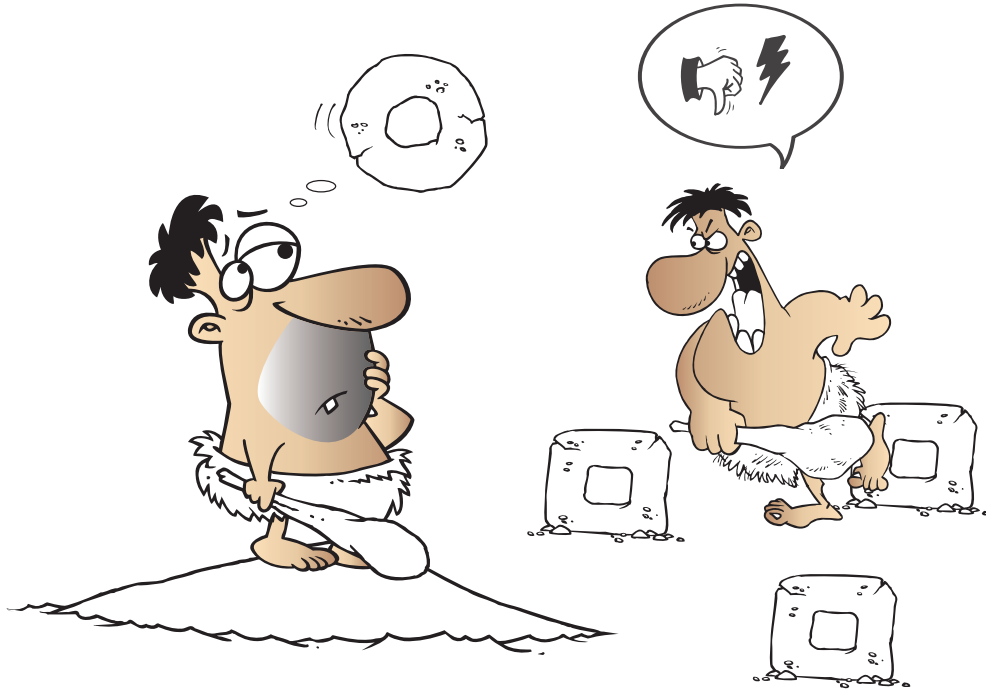


# A Prehistoric Attempt at Brainstorming!



**“All new ideas must pass through three stages:**

- 1. first dismissed as nonsense,**
- 2. then rejected as against religion,**
- 3. and finally acknowledged as true, with the proviso from initial opponents that they knew it all along.”**

**- Karl Ernst von Baer,  
father of embryology, 1867**

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For more information: [www.wagilabs.org](http://www.wagilabs.org)

# A Missed Opportunity!

In 1976 I was a young new employee at Walt Disney. In a brainstorm, I recommended using the latest technology, VHS and Betamax, to expand the distribution of our cartoons and movies.

I was met with this “Yes, BUT...”



So I took the “never” seriously, left Disney, started my cartoon company, and embraced videotape.

“Never” doesn’t mean never! It just means not now. Never is too long of a time for anyone to predict accurately.

It also shows us the blind spots where entrepreneurs can find an opportunity for creation.

Now think of a time when you had an idea, and someone gave you an “It will never work!” How did you handle it?

---

---

What blind spots do you see that you can turn into an opportunity?

---

---



# Seeing Blind Spots!

By definition, we can't see **blind spots**.

We hear them!

They usually start with "Yes, BUT..."

In 1992 Pepsi asked to help them create a new clear soft drink. My first thought was let's sell bottled water with a sophisticated name and unique bottle. Pepsi responded that it would never sell bottled water! In 1994 Aquafina was tested and rolled out nationally in 1997.



The entrepreneurial mind flips the "Yes, BUT..." into an opportunity because there's less competition and a lower cost of entry in the world of "never."

So, why is it difficult for many to see the merits of a new idea? The average brain has difficulty holding opposing traits, values, and ideas and then integrating them into a larger one. It's called integrated complexity, and we score the lowest at 44 years old.

The dyslexic entrepreneurial brain is a different story. People with dyslexia have seen opposites from birth and consider their opposite thinking a superpower rather than a learning disability.

Often seeing the opposite, the **never**, is the key to unlocking their creativity. As F. Scott Fitzgerald said, "The cleverly expressed opposite of any generally accepted idea is worth a fortune to somebody."



# Bunting A Home Run

I was born very prematurely due to my parents' heavy smoking habit. The nurse put me in an incubator and nicknamed me "Chick."

