

# Breaking the Rut Cycle: Innovate Your Thoughtleading By Capitalizing On Opportunity

By Katie Barton

Is your business stuck in a rut? If so, you need to recognize that opportunities to succeed present themselves every day. But if we're not paying attention or willing to go outside our comfort zones, they will go unrealized. Instead, you can break this "rut cycle" by highlighting the importance of being open when it comes to business strategy and thoughtleading. By focusing on the benefits of listening, and forging interpersonal connections, and risk-taking, we can truly innovate and capitalize on new opportunities every day. We just need to open our ears and our minds.

The thoughtleading mindset is heavy on the "I," as it must be, to a certain extent, if the thoughtleader is going to gain any degree of recognition. It is true that unless you possess and project self-confidence in your ideas they will never get off the ground. Another basic truth, however, focuses on the flipside of the ego involved in thoughtleading. Sometimes, when trying to think of new and relevant ideas that will benefit clients and followers, the "I" of thoughtleading serves as a hindrance. We can get caught up in a frustrating mental battle, bent over our computer screens trying in vain to come up with our own "next big thing."

Ultimately, it proves all too easy for the thoughtleader to become wrapped up in his or her own thoughts and dreams of personal success and to lose sight of the bigger picture. The most successful thoughtleaders

achieve a balance between their focus on their own ideas and their continued outreach to others through simple techniques that often get overlooked or discredited. This balance enables them to stay focused on their goals, while not losing their sense of perspective or their competitive edge, and is achieved by listening carefully, fostering interpersonal connections, and taking risks.

The first, and possibly most important, overlooked pillar of true thoughtleading is listening. Simple though it sounds, not many people take the time to truly listen to what others are saying to them, absorb the information they are receiving, and respond in a meaningful way. Whether you find yourself engaged in a conversation with a client, a passing acquaintance, or a close friend, there is no limit to the personal gains you can experience simply by making a conscious effort to understand where the other person is coming from.

The importance of listening is realized when it is linked to creativity. Creative ideas and new concepts come from venturing outside ourselves – from getting out of the office, or at least the office frame of mind, and getting in touch with the world. At a recent meeting of a group of consultants in Maine, I heard one woman speaking of a new idea she had for an article or book that was focused around the process of mentoring within hair salons. Where did this idea come from? Not



**Katie Barton** is a Scribe-at-Large with emerson consulting group inc. and is a graduate of Washington and Lee University, class of 2011. Contact her via [www.thoughtleading.com](http://www.thoughtleading.com)

from sitting in her office, that's for sure. It came from a conversation she had with her hairdresser. This conversation about mentoring and the mentoring system the hairdresser had designed for her multiple salons caught the consultants attention, and she began to think of it as an opportunity to explore.

This is true thoughtleading in action. The consultant did not go into the hair salon with a business agenda in mind, but she saw the mentoring conversation as a springboard for her own ideas on a broader concept. She did not get preoccupied with her own thoughts and tune out what the hairdresser was saying, but instead internalized what the hairdresser had to say.

When we start to see the mundane occurrences of our daily lives as opportunities, the chances to be inspired and to come up with new perspectives are limitless. In this way, listening is linked to the second, equally important concept of forging interpersonal relationships. Though

it may seem counter-intuitive that innovating our thoughtleading ideas involves first getting outside of ourselves, such thinking follows the teachings of the expert of interpersonal communication, Dale Carnegie. On this, he states, “You can make more friends in two months by becoming interested in other people than you can in two years by trying to get people interested in you.”

In the business world, making “friends,” often means attracting clients and partners, thus increasing your own profitability. By showing an interest in other people, looking ahead to see how you can mutually benefit one another, and following through with connections, you will find yourself surrounded by a network of people ready to provide you with opportunities to grow, listen, and get out of your own head. Just as taking a walk outside on a nice day can clear your head, having a conversation with a person in your network and genuinely expressing

interest in their work will give you an opportunity to see things from a different perspective.

Ultimately, this different perspective is what allows the thoughtleader to realize opportunities for new ideas and business growth as they present themselves. If you listen carefully and make yourself available to a wide array of people, you won’t have to seek out opportunity – it will come to you. And this is where the third overlooked aspect of thoughtleading comes in: taking risks. Once you begin to recognize the prevalence of opportunities for creativity and growth all around you, the next step is to venture outside what you consider “safe” and go for it. Whether you it involves trying a new social media, entering a new line of work, or sending your ideas out to publishers, it was Albert Einstein who said that insanity is “doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results.” Unless you jump at the opportunities you find, you will stay in the same

situation you currently find yourself.

By taking the time to listen, to view each interaction and encounter as an opportunity to learn someone else’s perspective and absorb what they know, you are in fact making yourself more open and available to them. This is mutually beneficial. By putting yourself into new situations where you have the opportunity to connect with people outside your own circle, you are exponentially increasing the reach of your ideas and the diversity of your sphere of influence. And by not shying away from opportunities when they present themselves, you are setting yourself up for a dynamic and exciting future. Careful listening, relationship-building, and timely risk-taking all fall outside the box of what is typically considered “good for business,” but they are crucial for maintaining thoughtleader relevancy and breaking out of your business rut.