of Perfect



“If you think you are close to using all of your intellectual talent, think again. If you need to produce more original thinking, introduce your staff to Chic Thompson. It works!”

Robert Matson, Ph.D.
Former Director, Federal Executive Institute

Keynote Address (60-90 minutes)



“Be Curious First...”

The 15 Second Solution to Breakthrough Ideas

We don't have time to sit under a tree waiting for creative inspiration. Learn how to “shake the tree” to let fresh ideas fall into your lap. Then be curious first... critical second to see what's right with your new ideas.

In this high energy interactive session, Chic Thompson will open everyone's mind to creating possibilities.

The key learning points are:

- Diffuse self-defeating killer phrases with “Yes, and...” vs. “Yes, but...”
- Learn from trial and error rather than expecting trial and rightness
- Reframe your challenges with metaphorical and paradoxical thinking
- Clarify your vision by making it visible and viable
- Ask “Why” five times to find the root cause of your challenge
- Become a continuous learner by asking the right questions
- Smile... laugh... have fun and fight “terminal seriousness”
- Keep your brain alive with neurobic exercises

“They loved you. They thought you were terrific. That's all anyone is talking about today. It was a combination of your warmth, sincerity and interesting and practical information.”



Julie Baiter, VP Technology Planning
McGraw Hill CIO Conference

“You were an overwhelming hit... You've really had an impact.”



Amelia DiVenere, VP Finance & Admin
Cox Comptroller Conference

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Creativity Workshop (4-8 hours)

“What a Great Idea!®”

Turning Ideas into Action

Everyone who’s ever taken a shower has had an idea. But it’s the person who gets out of the shower, dries off and does something about the idea that makes a difference.

In this creativity workshop, Chic Thompson will take you on an interactive journey through the four steps of organizational innovation: Freedom, Expression, Creation and Action. Interactive exercises, case examples and video clips will be used to spark ideas that will provide a great return on innovation for your organization.

Freedom

- Break the old “rules of school”
- Learn from failure
- Dream with your eyes open

Expression

- Be curious first... critical second
- “Shake the tree” for inspiration by adding stimuli
- Smile and change your world in a heartbeat

Creation

- Ask the right questions and see the uniqueness of your challenge
- Look for second and third right answers
- Expand your perspective with metaphorical thinking
- Challenge your assumptions with paradoxical thinking
- Learn a powerful brainstorming method called Idea Mapping

Action

- Make your vision visible
- Create a results-driven action plan and sell your ideas with passion
- Keep your brain alive

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Please come for a visit.



Watch four video clips of Chic presenting his creative idea strategies for success.



Download a PDF copy of our latest Killer Phrase poster.