

# Making time to think

by Ed Bernacki

**T**hinking is crucial in business to solve problems, develop new strategies, deal with customers and manage staff issues. Thinking is important. It fuels creativity. It improves decision-making. It creates value. So when do you think?

According to a recent US study, more than half of the senior executives questioned said that they are most effective in personal thinking in these places:

- 58 percent say at home
- 50 percent say commuting to work
- 45 percent say at the office and
- 38 percent say during brainstorming sessions.

**“It’s staggering to consider that so many executives believe their businesses are unsuitable places for thinking.”**

Would the results differ for New Zealand executives? I doubt it. It’s staggering to consider that so many executives believe their businesses are unsuitable places for thinking. If this reflects your reality, consider how you can harness your thinking when you actually do it. You won’t be sitting in front of a computer. Therefore, what tool can capture your thinking to create value for your organisation?

Forget the electronic toys and invest in a quality notebook. Turn it into your ideas journal with two sections.

In the first section, use the first two or three pages to answer this

question: where do I need innovative thinking? Write down a version of this question in big letters on the first page to prompt you to pick the problems in need of solutions, the products waiting to be created, the staff issues needing to be resolved and so on. Think of this as your contents pages. Number each challenge.

In the second section, take each challenge and write it across the top of a new page. If you start with four challenges, then use four separate pages.

Whether you are sitting at home or driving, pick one of your challenges and think about it. Don’t be worried if the big idea does not come right away.

Start by asking:

- Why does this problem exist?
- What assumptions have we made about this situation? Are they still valid?
- Have we tried to solve this in the past? Why did the solution fail?
- Do we need a better solution or a totally different solution?

The goal is to capture your observations, insights and conclusions. Sometimes nothing comes to mind. Don’t fret, as it takes time to develop ideas. The key is keep advancing toward a solution.

This final aspect is the hardest.

It takes discipline to invest small amounts of time each day. Our productive time is too valuable to waste. I look for opportunities to steal time for my ideas when I am forced to waste it. Waiting for a doctor’s appointment or at the airport are perfect opportunities to invest 10 minutes of thinking into your challenges.

I confess that I have used my ideas journal during dull meetings. I focus one eye on my challenge while keeping the other on the meeting. People may

think I am making meeting notes when I am actually developing my ideas.

The research does raise some interesting questions: why do we manage our business without building in time to think? Perhaps you can think about that when you drive home tonight.

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