The nickname stuck, and I dropped the "k" when I learned the cartoonist of the Dagwood comic strip was Chic Young.



My childhood passions were cartooning and playing baseball.

I was on a Little League team and wore #1 because of my small size. My coach never let me swing since I was difficult to pitch to and got on base by pitchers walking me with four balls.

When on base, I practiced base-stealing. One day, I accidentally bunted a ball toward third base, turning it into a home run as the opposing team kept mis-throwing. That bunt and three errors accounted for my career's only RBI (run-batted-in).

That improbable hit foreshadowed my life. My teachers and coaches underestimated me due to my size and dyslexia. I've scored my successes through many bunts, getting hit by pitches, competitor fielding errors, and base-stealing.

Brainstorming has been my superpower throughout my life, and I look forward to sharing my creative secrets with you.

Smiling,

*Chic Thompson*



# CONTENTS

## **Foreword:** The Box is your Friend!

8

## **Creating a Mindset for Ideas**

14

Recognizing “Idea-Friendly” Times

25

Anticipating “Yes, BUT”

29

Empowering with “Yes, AND”

32

Defusing “Yes, BUT”

40

1. Jumping to Conclusions

41

2. Comparative Thinking

47

3. Gaslighting

55

4. Put-Downs

61

5. Catastrophizing

69

6. Stalls

76

Negative Self-Talk

85

## **Seeing Ideas Others Can’t See**

96

Defining “What?” “Why?” “Who?”

99

1. What? Questions

102

2. Who? Questions

106

3. Why? Questions

111

Writing “How might we...” Statements

114

Reframing with “What if?”

117

1. Visualizing with Analogies

122

2. Creating with “Smash-Ups”

129

3. Thinking in Opposites

137

4. Asking, what would I never do?

147

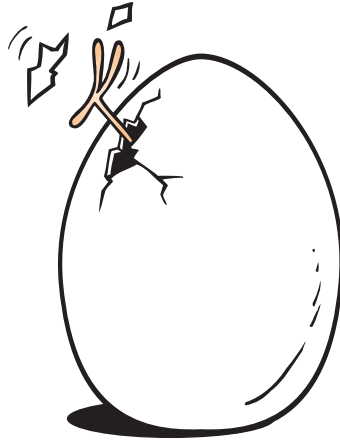
Unleashing DIY Brainstorm with ChatGPT

151



<b>Making Your Ideas Visible</b>	156
Evaluating Your Ideas	158
Prioritizing Your Ideas	160
De-risking Your Ideas	162
Prototyping Your Vision	169
Pivoting in New Directions	179
<b>Selling Your Wild New Ideas</b>	181
Pitching with Purpose	182
1. Movie Pitch	183
2. Pitch without Words	186
3. Smash-Up Pitch	191
4. Music Video Pitch	193
Selling In/Out/Up/Down	202
<b>Keeping Your Brain Alive</b>	206
Overcoming Mental Blocks	208
Interviewing the Edison of Japan	213
Finding Brain/Body Dominances	222
Jump Starting Brain Exercises	226
Your Final Exam Question	237
<b>Afterword: Achieving Immortality</b>	238
Answers in Back of the Book	248

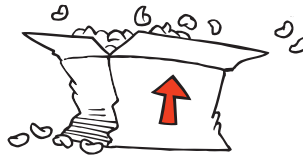




"The goal of every living  
creature is to break out of  
the box."

## Introduction:

# The Box is Your Friend!



We all started out creative.

Remember the cardboard box you turned into a fort... a dollhouse... a sled to slide down a hill. At five years old, we invented “out-of-the-box” thinking by saying: “It’s not a box! It’s a...!”

It’s **NOT** a box!  
It’s a...

A box is a finite idea. “It’s not a box” is an infinite idea. “It’s not TV; it’s HBO” was a very effective advertising campaign for the startup prime cable industry. TV is finite...the possibilities of HBO were infinite.



Think about our home during the first year of COVID-19. It’s not just a home...it’s a school...a food warehouse...a gym...a vacation...a library...a movie theater. When you think, “It’s not a...” your mind becomes agile and non-judgmental. You are starting to brainstorm.

Ask children in kindergarten if they like to sing, dance, or draw. All the hands go up. They are ready to show you their drawings and their moves.



Ask a group of adults if they like to sing, dance, or draw. Only about fifteen percent of the hands go up. Then someone will ask, “What kind of dancing?” or “Can I have two beers first?” They are stopping the brainstorming in its tracks.

What happened in twenty-five years? Most of us started school with a box of sixty-four brightly colored crayons. The lucky ones had a tin box of 128 colors with a sharpener on the side. But if we lived in a world of purple tree trunks and orange skies for too long, we probably began to hide our creativity.

