

Randomness Awaits You

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There is an adage among folks who work in innovation and creativity that the more ideas you have, the more likely you will have great ones—you just don't know which ones they are. Often they are at the intersections of ideas...more random than scientific, more by chance than by choice, and more likely to come from luck than rigor.

With that as an idea for you to think about, let me share some ways you can put randomness and chance into your business and perhaps even come up with some big ideas.

Mark, a client of ours in the battery OEM business, had a big problem—growth had stalled. Ideas had dried up, the business was changing and he was being left behind. New sales management had not reinvigorated sales. They were actually feeling like they were re-inventing themselves even though they had been a successful business for over 20 years. Not an uncommon problem, so we took them out to visit their customers, as well as to totally different markets where they had never done much business.

During one of the listening sessions, an epiphany happened. Not by design but by chance, they heard something that lit a light bulb and off they went. What the customer said was simply. "We really don't want batteries. We need lighter, longer, stronger power solutions. We want our tools to last longer and be lighter than the competitors." My client said, "But I thought they just wanted us to build their batteries to their specifications and deliver them on time. What's with this lighter, longer power solution?"

After that, the conversation never stopped. "How do we stop building 'batteries' and create 'lighter, longer, stronger power solutions?' What are those anyway? Are we an OEM or do we create our own solutions? Can we leverage rechargeable batteries? How about lithium ion batteries? What are our customers really asking for anyway?"

As a [Blue Ocean Strategist](#), I work all the time with companies that are struggling to sustain growth in a changing economy—one that doesn't look much like it used to a few years ago. Too often their approach is one of protecting old, guarded strategies bent on outcompeting others just like them. That was certainly the case with Mark as he stayed in the OEM zone, building batteries.

Traditional strategic thinking traps these business owners into seeing where their strengths and weaknesses are and assessing their opportunities and threats, but all in a rather constricted business market space. These are the markets that they know well and have grown their businesses in. But in changing times, the old is not always the place to hang out. This is not a rule-driven world but rather, a chaotic one filled with uncertainties and the unexpected. How to take advantage of that and turn frustrations into success stories?

In a new book by Frans Johansson, "[The Click Moment, Seizing Opportunity in an Unpredictable World](#)," there may be some help for those of you who are stuck like Mark. The success stories Johansson describes in "The Click Moment" are less about a linear strategy and more about a lot of chance, randomness and luck. But how to create that luck?

Opportunity is not a linear process unless you are Serena Williams who practiced 10,000 forehands and backhands on her way to becoming a star in a very well-defined tennis world. But if you are a CEO of a company, practice might not be of any value in a world going through changes—fast.

In this blog I want to challenge you to think differently about what really matters to grow your business. Maybe the most important step is to try lots of things and not judge them until you see what might really work. Take for example The Ice Hotel, a remarkable tourist attraction in northern Sweden built entirely of ice—even the chairs and tables and beds. The idea is



rather crazy but it worked. The Ice Hotel has become one of the largest tourist attractions in Sweden. Who would have thought?

Or Starbucks. How can coffee selling for a premium that even Consumer Reports rated below its competitors, such as Newman's Own and Gloria Jean's, open 17,000 Starbucks coffee shops around the world and throttle all other players in the segment?

What might this mean for you? How could you put serendipity to work for you? Where is that "luck" you had before and want again? Can you make that magical moment happen when luck and skill come together, often at the intersections of ideas?