

Who is your Competition?

Dr. Y. L. R. Moorthi

This is an article written some years ago by Dr. Y. L. R. Moorthi but is relevant all the more today. Some of the things mentioned may sound dated because of rapid advancement of technology which only goes to prove that Moorthi is right.

Who sells the largest number of cameras in India? Your guess is likely to be Sony, Canon or Nikon. Answer is none of the above. The winner is Nokia whose main line of business in India is not cameras but cell phones. Reason being cameras bundled with cellphones are outselling stand-alone cameras. Now, what prevents the cellphone from replacing the camera outright? Nothing at all! One can only hope the Sonys and Canons are taking note.

Try this. Who is the biggest in music business in India? You think it is HMV Sa-Re-Ga-Ma? Sorry. The answer is Airtel. By selling caller tunes (that play for 30 seconds) Airtel makes more than what music companies make by selling music albums (that run for hours).

Incidentally Airtel is not in music business. It is the mobile service provider with the largest subscriber base in India. That sort of competitor is difficult to detect, even more difficult to beat (by the time you have identified him he has already gone past you). But if you imagine that Nokia and Bharti (Airtel's parent) are breathing easy you can't be farther from truth.

Nokia confessed that they all but missed the smartphone bus. They admit that Apple's iPhone and Google's Android can make life difficult in future. But you never thought Google was a mobile company, did you? If these illustrations mean anything, there is a bigger game unfolding. It is not so much about mobile or music or camera or emails?

The "Mahabharat" (the great Indian epic battle) is about "what is tomorrow's personal digital device"? Will it be a souped up mobile or a palmtop with a telephone? All these are little wars that add up to that big battle. Hiding behind all these wars is a gem of a question "who is my competitor?"

Once in a while, to intrigue my students I toss a question at them. It says "What Apple did to Sony, Sony did to Kodak, explain?" The smart ones get the answer almost immediately. Sony defined its market as audio (music from the Walkman). They never expected an IT company like Apple to encroach into their audio domain. Come to think of it, is it really surprising? Apple as a computer maker has both audio and video capabilities. So what made Sony think it won't compete on pure audio? "Elementary Watson!"



So also Kodak defined its business as film cameras, Sony defines its businesses as "digital." In digital camera the two markets perfectly meshed. Kodak was torn between going digital and sacrificing money on camera film or staying with films and getting left behind in digital technology. Left undecided it lost in both. It had to. It did not ask the question "who is my competitor for tomorrow?"

The same was true for IBM whose mainframe revenue prevented it from seeing the PC. The same was true of Bill Gates who declared, "Internet is a fad!" and then turned around to bundle the browser with Windows to bury Netscape. The point is not who is today's competitor. Today's competitor is obvious. Tomorrow's is not.

In 2008, who was the toughest competitor to British Airways in India? Singapore Airlines? Better still, Indian airlines? Maybe, but there are better answers. There are competitors that can hurt all these airlines and others not mentioned. The answer is videoconferencing and tele-presence services of HP and Cisco. Travel dropped due to recession. Senior IT executives in India and abroad were compelled by their headquarters to use videoconferencing to shrink travel budget. So much so, that the mad scramble for American visas from Indian techies was nowhere in sight in 2008. (India has a quota of something like

65,000 visas to the U.S. They were going a-begging. Blame it on recession!). So far so good! But to think that the airlines will be back in business post-recession is something I would not bet on. In short term, yes. In long term a resounding, no.

Remember, if there is one place where Newton's law of gravity is applicable besides Physics it is in electronic hardware. Between 1977 and 1991 the prices of the now dead VCR (parent of Blue-Ray disc player) crashed to one-third of its original level in India. PC's price dropped from hundreds of thousands of rupees to tens of thousands. If this trend repeats then tele-presence prices will also crash. Imagine the fate of airlines then. As it is not many are making money. Then it will surely be RIP!

