



by Michael Scott, MPA

"If you only have a
hammer, you
tend to see
every problem
as a nail."

—Abraham Maslow

The Rise of the Creative Leader

Have you ever had the experience of drawing a blank when trying to resolve a complex work issue? Do you wish that your staff offered more creative input in terms of addressing key operational issues? Are you finding new solutions in short supply?

If you can relate, then maybe a key element of your leadership arsenal has been lost. I call this losing one's "creative mojo."

The good news is that this creative spark can be reclaimed. Whether your desire is to approach a problem or challenge in an imaginative way or proactively explore new ways to enhance a current system, creativity can be the catalyst for unlocking mind patterns that hinder the free flow of productive ideas.

In fact, I'm struggling a bit with my own creativity in crafting this very column, otherwise known as writer's block. It's during

with the design concepts and eye capturing photos that are dotted throughout the pages. Never a month goes by that I fail to walk away with at least one off-the-grid idea to toggle my thinking as a result of reading this magazine from cover to cover.

OK, lest I regress, here are some thoughts to help fuel your rise as a creative leader in the food and nutrition field. I encourage you to try a few of them on for size in your quest to build an endless stream of fresh, relevant ideas for moving your professional efforts forward.

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these periods that I find it a challenge to sync my thoughts in a way that will make sense to you, the reader. Whenever faced with these sorts of blocks, I make a point of identifying new environments and experiences that jolt my brain out of its complacent pattern.

When it comes to getting your creative juices flowing, there's a great magazine that I like to recommend to every leader with whom I cross paths. It's called *Fast Company Magazine*, a publication which has been a staple in my reading stack for nearly 20 years. What I love about this magazine are the cutting edge feature stories that jump-start my brain into generating creative ideas. As a visual person, I find myself particularly enamored

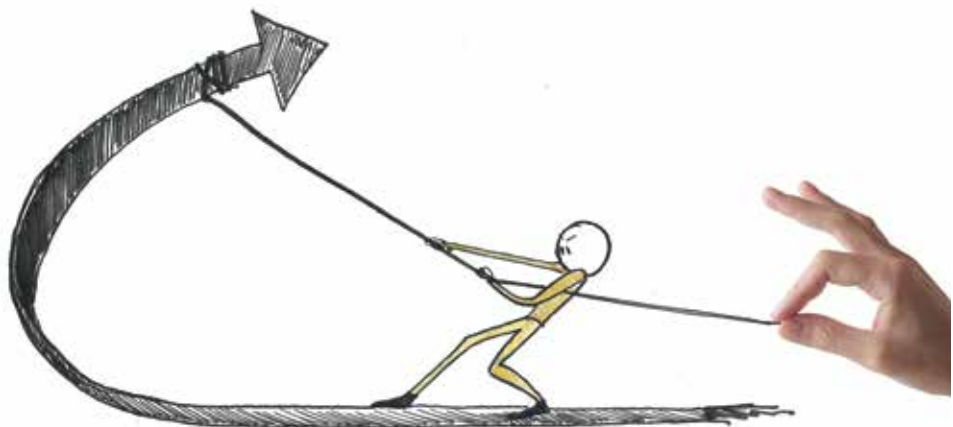


So here goes...

1. Creativity is a team sport.

It's important to keep in mind that great leaders are facilitators of creative ideas as opposed to generators. This underscores the importance of cultivating a workplace culture where your staff and professional colleagues are encouraged to share ideas that you, in return, acknowledge them for. So the next time a problem crops up with some aspect of your foodservice operation, tap into the creative capital of your team. I bet you'll be pleasantly surprised at what they come up with.

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2. Ideas flow in varied environments.

Many of us know that a morning shower or even an afternoon jog can serve as a breeding ground for creative ideas and inspiration. This is because a shift in venue often, allows a person to reconnect with their subconscious. Maybe it's time to get out of your stuffy office and meet with your managers offsite. Varying your environment often can reap untold ideas that have long been stagnated among your team.

3. We're all leaders.

One characteristic of creative leaders is that they find ways to become more in-tune with human behavior. For in the end, creative leadership is ultimately predicated on the idea that all staff are in a sense leaders in their own right.

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Stretch your leadership capacity by doing some research. Visit another reputable foodservice operation to examine their system for delivering excellent service or methods for rapid food delivery.

4. Don't be afraid to challenge the norm.

As a leader, why not cast yourself as an iconoclast, one who challenges traditional thinking and upsets conventional notions. Like many fields, food and nutrition professionals can become rote to the point where the same practices and course of action are adhered to year in and year out. So don't be afraid to shake up the commonly accepted norm. Ideas that ensue from this can be the catalyst for greatness.

5. Cast a wide net for ideas.

One thing that I found a bit boring about my time in health-care administration is that most leaders in the field would exclusively seek out ideas from others in health care. I always thought this was shortsighted and unimaginative. I suggest stretching a bit in your leadership capacity. Maybe you visit the foodservice operation at a Ritz-Carlton to examine their stellar reputation in terms of service excellence. Or even a fast food chain to explore the systems they have in place for rapid delivery of food. Look for ideas in uncommon places for it will expand your bandwidth of possibilities.

SUMMING IT UP

Unleashing creative ideas is the key to accelerating your productive potential as a food and nutrition leader. By building upon these tools, you'll find untold success in rising to the top of your profession. ☺

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