

Creation begins with destruction, or at least, with disruption. If we build something new, it requires that we reshape what was. An extension to a house requires that we disturb, disrupt or destroy the house as it was. Renovation entails disruption of current living space and a loss of comfort. To develop a new idea requires some reconfiguration (disruption) of old ideas, mindsets, perspectives and paradigms. Evidently all innovations and creations are not created equal. Some will be more disruptive than others.

The box of old thinking has been either damaged or destroyed by the disruption of the economy. And that is the opportunity that is staring us in the face. Boxes contain and constrain, and for too long our collective minds have been constrained or constricted by the boxes of history and experience, oil, gas, tax holidays and government incentives. Let us celebrate the fact that the box is no more. The box is gone; now let us look for the gift that came in it.

There is an old Native American proverb that states "Every problem brings with it a gift". Often the gift is the opportunity to innovate and create. As we make a decision to change a ceiling, the disruption is an opening to what is new. The disruption creates an opportunity to change the electrical wiring and install new fixtures. When that is done, and the floor is a mess, we may well decide to redo the floor. That done, we may as well repair the walls and before we know it, the

disruption of the ceiling has been transformed into a journey to more expansive innovation and creation.

Today, the box is gone; the door is open to what is new! But opportunity is not enough.

Trini culture celebrates our native creativity. We talk all the time about our ability to be creative with our music, our food, our Carnival and our sense of humour. And we might very well be right. But if we examine how we manage our creative spirit and our ability to innovate, we will see a deeply embedded cycle of creativity for consumption.

While acknowledging that there are exceptions, the majority of our creativity dies on the altar of enjoyment and consumption. Our music (such as it is) is ritually enjoyed and discarded on a seasonal or annual basis. Our Carnival costumes similarly are enjoyed and discarded even before the end of the day's festivities. Our steelband and our food suffer a similar fate. And these are often touted as some of the iconic expressions of our creativity. From creation to consumption.

The moment someone in the USA threatens to "patent pan" or when the issue of "costumes made in China" hits the headlines, our collective anger is aroused. We had been doing these things for years! But we did not extend the process beyond its initial narrow confines. Why did we not seek to move our creations from idea to innovation (with room for some enjoyable consumption), from innovation to prototype, from prototype to

production and from production to market? How come we did not look up and out, beyond the moment and the limiting national or regional space? We had been too busy enjoying and consuming what we had so artfully created. Notice that the Jamaican experience with Reggae music is quite different from ours. Music enjoyed, and on to production and to a world market.

If we are to take advantage of the gift that has come with the current economic and social disruption, our native creativity must be harnessed and combined with a driving business focus and a global vision of possibility.

Business leaders need to acknowledge and celebrate the fact that employees are a vast pool of creative impulses and ideas. If you think they are not, get a glimpse of them in their private and personal lives away from work. This pool is not to be exploited and expended but leveraged for collective organisational growth and success and national development. Employees sit every day and talk about what can be done differently. Their experiences and perspectives allow them to see what leaders do not and cannot see. It is this very diversity of views and perspectives that is the seed of economic diversification. There is always the potential to discover the new product idea, the different production process, an unseen market, the "mistake" that might have some economic value or alternative use.

But no one asked, no one is listening, so they keep their ideas, in silence. They leave your employ with gold, undiscovered, unrefined. It has been said that the tragedy in life is not that we die, but what dies inside us while we live. Our work over the years provides many examples of ideas that died from being ignored and others that found life in the fertile ground of listening leaders.

Leaders' openness to this notion requires that they remove the mental "box" that prevents them from valuing this asset. In today's open, box-less context, leaders must learn to see employees through new lenses and to engage them differently.

Leadership language must be the language of possibility. Leadership approaches and responses must reflect respect, curiosity and interest, questioning and a search for deeper insight. Leaders need to create a workspace that celebrates and encourages the natural "explorer", that person who asks questions and wants to know how, why and what if. Leaders need to welcome the "artist" in our people, the person who crafts something from the stuff that the explorer has surfaced. Leaders need to allow "explorer" and "artist" the room to table and express ideas and options. Remove the box, discover the gifts.

But leaders need to move things beyond the explorer and artist; they will create, celebrate and consume. They will then go about the business of creating and consuming all over again.

The global vision and the drive for business success must guide leaders to invite the "judge" into the space. The judge is the one to do the assessments, feasibilities and planning. When it makes sound business sense with some risk, the "warrior" has to execute boldly, moving to implementation, production and to market. This is how we can create, innovate and diversify.

The pool of native employee creativity is there if leaders are bold enough to go fishing in deep unexplored water. But leaders must discard and destroy the mental boxes that limit possibility and success. The tools and techniques are available and can be learned.

Creation begins with disruption. The moment is now.

Authored by: L. Anthony Watkins

Published: TTMA Manufacturers' Digest 2016