India has two passions. Films and cricket. The two markets were distinctly different. So were the icons. The cricket gods were Sachin and Sehwag. The 'filmi' gods were the Khans (Aamir Khan, Shah Rukh Khan and the other Khans who followed suit). That was, when cricket was fundamentally

test cricket or at best 50 over cricket. Then came IPL and the two markets collapsed into one. IPL brought cricket down to 20 overs. Suddenly an IPL match was reduced to the length of a 3 hour movie. Cricket became film's competitor.

On the eve of IPL matches movie halls ran empty. Desperate multiplex owners requisitioned the rights for screening IPL matches at movie halls to hang on to the audience. If IPL were to become the mainstay of cricket, as it is likely to be, films have to sequence their releases so as not clash with IPL matches. As far as the audience is concerned both are what in India are called 3-hour "tamasha" (entertainment). Cricket season might push films out of the market.

Look at the products that vanished from India in the last 20 years. When did you last see a black

and white movie? When did you last use a fountain pen? When did you last type on a typewriter? The answer for all the above is "I don't remember!" For some time there was a mild substitute for the typewriter called electronic typewriter that had limited memory. Then came the computer and mowed them all. Today most technologically challenged guys like me use the computer as an upgraded typewriter. Typewriters per se are nowhere to be seen.

One last illustration. 20 years back what were Indians using to wake them up in the morning? The answer is "alarm clock." The alarm clock was a monster made of mechanical springs. It had to be physically keyed every day to keep it running. It made so much noise by way of alarm, that it woke

you up and the rest of the colony. Then came quartz clocks which were sleeker. They were much more gentle though still quaintly called "alarms." What do we use today for waking up in the morning? Cellphone! An entire industry of clocks disappeared without warning thanks to cell phones. Big watch

companies like Titan were the losers. You never know in which bush your competitor is hiding!

On a lighter vein, who are the competitors for authors? Joke spewing machines? (Steve Wozniak, the co-founder of Apple, himself a Pole, tagged a Polish joke telling machine to a telephone much to the mirth of Silicon Valley). Or will the competition be story telling robots? Future is scary!

The boss of an IT company once said something interesting about the animal called 'competition'. He said "Have breakfast or be breakfast!" That sums it up rather neatly. ■

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Mindful Innovation

Ron Schultz

In our continuing attempt to Create Good Work, to find socially innovative solutions that can be turned into work that benefits those in need, cultivating mindfulness—an ability to be open to the new—has become a critical element.

A decade ago, I co-authored a book with Paul Nakai called "The Mindful Corporation." In it, I offered that the opposite of being mindful was being mind-filled. In a state of mind-filledness, there is no room for anything new to enter.

The paradoxical response people often have to this condition is often to distract themselves even more, with music, food, movies, the Internet, etc. When looked at from this perspective, it's easy to think this additional informational input would only exacerbate the condition — and guess what? It does.

The more distractions you add to your mind, the less mindful you are and the more mind-filled you become. I would think at this point it would be fairly obvious why people might experience overload: There's simply no more room. Clamor and clutter distract. Within today's complex work environments, as well as simply staying abreast of what's going on in the world round us, we make a choice every moment — be here or be someplace else. And overwhelmingly we choose to be someplace else.

Try the Mindfulness Test

Don't believe me; try it for yourself. Try to sit still for five minutes without distracting yourself with something else. That includes telling yourself a story, making lists about what you have to accomplish, what you need at the store, how many cracks are on the floor, what sports event you want to watch, taking the wash out of the dryer — no entertainment. Okay, that last one isn't very entertaining — but it could be, especially if you're trying to be aware of all your other distractions. Even reading this blog is a means of distraction — but don't stop reading yet.

The overfull mind misses much. Why should you care if you are mind-filled or mindful? Let's take your ability to pick up cues within the environment in which you are operating.

