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ENTREPRENEURS | 8/12/2012 @ 8:59PM | 961 views

How to Solve Huge Dilemmas: The "Imagine Session"

Great business leaders often experience mindboggling dilemmas. Sitting at their desks they ponder solutions to fabulous opportunities and to complex problems needing serious attention. They may need to develop a compelling new product to win customers and beat competitors. Perhaps they need to expand globally or find and capture growth niches. Or possibly there is a need to improve productivity and efficiency to increase profits. And, of course, there will always be many trials to conquer during exasperating economic times.

What do the best and brightest entrepreneurs and managers do at such moments? How do they cope, and how do they meet challenges head on? Historically, leaders gather their senior teams to consider extraordinary situations and decide an appropriate response. It's a model that has worked for generations.

Today, however, I wish to share another powerful way to manage these unique moments. It's a model I learned from [Mr. Thomas Harrison, Chairman of Diversified Agency Services \(DAS\)](#), a division of the [Omnicom Group](#). It's called the **Imagine Session**.



Thomas L. Harrison LH.D., is the Chairman of Diversified Agency Services for the Omnicom Group.

I first saw this creative problem-solving model in action a few years ago when I was invited to a meeting on [Madison Ave.](#) to participate in an Imagine Session with seven other corporate CEOs, as part of the DAS/Omnicom universe. Each executive represented a different discipline of skill, knowledge and experience. I represented sales execution; others represented promotions, research, advertising, public relations, branding and digital communications.

We had been asked to assist another CEO in the organization with possible solutions to his problems. Our peer, unfortunately, was facing a serious decline in gross revenues, margins and profits. After listening to the issues, we spent the next six hours discussing and debating from our individual points of view the various initiatives we believed would solve the problems.

As I reflect on this remarkable event, I marvel at what I heard from this distinguished body of senior executives. Having since participated in other Imagine Sessions within my own company and with other firms in need, I have become a converted advocate to this approach to challenging business issues. I have invited Mr. Harrison to provide an overview of this valuable model:

“The idea for Imagine Sessions came to me more than three years ago when I saw that collaboration was going to become the way of the world we operate in. The uprising digital environment was making collaboration easier, and actually demanded that we improve our ability and willingness to collaborate. I became aware of the intellectual and collaborative power of Wikipedia and looked to that as a model—people adding to people’s content to make it richer and better.”

“At the same time, I saw our clients wanting us as individual companies to come together, to work together, to collaborate and generate efficiencies that we could not give as individual agencies.”

“So, I looked for the most powerful word in our English language and arrived at Imagine. It gave such possibility, such promise, and such power. Imagine ten or fifteen of our companies represented at one time in one room by their senior most talented executives, working in harmony to address a singular client challenge. It could be powerful. It exceeded the best and greatest ‘imagination’ of any participant.”

“I found that our talent actually liked and enjoyed working together. I found the insights carved out of the sessions were bigger, more relevant and most times more actionable than those any single company could find. I saw our clients were enjoying the session and I was amazed at how naturally we collaborated. I was also pleased that to hear our clients tell us this was the first time the agency insight-generating process was transparent to them, which lead to clients asking for more transparency in the agency’s thinking processes overall.”

“To date, we have orchestrated more than 165 Imagine Sessions for a range of clients representing every imaginable industry vertical and across a very broad range of brands.”

“To say they are just ‘successful’ is an understatement. We now have clients worldwide who have activated our Imagine Sessions. We have some clients for whom we have done as many as half a dozen Imagine Sessions across different brands and company divisions. These sessions are free to our clients. But free in no way mirrors the value received. If we charged, each session might cost \$50-100,000. The actual intellectual value—because of the synergies witnessed in these sessions—is far greater still. And, yes, there is significant incremental revenue to our participating companies when a client says ‘let’s move forward,’ which is more often than not.”

“What started out three years ago as an experiment in collaboration has evolved into a cultural shift in the way we go to business—much more joined

up, seamless and collaboratively valuable to our clients.”

The Imagine Session works! It's a creative and innovative model for solving big problems and responding to great opportunities. I recommend that the next time you face a challenging issue, in your company or in your department, you assemble your own version of the Imagine Session. Seek out willing executives, from other related and unrelated industries, who will spend the day with you to tackle unfathomable situations. I promise you the experience will be profound, productive and memorable.

Please share your own experiences in problem solving with me. You can contact me here or through my personal website at www.AlanEHall.com.

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