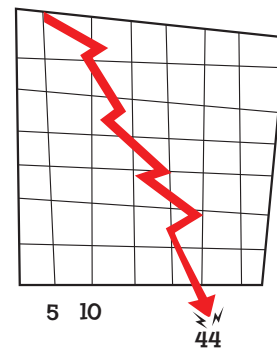
Why? Because every year, more colors and colorful wall hangings were removed from the classroom. We graduated not with sixty-four colors but with two colors—black or blue inside a disposable pen. We hated the color red because when we saw it in writing, it meant we were wrong.



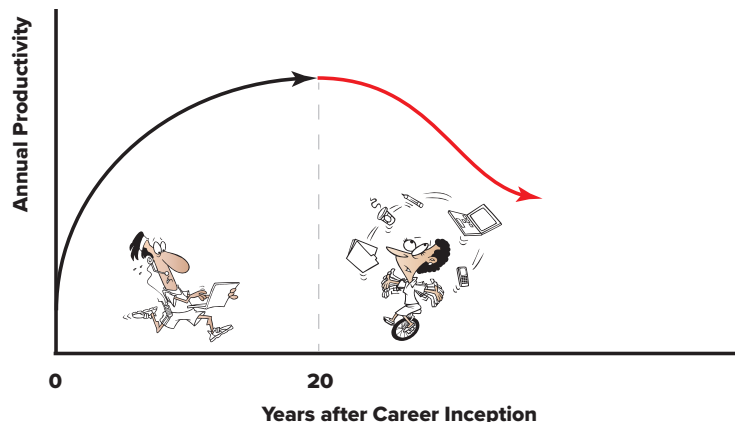
George Ainsworth Land, author of “Grow or Die,” gave five-year-olds a creativity test used by NASA to select innovative engineers. Ninety-eight percent of the children scored in the “highly creative” range. When these same children were retested at ten, only thirty percent were rated “highly creative.” By age fifteen, just twelve percent were ranked “highly creative.”

What about the average adult population? Only two percent of the adults who took the NASA tests were rated “highly creative.” Therefore, our lifetime creativity, measured in terms of our ability to generate several new ideas, is at its highest point at five years old and lowest around forty-four years old.

Lifetime Creativity

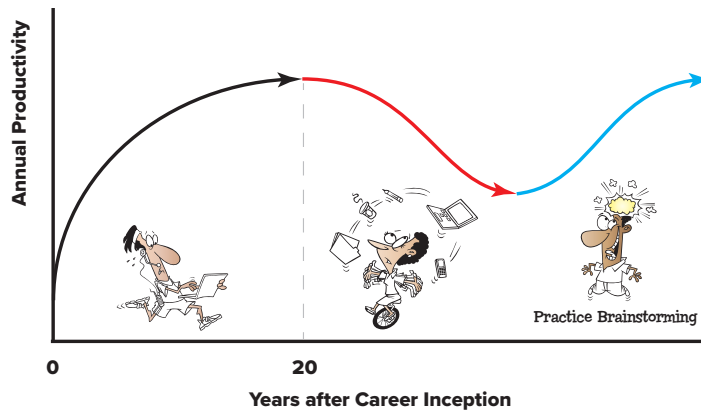


Arthur Brooks in his book, “Strength to Strength” states the following: “On average, the peak of creative careers occurs about twenty years after career inception. If you finish your education and start your career at twenty-two, you will, on average, hit your professional peak at forty-four and then start to see your skills decline.”



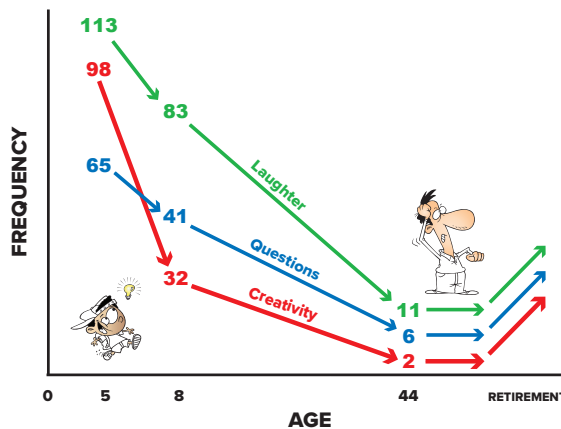
Creativity seems to be learned and practiced and then, without warning, unlearned and not utilized as we advance through life. I felt this decline in creativity might be related to the types of questions we ask at different stages of our careers.