Picking up the Cues

Cues point in the direction of something new about to emerge. They can show up as physical evidence, a sensation or an intuitive awareness, an expectant feeling you might get walking into a crowded room. If your mind were filled, any new information that might emerge probably would not register as more than background noise.



Now, let's extend the notion of picking up cues as the precursor to actually recognizing something emerge, as it emerges, rather than trying to track it down after the fact amid all the muddle and debris.

This is something akin to trying to figure-out a whodunit mystery in real time. Miss a cue and the mystery remains unsolved. If you aren't able to be present enough to see and feel the environment with a mind not filled by other distractions and junk, you'll invariably be surprised when you discover it was Professor Plum in the conservatory with the iPad. "Oh, that's who did it!" — after the fact.

Picking up on Innovation

In a business context, this is the ability to move toward recognizing an innovative idea rather than looking back and trying to figure out what just happened. Within the CSR context, if others are spending time looking back at what took place in the past and you're moving toward new solutions, who's benefitting more people?

Clear mental clutter and see what springs up. The ability to become more mindful and make space in your mind allows another profound occurrence to take place. The more you practice mindfulness, the less you become fixated on your own ideas, locked-in by your own biases. Being free from fixed ideas allows you to be more comfortable sitting with a blank canvas.

This is the open space upon which the opportunity for real innovation, something truly new and now, can emerge.

Practice, Practice

Mindfulness is not something that is simply learned. It is a practice and requires practice. One well-known technique for developing mindfulness is meditation: the act of stabilizing the mind. This is not about learning to stop your thinking, as some mistakenly purport. Rather it is about being able to watch your thoughts without holding on to any of them.

One metaphor describing the relationship between meditation and thought is that you are a mountain and your thoughts are like clouds floating by. You have no means to jump on one of the clouds or pack it away for later. It just moves on by.

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Let Go of the Clutter

Once you have received initial instruction in how to meditate, it takes practice to begin letting go of the clutter you've amassed. Mind-filled hoarding is no less an issue than hoarding material stuff in your own home. But by learning to clear some of that out, you actually discover you've created more space.

And by being able to sit within that space and not freak out because you've gotten rid of the comfort of the clutter, something rather remarkable begins to take place. Clarity begins to emerge.

When you can be comfortable simply sitting in the space of your mind while interacting with others, a variety of incredibly beneficial things take place. One is that when something emerges out of that interaction with others, it becomes evident to you and not lost amid the stacks of old New Yorkers you've carefully stored in the corner.

Six Steps to Spotting Cues

A clear mind spots clues and cues. This ability to cue-spot, as I call it, and capture what emerges within a collaborative interaction actually requires more than just a mindful space. There are six steps within this process.

1. **Mindfulness:** Returning focus to the topic at hand without clinging to thoughts
2. **Awareness:** Recognizing you have been pulled away from the interaction.
3. **Listening:** Hearing what is being said within all segments of the environment, both inner-personal and inter-personal.
4. **Offering:** Trusting what is known and to capture and present what has emerged.
5. **Furthering:** Reapplying what has emerged to deepen the conversation and afford the next level of emergence.
6. **Discovery:** Identifying novelty as it emerges.

Cultivate your Mindfulness

Being able to capture these innovative moments, however, begins with an ability to cultivate mindfulness. It takes a willingness to not be stuck in our fixed ideas about the world we encounter. Fostering this in our workforce and with those we serve opens the door to social innovations coming to the front of the pack, not lost in the noise. At that point of discovery, they can be nurtured, developed and actualized. The critical factor is having the space to know they are there in the first place.

If the goal is to be of benefit to others, sitting down and shutting up can be a great place to start. ■

Ron Schultz is the founder and President of Entrepreneurs4Change, working with green and social innovators, veterans, and marginalized communities providing entrepreneurial education, access to funding and capital, and ongoing nurturing and support for the businesses once they are operating.

Credits: <http://www.csrwire.com/blog/bloggers/130-ron-schultz/posts>

The Cars People drove 100 Years Ago!

