



INNOVATION COACHING

The Manager as Idea Midwife

by Mitchell Ditkoff

Sixteen years ago, in the middle of a work day, I got a call from my wife. Before she uttered a single word I could tell that she was completely out of breath – as if something either really good or really bad had just happened.

"It's Barbara!" she gasped, "She's... in labor... Steve's in Boston...You...have to go... now! She's all alone!"

It didn't matter that Steve had gone to Lamaze classes for three months. It didn't matter that he'd read all the birthing books. At this moment, Mr. Father-to-Be was 400 miles away, his wife was in labor, and I, Mr.

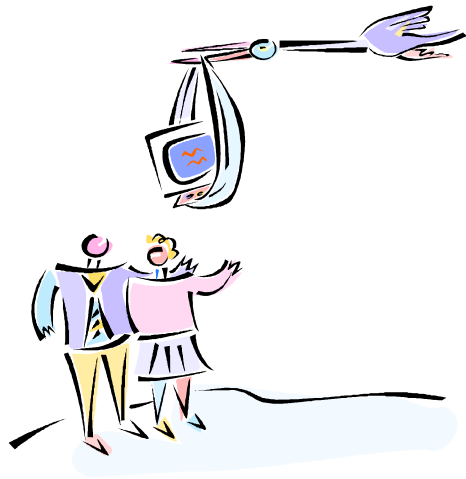


Never-Having-Seen-a-Baby-Born, had just been drafted to be his surrogate. Dropping everything, I sprinted the eight blocks to Barbara's house where I proceeded to spend the next five hours timing her contractions, answering the phone, and asking if it was time to go to the hospital. My role was simple: to let my responses take shape around her very primal need to give birth.

Metaphorically speaking, this is a challenge we all face. It doesn't matter what our jobs, genders or astrological signs are – everyday we find ourselves surrounded by others who need our committed support. Everyday we find ourselves in situations in which we're being asked to give more than we're accustomed to. In Barbara's case, it was obvious what needed to be done. But what about the less obvious situations – the times when it's not a baby being born, but something less palpable? Like an idea, for instance...

You may laugh at the comparison, but still the fact remains that ideas are one of the most powerful forces on Earth and – just like babies –are also the product of conception. (Hey, that's why ideas are called "concepts!") Ideas, in fact, are the seeds

from which everything we create emerges. First there is the thought. Then there is the manifestation. It's universal law. Every invention, song, service, product, business, book, or breakthrough begins with an idea. The telephone? An idea. Banking? An idea. The bagel? An idea. Potato chips? Chocolate chips? Computer chips? All ideas. All got their start in the fevered mind of someone on fire with a new possibility.



Do we care any less about the birth of a baby because 50 million have already been born that year? Of course not. Neither should we care any less about the birth of an idea – especially one whose conceiver has majorly bonded with. Who knows what its future holds? Who knows what impact it might have? That "hare brained" thought you had yesterday for a new business? That "weird notion" you had last week for a better

way of marketing your services...or producing food....or teaching the deaf...or ending world hunger? Any one of them has the potential to grow up and stand on their own two feet. And not just for you, but for the thousands of others "out there" likely to benefit from your idea's long delayed appearance in the world.

How many inspired ideas have you ignored this year? Last year? Since you were born? Thousands, probably. Imagine what might have happened, at the time of your idea's conception, if you had a committed coach available to you – someone willing and able to help you through the birthing process? An "idea midwife" of sorts.

Innovation coaching is the art of midwiving ideas in today's nanosecond marketplace. And it is, arguably, the most important skill a business leader can learn. Why? Because ideas drive business! No ideas, no innovation. No innovation, no response to customer needs. No anticipating customer needs, no conceiving what your customers can't even imagine they want.

You want it simpler? In today's flattened, restructured, downsized organization, your role is much more than getting the best out of people – it's getting the best out of the best part of people – and that best part is their inspired imagination – their ability to dream.... conjure... and conceive – then transform their inspired ideas into the products, services and improvements that will not only keep your business humming, but make the world an even better place for all of us to live.

*"Our best ideas
come from clerks &
stock boys."*

SAM WALTON

*This article is excerpted from **BANKING ON INNOVATION**, a 172-page workbook that accompanies Idea Champions' 2-day creative thinking training.
Log onto www.ideachampions.com/banking_on_innovation.shtml for more info.*

Copyright © 2006 Idea Champions, Inc.
800-755-IDEA, www.ideachampions.com