I wondered if brainstorming and asking curious questions could “jump-start” our creative productivity?



So, in 2010 I asked my MBA students to research how our creativity scores relate to the number of questions we ask daily. For fun, they also charted how many times we laugh per day.

Here's a chart of the results, and the correlation is visually apparent.



At five years old, we ask sixty-five questions daily, most starting with "Why?" By age forty-four, we're down to just six "What?", "When?" and "How much?" questions a day.

No wonder the educator, Dr. Neal Postman, said,

**"We entered school as a question mark  
and graduated as a period."**

In retirement, the number of questions goes up again, but they tend to be “Why did I walk into this room?” and “Where are my keys?”

As children, we ask exploratory “whys.” As adults, asking “why” is usually framed in an accusatory tone, like “Why did you do that?” We spend most of our adult life just giving answers, with a few questions thrown in to sound like we are listening.

Our lifetime responses can be put into three ages:

1. The age of “Why?” Birth - 5 years old
2. The age of “Why not?” 5 - 12 years old
3. The age of “Because!” 12 - Retirement

Based on work by the oncologist Dr. Carl Simonton, who introduced the concept that our state of mind could influence our health, our laughter level follows the same curve, dropping from 113 times a day as a child to eleven times a day as a “**terminally serious**” adult.

Some of you think, “Eleven times—that’s a lot.” Many of us know people in the negative numbers on laughter. Come retirement; the laughter level thankfully rises again.

One of the reasons for these declines is that the experiences children seek out are the ones that we, as adults, avoid. Remember the old playground teeter-totter? If today’s bureaucratic organizations took the form of a teeter-totter, they’d brace it on both ends to create a level playing field. How boring. You got on the teeter-totter to experience the ups and downs.

So what can counteract this decline in creativity?

## Retirement?

Yes, I aim to teach you how to retire from challenges, take a fresh look with creative eyes, and rediscover the joy of asking questions.

We’ll also add some laughter and smiles along the way as I encourage you to break your patterns, see your blind spots, and keep your brain alive.



# Old Rules of School

Let's first, retire those old grammar school rules like:

1. There is only one right answer.
2. The teacher is always right.
3. The right answer is in the Teacher's Edition.
4. Don't pass notes.
5. The answer is not on the ceiling.



In third grade, I dreamed of finding the Teacher's Edition with all the answers. Now I know no such guide exists for adult challenges.

So, when I facilitate brainstorms, I suggest the opposite guidelines:

1. Look for the second and third right answers.
2. Challenge assumptions and accept ideas from all levels.
3. The answer this year is different.
4. Pass notes, collaborate, and appreciate diversity.
5. Look up, visualize, daydream! The questions are on the ceiling!



## Passionate Curiosity

Albert Einstein never described himself as being creative. He said he was passionately curious. We therefore dedicate this book to the passionate curiosity within each of us.

Einstein said, "If the average person were looking for a needle in the haystack, they would stop when they found the needle.

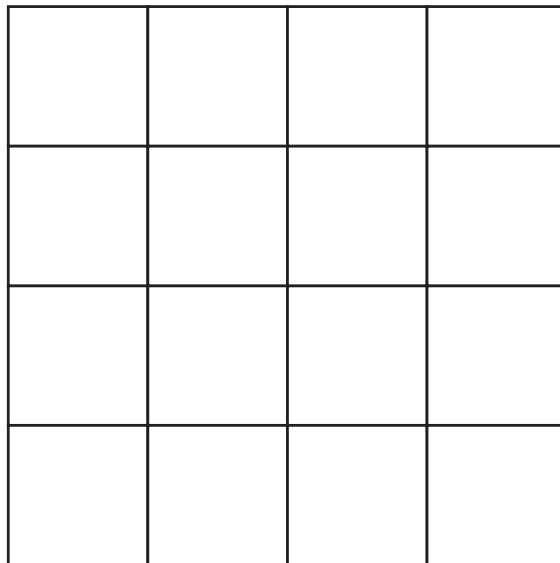


The passionately curious person would look for everything in the haystack that could act as a needle." In other words, looking for second and third right answers.

As Einstein passed out his final exam for his second-year physics class, a student said, “This is the same exam as last year.” Einstein replied, “You’re observant, but the answers are different this year.”

COVID, and social unrest, have challenged how we approach many of the practices once considered “the norm.” We need our passionate curiosity to try new things and be resilient in creating our future.

With a passionately curious mindset, I hope your creative production reengages, and the ideas flow freely. Let’s start our creative adventure with a brainstorm exercise. I want you to count the number of squares you see in the below graphic. Remember, squares have four equal sides.