These cars start from the very first official automobile in the 19th century, and proceeds into the early morning of the 20th. Looking at these, it's hard not to appreciate the workmanship and class that went into these first vehicles, treasured as they were as the height of technology at the time.



1888 Benz

The Benz Patent Motor Car is considered to be the world's first automobile.



1887 Coventry Daimler



1900 Napier



1901 Columbia



1901 De Dion Bouton



1902 De Dietrich

... and the Cars People Drive Today



No Steering Wheel

No Pedals either



Staying Mindful

Elisheva Wexler

How do you actually take that great idea for a business you always had and make it a reality? Furthermore, how do you make sure the business you're building is a mindful one?

When I took the seeds of an idea I had over a year ago and actually put them into action, I wanted to create a mindful startup. Fazed by the countless articles out there that claim to show you the “the top 10 secrets to starting a successful company,” I turned to Jon Kabat Zinn's book, 'Full Catastrophe Living'.

While his publication focuses on mindfulness methods to zap stress, pain, and illness, these practical tips also proved to be apt guidelines on how to mindfully take my idea from inception to realization. I derived the following seven tools from the precepts within:

TRUST

To create 'Junga World', an animated rock band, I faced the daunting reality that I had no previous experience with animation, kids media, or music. I did know that I wanted to teach compassion and acceptance and I wanted to teach it to kids through music and entertainment. So in the midst of self-doubt and fear of the unknown, I trusted my intuition and passion and moved forward with my goal.

NON-JUDGING

As any fledgling entrepreneur knows, you become your own lawyer, accountant, assistant, and web developer because you can't afford to hire professionals. Writing the operating agreement and studying HTML, I faced steep and frustrating learning curves. On a daily (and sometimes hourly) basis, I stepped back and simply witnessed these feelings of frustration and ineptitude, letting them be until they passed on by.

ACCEPTANCE

Initially, I put all my metaphorical eggs (and literal money) in one basket, creating a three-minute Junga World music video. However, I underestimated the astronomical expense of animation, lighting, compositing, and rendering. So what did I do when faced with this setback? I practiced acceptance. Do I like making mistakes? I hate it. Could I accept that none of us are perfect (and wouldn't the world be boring if we were)? That, I could do.

PATIENCE

Once confronted with the realization that my goal of creating an animated music video with a minimal budget and no directing experience was unlikely to yield a high-quality product, I panicked. My frustration and desperation precluded creative inspiration. I understood that it was better to take my time to regroup and gather fresh creative energy than to hastily throw together a new project. It took three months before I was ready to start over.

BEGINNER'S MIND

To figure out the next move, I tried to look at the project as if I were a separate person who didn't have her finances and preconceived opinions on the line. I became my own outside consultant. With fresh eyes, my team devised a financially feasible strategy: create a short, fun one-minute trailer that introduced the characters in a way that highlighted their personalities and passions.

NON-STRIVING

Like most meaningful and satisfying pursuits, startups are risky and take an immense amount of work. It is easy to get sucked into blind ambition and tunnel vision. When I felt overwhelmed with my 'to do list', I would remember to be present for the process. If I chose to spend my life caught in the trap of “if, then” (if it is a huge success, then I will be happy) I would miss being present for the process, and it is all process.

LETTING GO

As a typical business school graduate, I tried to project and calculate every possible outcome and anticipate every challenge. As a mindfulness practitioner, I knew that I ultimately didn't have final control. I practiced letting go by taking deep breaths, experiencing the nervous energy and tension of anxiety, and slowly allowing my muscles and mind to relax. By letting go of the fear, I was able to remember that no extrinsic circumstances would ever undermine my inherent value and that the true barometers of success are ultimately my personal growth and intrinsic happiness. ■

Elisheva Wexler graduated from the Wharton School of Business and has worked in real estate development, investment banking, and venture capital. She recently launched 'Junga World', a children's media and entertainment company.