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More Dots. We don't need to "be creative" and "think outside the box." We need to get outside the box.

ONE SPRING MORNING in the early 90s, my business partner found me laid out on a hospital bed with a respiratory ventilator strapped to my face. It was a fateful experience. Thankfully, it wasn't medically necessary. I placed myself in that uncomfortable position, in order to feel what our customers were feeling—it was my company's ventilator—and in an attempt to solve an intractable product performance puzzle.

After what seemed like hours of breathing, snoring, and snorting into a plastic mask, and while intently watching the changing shape of my breathing patterns on a bench oscilloscope, the answer to our design problem mysteriously appeared to me. It manifested itself as a "what if" question; one that our people fervently noodled over, experimented with and, eventually, brought to life in a very creative way.

I've often thought about that "Eureka" moment, and other sparks of inspiration I've experienced over the years. How does my mind manufacture these insights? Am I a right-brained person? And how do others like Page and Brin of Google, Starbucks' Howard Shultz, and Steve Jobs and Jeff Bezos, to name a few, come up with their breakthrough marketplace ideas, while others watch in disbelief.

Sometime around 2005, I was introduced to a theory of brain function that would answer my question, and radically change my views on both creativity and human behavior. That theory, or framework, is called memory-prediction. It was developed by Jeff Hawkins, inventor of the Palm Pilot, and described in his 2004 book *On Intelligence*:

"The brain is not a computer, supplying an output for each input it receives. Instead, it is a memory system that stores experiences in a way that reflects the true structure of the world, remembering sequences of events and their nested relationships and making predictions based on those memories. It is this memory-prediction system that forms the basis of intelligence, perception, creativity, and even consciousness."

It appears the brain works like an elaborate and evolving "connect the dots" puzzle. Adding new experiences creates new dots, which makes our mental pictures richer and more insightful. My flash of insight, therefore, was not created by switching my brain from a rational, left-sided orientation to a more intuitive, right-brained one. Instead, my new breathing experience added some critical missing dots to a partial picture; enough dots for the pattern to magically appear in my mind's eye.

In his book The Future of Capitalism, Lester Thurow wrote, " . . . [we] are about to enter a world of punctuated equilibrium—a period of economic change so dramatic and unsettling that America's middle class, as we now know it, may simply cease to exist." He concluded, " . . . business must learn to operate in a world where human capital or 'brain power' is the only strategic competitive asset."

We've entered that period. We live in that world. Yes, it's time to turn on our "brain power," but we don't need more brain*storming*. We need to turn off theories and turn on uncertainty by experiencing life firsthand. We need to spawn new patterns by creating new experiences. We need more dots.

 For the past twenty years, Tom has helped companies such as P&G, UPS, GE, and dozens of small-to-medium sized organizations and start-ups embrace change, improve their brand strategies and inspire their people. He's the author of critically acclaimed books including *A Clear Eye for Branding* and his latest, *Opportunity Screams*. Visit www.acleareye.com to learn more.