Your first answer: \_\_\_\_\_

Now, look for more: \_\_\_\_\_

Look one more time: \_\_\_\_\_

Your **FINAL** answer: \_\_\_\_\_

Here’s the secret strategy to brainstorming. Always look for second and third “right” answers. Your first answer isn’t always your best solution.

If you are looking at this exercise on a digital screen, does that change the answer? Answers are on page 248, please don’t peek!



# Creating

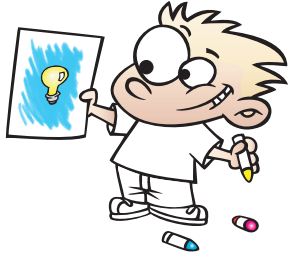
a Mindset for

# Ideas



**"The world is but a canvas to  
our imagination."**

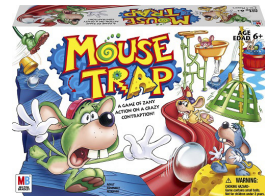
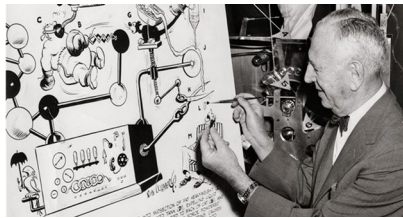
— Henry David Thoreau



My childhood dream was to be a cartoonist for Walt Disney. My inspiration came from my creative neighbor, Rube Goldberg.

Rube was a cartoonist, sculptor, engineer, and inventor (1883-1970). He created wacky, complicated contraptions that performed simple tasks like opening an umbrella, scratching someone's back, or sharpening a pencil.

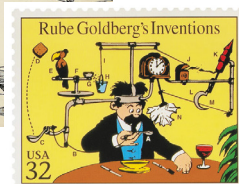
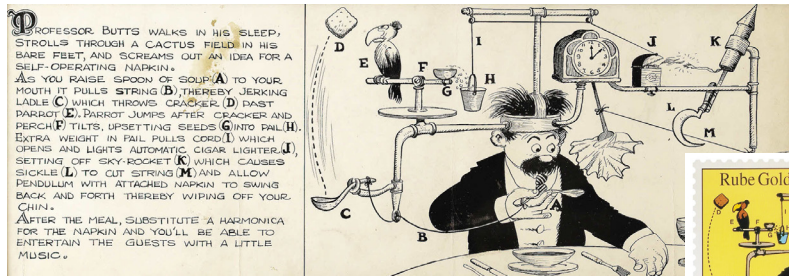
A Rube Goldberg contraption consists of a series of simple machines linked together to produce a domino effect – a series of actions in which each device triggers the next. The original goal is achieved only after many steps.



If you've played the classic "Mouse Trap" board game, you've experienced the fun of Rube's creations.

To get a sense of Rube's out-of-the-box thinking, look at his thirteen-step approach to using an ordinary table napkin titled: Self-Operating Napkin.

Drawn in 1931, this "A to M" contraption showed the untapped power of a simple napkin and was honored by a commemorative U.S. Postage Stamp.

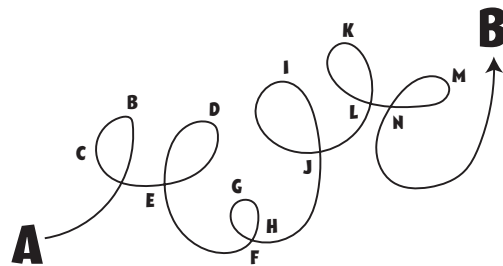


Here's a cartoon Rube drew for me when I was ten years old.

Rube taught me one incredibly insightful strategy for life. He said the average person tries to finish a task – or go from “A to B” – as fast as possible. Today, we call that “working smart.” It’s a way to think that we are in control.



Rube felt differently. He said he tried to go from “A to B” using all the letters of the alphabet. Why? Because that’s where the creativity is! Even when doing simple tasks, Rube Goldberg took the time to be curious and

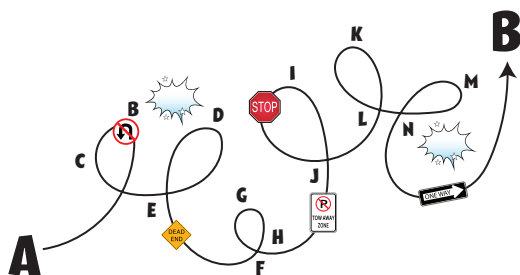


explore the unexpected events, failures, and possible detours in life. Going straight from “A to B” is called **convergent thinking**. It is fast and efficient – and great for simple analysis, drive-through waiting lines, and true/false tests. Rube’s approach of using all the letters of the alphabet is known as **divergent thinking**. It is ideal for challenges with multiple possibilities – for example, life and the pursuit of happiness.

