



Thinking Outside the Box

Willie Horton

www.Gurdy.net

Do you think that Bill Gates thinks there's a box? Or Warren Buffet? Do you think that Muhammad Ali thought there was a box? What about Sir Richard Branson? How do you think Tiger Woods or Roger Federer would feel if they thought that they had to operate inside 'the box'. Or the Mahatma Gandhi?

Very often, I hear business leaders – I mean normal business leaders, not the people whose names we all know – talk about 'thinking outside the box'. This phrase is frequently used in business, whether it relates to problem solving or innovation. Lots of business people talk about it – very few ever rise to what is in fact not much of a challenge at all. What very few of them have realised is that there is no box!

Only special people, unusually successful people – in other words, not normal people – realise this fact. That's why we all know their names – they stand head and shoulders above the rest of us.

There is no box – other than the box we create for ourselves. From a very early age, society and the education system begins to fashion a box for us – and because we're all in the box together, it seems OK – we think that it's acceptable. Get yourself a good education (Bill Gates dropped out of university) and get yourself a good job (Richard Branson left school when he was sixteen and started *Student* magazine).

When you do get yourself a good job, you're taught how to be a team player – which is a euphemism for don't do anything that would upset anyone else on the team, play by the rules and, for God's sake, don't do anything unusual or innovative. And, of course, organisations have a culture – lots of management consultants make a fortune out of the corporate culture game, one, recently, told me that he had developed a template for auditing corporate culture – whatever that means. In effect, corporate culture means 'this is how we do things around here' – conform.

So the box – that you've effortlessly slid into – is all around you, supported by the mindless behaviour of all the other clones. And when I hear people talking about 'thinking outside the box', I know for a fact, that most of them never will.

Never mind 'thinking outside the box' – what about living outside it!

The Buddha, of course, knew there was no box – it just took him a while to experience it. And the people I mentioned at the top of the page had some inkling too – although, perhaps, only in relation to certain aspects of their lives, where they were driven towards the achievement of certain goals of objectives.

The box that you live in – the box that you think inside – was created for you during your formative years – at home, at school, at college, in your first job or two. It's based on what other people told you – and, like a sheep, you've conformed – you've followed. The blind have been leading the blind.

It's time to step outside the box.

But, in fact, you already know how to do that – we all do it from time to time, without realising we're free! For example, I mentioned problem solving earlier. When are you most likely to think of the solution to something that's been bugging you for hours, days or weeks? When you're not thinking about it, of course. When you're sitting on the loo, relaxing in the bath (of course, most modern people live lives that are too frantic to take the time to do this), when you're brushing your teeth last thing at night.

Of course, you're not being a team player in the toilet – corporate culture is never squeezed onto your toothbrush! You solve problems when you accidentally wander outside the box. What you need to be able to do is wander outside the box when you feel like it – who knows, you might even stay outside and, in doing so, realise that, in reality, there never was a box.

Artists, scientists, inventors all wander outside the box too – Picasso called it inspiration, Thomas Edison cultivated his ability to wander when he felt like it. You've got to do the same.

How? Well, does 'sitting on the toilet' give you a hint? We need to make space in our lives to do nothing – to daydream (which is completely different from being distracted or letting your mind wander – but other articles deal with this). The Buddha became enlightened when he was sitting under a tree – just sitting there. Newton discovered gravity while he was doing the same thing – doing nothing.

The most effective way of being inspired, of having ground-breaking ideas, of innovatively solving problems, is to take a step back from what you're doing, to slow down, to give your mind the space it needs to be inspired. And, to do this as an integral part of your daily life.

I'm not talking about power napping, nor am I talking about meditating in the conventional sense, nor am I suggesting you go for a walk to think things through. I suggest to you – to all my clients – that you set aside a little time most days to sit down – by the river or canal, at a pavement cafe, on your patio or balcony in the evening – and do absolutely nothing.

You might be surprised by what dawns on you.