



# PATTERNS 'R US

## Making Sense Out of Nonsense

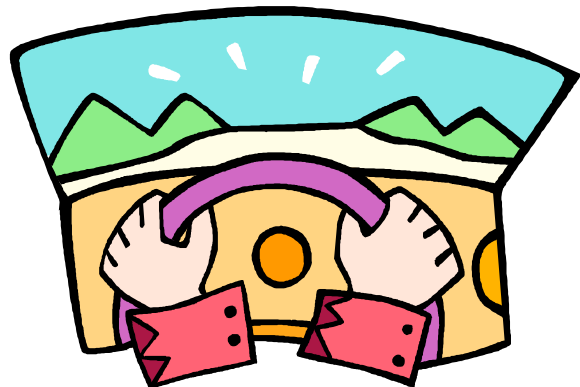
by Mitchell Ditkoff

C\_n y\_\_ r\_ad th\_\_ se\_t\_nc\_ ?

Probably.

And do you know *why* you can? Because you've been given just enough information to deduce a meaning. Your brain, drawing on past experiences of letters, words and sentences, recognizes a pattern – or at least *thinks* it does.

Human beings are masters at “filling in the blanks.” We see something, compare it to our storehouse of past memories, reach a conclusion and then act on it. This pattern-recognizing ability of our brain is very useful tool. It saves us time, lets us to make decisions on the fly and helps us interpret our world. For example, when driving up a hill, your **PATTERN RECOGNITION ABILITY** allows you to *keep on* driving rather than stop your car to make sure the road continues on the other side. Past experience has taught you that *roads continue*, even when you can't see where they're going.



True. *But not always.* After an earthquake, for example, some roads *do not* continue. In that case, it would not serve you to keep on driving. A routine habit that had saved you time in the past might now lead to your quick demise. (Bye bye car payments. Bye bye world). Indeed, more than a few patterns that we live our lives by turn out, in the end, to seriously mislead us. Stereotyping is the most obvious manifestation of this

phenomenon, causing us to jump to conclusions. But our conclusions are not always true. In our hurry to make sense of the world, we prematurely “fill in the blanks,” trading in reality for reactivity. The past, instead of serving us, becomes our ruler.

Patterns are neither good nor bad. They're simply the raw material from which we interpret our world. Weathermen make their living interpreting patterns. So do stock market analysts, futurists, and astrologers. All of them infer a future based on past trends. Sometimes, however, they misinterpret the clues. Or *even more insidiously, cannot detect new patterns* inconsistent with their present worldview.

If you want to be more creative, start making a commitment to look for, learn from, and **CHALLENGE** existing patterns. It will help you see the world (and all your problems) in wonderful, new ways – the fertile ground from which all innovation springs.

- ✚ **WHAT PATTERNS OR TRENDS INTRIGUE YOU?**
- ✚ **WHAT CAN YOU LEARN FROM THESE PATTERNS?**
- ✚ **WHAT IDEAS FOR A NEW PRODUCT OR SERVICE CAN YOU CONCEIVE BY NOTICING AN EMERGING PATTERN?**

*"A genius is only that one who discerns the pattern of things within the confusion of details a little sooner than the average person."*

**BEN SHAHN**

*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](http://www.ideachampions.com/banking_on_innovation.shtml) for more info.*