## Creative Collisions

According to Rube, life is not a straight line. It is a zigzag road map of detours. If we are persistent, this path eventually leads us to our dreams. It helps us adapt and learn from the dead ends, U-turns, stop signs, and inevitable setbacks.



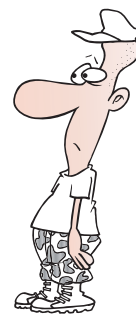


We might even welcome these detours as “blessings in disguise.” It’s the zig and the zag, the up and the down, the pothole and the pivot that open you up to what I call your moment of “**Creative Collision**” when your next opportunity shows its face.

For me, it was the late 1960’s and my college adviser recommended that I give up on my studies at the University of Delaware. Because a 1.63 GPA and working weekends/summers on the assembly line at Pepperidge Farm Bread were not preparing me to get a job at DuPont as a chemist. Everyone in my classes wanted to work for DuPont, whose headquarters was only 15 miles away from campus.

As soon as I dropped out of college, I became eligible for the military draft. The Army held a random selection draft for Vietnam using ping-pong balls with birth dates. I won the lottery with a May 17th birth date and was picked #112. The Army drafted numbers 1-122.

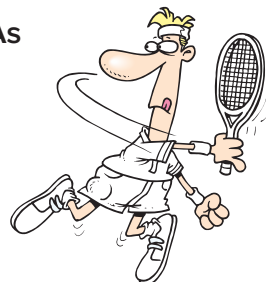
I spent weeks preparing for my transition, consoling my parents, and saying goodbye to my friends. As I stood half-naked in a military line-up in Philadelphia, a doctor came up to me and said that I failed the military physical due to my autoimmune disease and double inguinal hernias.



I’ll never forget driving back to my apartment and thinking... the Army doesn’t want me... DuPont doesn’t want me...

Delaware doesn’t want me. I needed to clear my head, so I drove to the University of Delaware tennis courts.

I got in a pick-up doubles game with some older men. As I introduced myself, I asked what everyone did. They said they worked for this new start-up on Papermill Road and had left DuPont because DuPont saw no value in their porous polytetrafluoroethylene idea. I was intrigued and kept asking more questions at every break in the game.



To my surprise, I then got invited to play with them in a weekend tennis game, and my new partner was the founder of the start-up. His name was Bill Gore. He had started W/L. Gore & Associates and their new product was called Gore-Tex.

Bill and I hit it off, and he hired me as a new product chemist. He never asked about my GPA. He just saw something in me. I think it was my curiosity. On my first day at Gore, Bill told me that my responsibility was:

**“...to come into his office every Friday with ideas for uses for Gore-Tex.”**

I was to spend my days asking questions of researchers, marketers, and future customers and compiling the possibilities. What he was asking me to do was conduct brainstorming sessions. The term “brainstorming” was rarely used back then; it was considered an advertising term.

In my second month at Gore, I had to go into the hospital for an emergency hernia operation. After several days in the hospital bed, I commented to the nurse that the mattress was warm, and I was getting a rash on my back. The nurse said that all hospital mattresses are hot because they put plastic sheeting on top of the bed to prevent body fluids from leaking into the mattress.



An idea popped into my head, Gore-Tex was smooth, slippery, breathable, and could be “hospital clean” by wiping it down with alcohol. I recommended creating a hospital bedsheet out of Gore-Tex sheeting to eliminate bedsores.

Everyone loved my prototypes and being twenty-one, I was thrilled to be able to sleep on my home waterbed for months without changing the sheets. Also, food would wipe off without a trace after late-night pizza breaks.

Unfortunately, the in-hospital test market results weren't nearly as favorable. When the patients started slipping out of bed, the test was stopped. Bill Gore then asked me one of the most memorable questions of my life:

