

# THE UN-COMFORT ZONE

With Robert Wilson

*Time Given to Innovation is an Investment in Your Future*

*Ideas Seldom Occur Without This Critical Commitment*

When I was studying Abnormal Psychology in college, I read a case study of an unusual mental illness. It was so fascinating, that I thought it would be the perfect vehicle for a novel. Thus my idea for a story was born, but it would be eight years before I felt that I had acquired the writing skill to turn it into a book. During those eight years, I thought of it many times, and allowed the idea to grow in my head. Then once I started writing, it took over two years to complete. My point is that an innovation, whether it is a song, electronic gadget, or a new way of doing business takes time.

It's rare that an idea drops fully formed into someone's head. Even when it seems that way there are countless hours of experience that paved the way for that idea to form. Most ideas begin with a problem that needs to be solved. Some problems are obvious and demand your immediate attention. You are forced to make the time to come up with a solution. Other times you have to seek out the problem.

Say, for example, that you need your company to make more money. Perhaps you require more money to expand, or maybe you simply must have more money to stay in business. These are certainly problems that demand a solution. However, they are not specific enough.

Here's where you begin spending some time in creative thought. Start by asking why you are not making enough money. Don't bother blaming it on the economy, that isn't going to solve your problem. Focus your attention on areas where you have control.

Ask questions such as "Do we have enough customers?" If the answer is, "Yes," then your next question may be, "How can we get

our customers to buy more?" That might lead to a product improvement, a new product development, or even a customer service idea.

If the answer is, "No," then your next question may be, "How can we get more customers?" That might lead you to a marketing or public relations solution.

Either way, you need to spend time thinking about all the factors involved. The more specifically you identify the problem, the more likely you are to solve it and come up with a winning idea.

Many people feel that time spent in creative contemplation is not time spent working. American journalist, Burton Rascoe, understood that when he said, "What no wife of a writer can ever understand is that a writer is working when he's staring out of the window." This is not just true for writers, it is true for anyone who is working on developing a new idea. Busy people are seldom innovators for the simple reason that they don't have time to think of new ideas.

Do you want everyone in your company working on the problem? Of course you do! Many great ideas emerge from the bottom of companies where the employees are working closer to the

problem. If you want your employees to come up with great ideas for your business, then you need to create a Culture of Creativity. The first step in doing that is to give your staff time to innovate. They need time for research and the collection of data. They need time for thinking, dreaming and planning.

The way to motivate innovation is to give it time. Some companies like Google give their employees 20% of their work week for creativity; 3M gives theirs 15%. Even 10% is better than none, because the time you give your employees to innovate, is time you are investing in your company's future success.

**Robert Evans Wilson, Jr.** is an author, humorist and innovation consultant. He works with companies that want to be more competitive and with people who want to think like innovators. Robert is also the author of the humorous children's book: *The Annoying Ghost Kid*. For more information on Robert, please visit [www.jumpstartyourmeeting.com](http://www.jumpstartyourmeeting.com)