

A Beginner's Mind ©

By Kathy Ellis, The Business Lab Marketing Coach

Beginner's Mind is a Zen Buddhist concept about seeing things from a whole new perspective and being able to learn, unlearn then re-learn what you know or believe about something. It's a concept that is far easier to talk about than to implement because we all tend to retreat back to the comfort of "what has always been." Imagine the advantage you would have though if you walked into your office one day and knew nothing specific about what products or services your company offered. Instead, you were shown a room where you could watch video of prospects and clients needing and using your products and services. It would probably give you a whole new perspective on what to offer and how to offer it. In this month's article we share some ideas on how you can create a beginner's mind program for the products and services in your business.

Step One—Define Your List of Products/Services: With your team, write out your "laundry list" of products and services. These are your core offerings—i.e., the "services" section of your Web site or brochure.

Step Two—Define Teams: Pair up members of your total team so that you have at least one right brain thinker (e.g., big picture, abstract, uses intuition and emotion) and one left brain thinker (e.g. analytical, detailed, uses logic and is a planner). Get your whole team involved—from your accounting staff to your manufacturing staff. You might even consider asking clients or suppliers to be on a team.

Step Three—Learn About Your Products/Services: Have each team learn all they can about the specific product/service they have been assigned to. Here are some ideas to help get you started:

Differentiate: List your specific product/service along side your competitors and assign a one word attribute that best describes each in the minds of your clients/prospects. Determine which attribute your product/service is known by and how this differs from your competitors.

Problems: List all the problems/needs that your specific product/service can solve.

Case Studies: Have the team write case studies on how this particular product/service specifically solved a problem for a client. Don't settle for an internal version of this case study; interview your client, get their perspective, watch them using your product/service, etc.

Step Four—Unlearn What You Know About Your Products/Services: This step will require a lot of creativity, brain storming and willingness to be open to all ideas. The goal of this step is to ignore all of the things you just learned about your product/service and see what new nuances of meaning or purpose you can discover. You may already have a great head start simply by pairing up opposites on your team and including parts of your staff that would not normally have an opportunity to learn about or offer insights about your specific products/services. Here are some ideas to help get you started:

Give a brief scenario of how the current problem-to-solution process is currently being played out. See if you can expand this scenario in any way by reviewing your customer's situation several steps before or after the "problem/need" has been identified. How did they get to the point where they "need" a solution and/or what other needs/problems do they have that would tie-in with what your company can offer.

Example: Assume you owned a pack and ship store that catered to a three-

mile radius around the store's location. Currently, a customer brings in an item that is already packaged or needs to be packaged then sent on to a new destination.

By observing your customer several steps before and after the need for your pack and ship services, you learn the following: The customer was having a garage sale and found a set of dishes that belonged to her sister. Her sister was excited to learn that the dishes had been found and so the package was sent. The customer had to drop off the package after 5pm because your store was not open when the customer left for work. Once you discover there are dishes inside, you realize that the current packaging will not be sufficient for the trip. You offer to repackage the dishes for her because she has to get home in time to put up flyers about the family's pet dog that got out of the yard earlier in the day. On her way out the door, she asks you if you know of anyone who would be interested in buying a treadmill machine — it's practically new and didn't get sold at the garage sale.

Step Five—Re-Learn What You Now Know About Your Products or Services: Take the expanded view of your customer and see how you can build a new business scenario.

The above observations might lead to the following scenario: Customer's within your three mile radius subscribe to your neighborhood care service and pay you a small monthly fee. This fee allows them to log-on to your Web site and let you know they have an item that needs to be sent. You pick up the item, package it and send it for them. Your neighborhood care service also allows them to have packages sent directly to your store and then delivered to them once they are home. This is especially helpful for items that need to be refrigerated, that are valuable, that need to be gift wrapped, or are simply too large for the regular mailbox. Because you have already established relationships with all the neighbors in your three mile radius, you expand your neighborhood care services. Subscribers to your service also have access to your neighborhood Web site where they can post items for sale, search or post listings for lost or found pets, build flyers for lost/found pets, send E-mail announcements of garage sales, search or recommend household services and products, exchange recipes, and post suspicious activities around the neighborhood.

Step Six—Implement What You Learned, Unlearned and Re-learned: Bring your teams back together and have them share what they learned, unlearned, and re-learned. Determine what new products/services you might be able to offer and how you can renew, enhance, reposition, or eliminate any existing products/services.

More Information? If you would like to learn more about this important topic or would like to receive our FREE Service Ideas Booklet, please send an E-mail to kathy@thebusinesslab.com, visit our Web site at www.thebusinesslab.com, or fax a note on your letterhead to 281-374-0569.

Author's Note: Kathy Ellis is a Marketing Coach and the owner of The Business Lab, a full service marketing and graphic design company. We specialize in creativity and helping you think outside the box. We then help you implement those creative ideas through programs including database marketing, web sites, interactive CD brochures, company brochures, client newsletters and promotional marketing materials. We share our FREE newsletter with you to showcase powerful marketing tips, techniques, and ideas to help you improve your business. The Business Lab is based in Houston, TX, at 281-374-0170 or by E-mail at kathy@thebusinesslab.com