**“We know what went wrong, but what went right with the sheet?”**

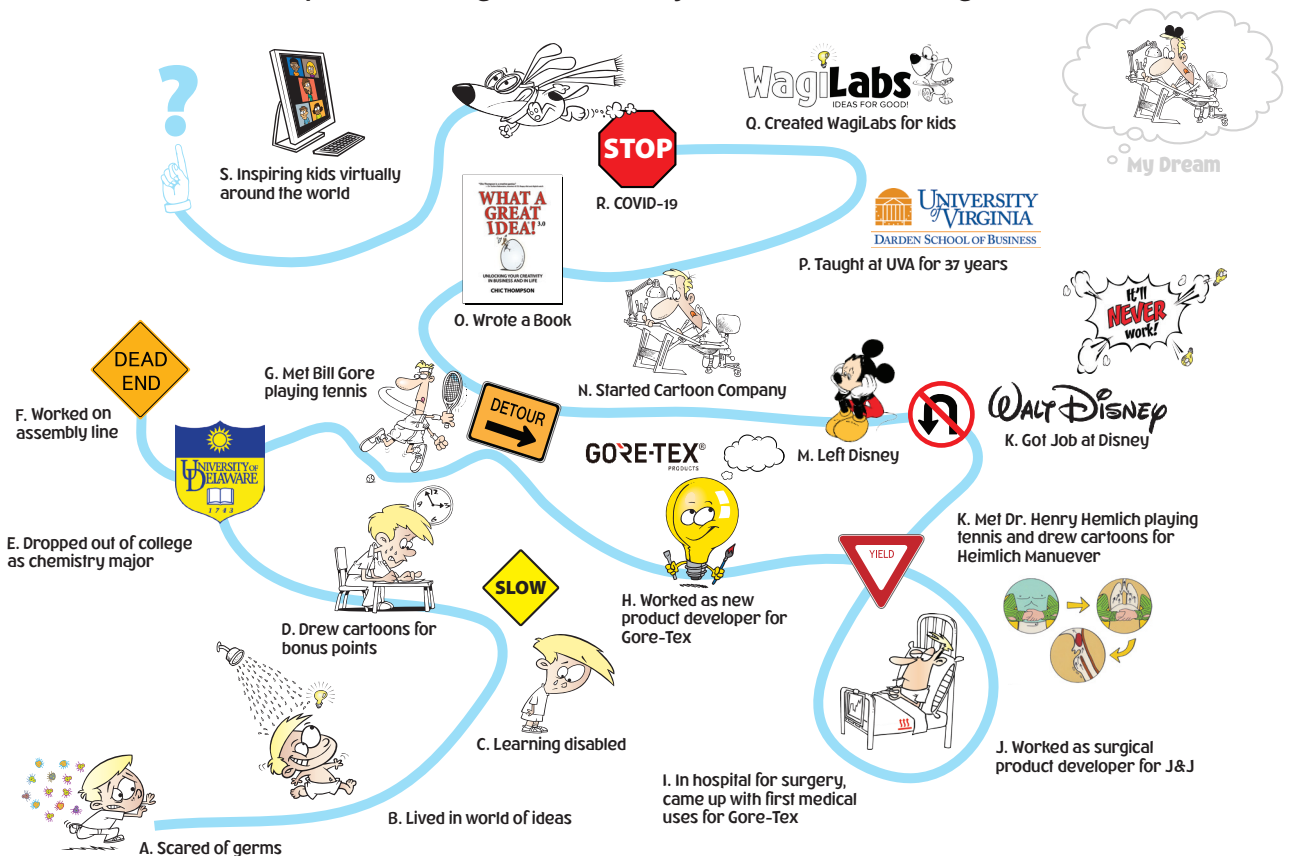


I explained that the medical staff loved the concept of Gore-Tex and had ideas for face masks, surgical gowns, and the like. Thus, my career as a new medical product developer was born. I recently heard that over a thousand medical products have a Gore-Tex component.

Twenty years ago, I was presenting a talk at a plastic surgeon's conference and told the bedsheet story. The head of a burn unit came up after my talk and proudly mentioned that his unit had just started using Gore-Tex bedsheets on the burn center beds. He said that the beds had rails on them, so slippage was not an issue and that the sheets worked fine to reduce bedsores. It took thirty years, but my first idea worked!

## Thinking like Rube

If Rube was alive today, I think he would have drawn a zigzagging contraption to help us visualize the challenges we are going through in our economy. So I decided to think like Rube and began reflecting on the detours and "pivots" that grew out of my dream of becoming a cartoonist.



Right now, it's an "A to S" adventure, and I hope I'll get to "Z" in my lifetime. If not, maybe my students will add more letters to my pathway.

As you can see on the map, I made it to Disney, which I thought was my dream, but within six months of working there, my life took a significant detour. I left to start my own cartoon company because the leaders at Disney said my ideas "would never work" at the Mouse.

Here was the problem: I wanted to create healthcare cartoons for kids and use the new distribution technology called videotape (remember, this was 1977). Unfortunately three months into my new job, I had a falling-out when I enthusiastically suggested in a brainstorm that Disney put their health education films on videotape for sale and rental to schools, health clinics and libraries.

