

Six Ways to Get out of a Rut



By Paul Lemberg

They say a rut is a shallow grave with two open ends. The good news is that the ends *are* open, which means you can get out of it.

How do we get into these ruts in the first place? Who would voluntarily lie down in that grave, shallow or otherwise? Dr. Edward Debono suggests that thoughts are pathways “etched” in our brains as electrical connections that get strengthened each time we think them, thus limiting our mental options. Repeating your thoughts and actions a few times all but insures you’ll repeat them indefinitely unless you take deliberate — possibly disruptive — action to do otherwise.

Dissipated energy is one of the reasons we lie down in that rut in the first place.

Here are six rut busters you can apply to put yourself and your organization on a new path.

1. Shift your mindset from self to other. Put yourself in the mind of your clients, your customers, the people for whom you provide services. Who are these people? What are they concerned about? What are they trying to accomplish? If you were in their shoes, what would you like your organization to do? What new programs would excite you?

2. Revisit your vision. Do two things. Make sure your vision still inspires you. Then check that it’s

pointing you in the direction you want to go. Once you’re sure, put pen to paper and rewrite your vision statement. Not just once, but over and over. Keep writing till you can’t write anymore because you’re so excited about a new idea that you must do something about it right away.

3. Conduct a survey. If you don’t know what to do next, ask your clients. Ask what’s bothering them. Ask what they’re stuck on. Ask what they like about your organization and what they’d like you to do next. Ask them about new features, new products, or new services. A good way to receive stimulating input is to conduct a survey online. Write an attractive search engine ad, promise something of value, and drive people to a survey page. Ask them anything you like; the answers will almost always

provide you with a neat mind-shift.

4. Focus on building your strengths, and dump your weaknesses. From the time we're children, we're taught to better ourselves by working on our weaknesses. This is often both frustrating and fruitless, and certainly not as much fun as practicing our strengths. Try this on: What if you focused 100% of your energy on being world-class in those few things at which you're already very good, and outsourced those things at which you're mediocre? Imagine if you never had to face any of those things again and could spend all your time doing the good stuff. Would that change the way you felt about your work? Would that bust you out of your rut?

5. Ask not if, but how. Think of

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that wild and crazy idea you had recently. The one where you said to yourself, "That would be great, but there's just no way." Well, what if there *were* a way? What would it be? Answer that question as if you believed it was possible — probable even — and then get busy making it real. That's power — turning your vision into reality. Talk about a breakthrough!

6. Ask yourself what you're willing to sacrifice. Some important things are more important than other important things, and trying to keep all those plates spinning in the air saps your vigor for the ones that truly matter. Dissipated energy is one of the reasons we lie down in that rut in the first place, and dropping a few of those plates can really help things break loose. So let go. Make the sacrifice. Give

up some of those precious things you've been holding on to. Focus your vitality on plans which will really rock your world. ■

Resources

Eadie, Douglas, "Master Change, Or Change Will Master You," *Nonprofit World*, Vol. 14, No. 4.

Jenson, Donna, "Sharing the Vision: Every Leader's Obligation," *Nonprofit World*, Vol. 8, No. 5.

Lemberg, Paul, "If You're Not Growing, You're Dying," *Nonprofit World*, Vol. 22, No. 5.

These resources are available at www.snpo.org/members.

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