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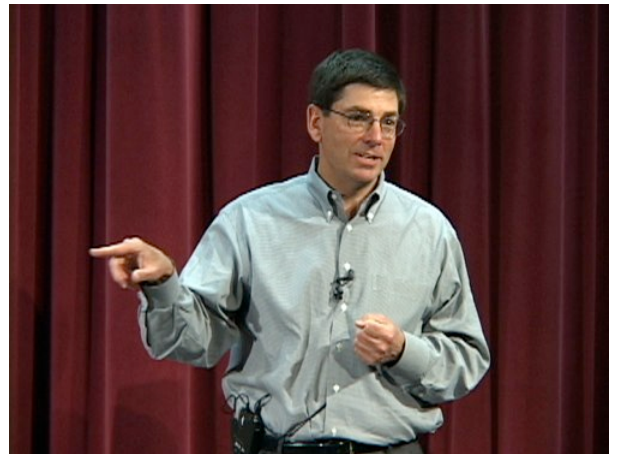
Using Creativity to Solve Problems

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Video URL: <http://ecorner.stanford.edu/videos/883/Using-Creativity-to-Solve-Problems>

Gordon describes the idea of bullet train thinking. You assume you want a train that can travel at ten times the speed of a conventional train and then figure out what would have to be possible in order to make it work. With this assumed result, you must think of creative solutions that otherwise would not likely be considered. In a startup, when you only have two months left of money, you find a solution in those two months because it is the only option.



Transcript

Creativity. I don't know if this book is still used in commercial futures, James Adam's Conceptual Blockbusting. It's just a terrific book. Some of my clients use it in a different term. It comes I think out of GE called bullet train thinking where you just assume that you can solve the problem then you work backwards and figure out what it would take to solve the problem. So the bullet train thinking idea is let's assume a train that goes 10 times as fast as a conventional train. What would you have to do in terms of infrastructure to build it and make it work? Once you assume the result then you start getting creative about how you get there. You got to identify a very big problem and find a solution. The most successful companies are attacking very big problems. It's a phenomenon that I don't think we fully understand but creativity seems to be much more fruitful in a small entrepreneurial organization than in a large one.

In my practice, I frequently see large companies come to startup companies and say we can't figure out how to get this done so we want to provide you with seed investment or we're going to split off a little tiger team group from our engineering team, put them out some place where they're not bothered by the daily affairs of the business and let them get creative. Somehow there's a magic to owning your own company, magic to having a very small group of people focused on a tough problem. Sometimes, necessity is the mother of invention. My favorite example of that is the one from the Apollo 13 mission and movie where they have the two incompatible oxygen supply systems and they figure out what they have and they've got duct tape and a couple of other flanges and things and they figured out how to connect the oxygen supply from the lunar lander to the space capsule to survive an hour and a half or whatever it is they had because they had to. That's when happens with a startup company. You have to figure out a solution to the problem in a month and a half or a year and a half because that's how long the money is going to last. It's the oxygen supply for the company and so you come up with a solution.