Card Walker, the president of Disney, responded to me by saying,

**"We will never release our cartoon films on videotape.  
There's too great a danger of illegal copying."**

That same year, Disney sued Sony over the introduction of the Betamax videocassette recorder.

When I hear "never," it doesn't mean "never" it just means not now and it shows me a "blind spot" to be filled where's there's less competition and less cost of entry.



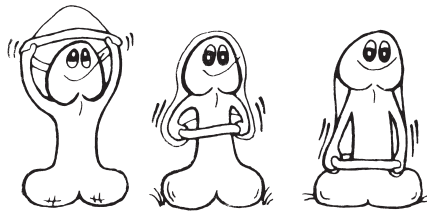
So, I took my "never" idea and left Disney to start a one-person health care cartoon company and using the new videotape distribution platform.

The first brainstorm question of my new company was: "What would Mickey never offer in health care education?"

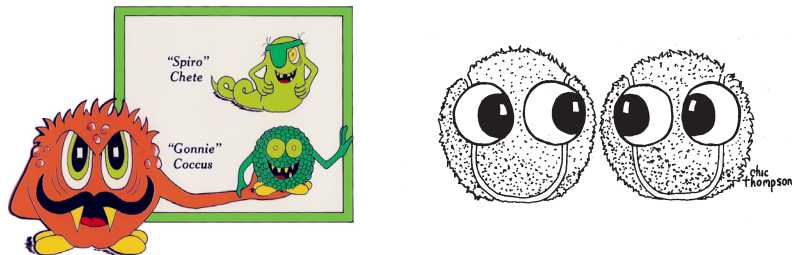
1. Mickey would never use videotape for sure...
2. Mickey would never do programs on sexually transmitted diseases... Goofy and syphilis don't go together!
3. Mickey would never wear a condom!!!
4. Mickey would never sell the programs for under \$100.

At that time, Disney charged schools and libraries \$460 for one 16 mm copy of their film like "Peter and the Wolf." All 16 mm films had a bad habit of catching on fire by overheated projectors so Disney made a lot of money repairing and/or replacing scorched films.

I took my “never” advice and my first animation meet the need of health clinics around the world. In cartoon form, I showed people how to put on a condom to prevent the spread of sexually transmitted diseases.



I called it “Peter Rises Again” and it was a global hit. It also had great dance music.

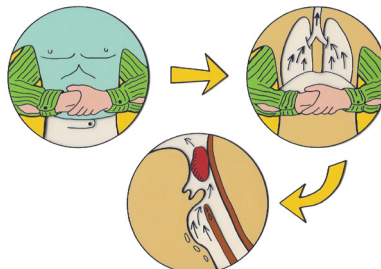
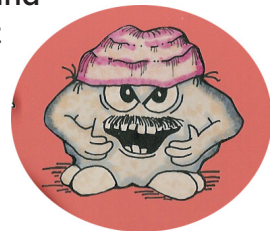


My next animation taught the world about genital herpes and was titled “Herpie: The New VD Around Town.” Another blockbuster.

Then I created the first educational film on homosexuality called “Rollin’ with Love.” It was the life of two gay tennis balls living in a tennis ball can.

My fourth release was the most impactful. It was 1981 and my health clients asked me to educate the world about this new disease called AIDS. So Andy AIDs was created to help spread the word.

My favorite doctor who believed in my cartooning was Dr. Henry Heimlich and I was able to help him prevent the world from choking on food.



As I think back, I do not doubt that my curiosity helped me discover and reveal my true passions. My persistence eventually led me to this rewarding time of my life.

I have always wanted to be a cartoonist...

1. **AND** I needed to become a scientist first, which gave me the scientific method...
2. **AND** I needed to be a new product developer, which gave me Design Thinking...
3. **AND** my fallout from Disney gave me the motivation to become an entrepreneur.

This prepared me to start my cartoon company and my latest creative adventure, WagiLabs. WagiLabs is an idea incubator for elementary school kids to generate ideas to help solve community challenges. We call them “Ideas for Good.”



My friends say I've been fortunate. I would agree. I believe in luck; the harder I work, the more chance I have.

On the next page are my guidelines for creating luck and going from “A to B” using all the letters in the alphabet.

# How to Create Luck!

Be **Curious First** and  
Critical Second!

Say, "Yes, **AND**..." vs.  
"Yes, **BUT**..."



Arrive 5 minutes early!

**BREAK** your patterns!

Introduce yourself to strangers while  
waiting in line.

Take a challenge into the  
shower with you!



Dream **BIG** and then  
over-deliver!