

# MUSTARD

## DOESN'T GO

# ON CORN!

HOW RESPECT, OPENNESS, AND A SIMPLE PROCESS  
FOR IDEAS CAN BUILD A GREAT FAMILY

RICHARD TROMBETTA





# Mustard Doesn't Go On Corn!

How respect, openness, and a simple process for new ideas  
can build a great family

By Richard Trombetta  
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# Introduction



This version of *Mustard Doesn't Go On Corn!* is designed to take many of the concepts in the book, *Mustard Doesn't Go On Corn! – How respect, openness, and a simple process for innovation can lead to great ideas*, and transfer them into tangible and practical means to help the everyday family.

Following the writing of my first book, several people told me that they were going to ask family members to read *Mustard Doesn't Go On Corn!* Why? Simply for the fact that many if not all of the concepts outlined in the version for businesses can also apply to families. What I am attempting to do here is help transfer some of those concepts and provide tangible and practical action items that a family can use to implement a POP! Culture at home.

I am firmly convinced that by simply reading my first book and applying the action items - in the original version and in this document – families can build a strong foundation built upon respect and openness. As a husband and the proud parent of two daughters I am put to the test EVERY day to practice what I preach.

**This version of *Mustard Doesn't Go On Corn!* assumes you have read or are familiar with the key concepts in *Mustard Doesn't Go On Corn! – How respect, openness, and a simple process for innovation can lead to great ideas*.**

It is ironic that the title for my first book came from witnessing and a conversation between a child, his brother, and his mother. For those of you who have not yet read *Mustard Doesn't Go On Corn! – How respect, openness, and a simple process for innovation can lead to great ideas*, here is story behind the title.

I once brought my young daughter to a small children's museum. Everywhere I looked I saw words like explore, discover, and imagine. In one section of the museum there is a small play kitchen that can

accommodate about 10 kids. I was watching my daughter have a grand old time putting plastic grapes in the play oven when I saw a remarkable event. There was a little boy about 3 or 4 years old who had a plate with some plastic corn on it. He said to his mom, "OK, mom, I'm going to put mustard on your corn." Just as he was about to do so his mom said in a semi-nurturing voice, "mustard doesn't go on corn." It was at that moment in time I realized why innovation is so difficult for companies and our society.

Here was a little kid seeing words and images encouraging him to explore and imagine and the second he does, boom – 'mustard doesn't go on corn!' The kid's face dropped. What made it worse is what happened next. Another little kid very emphatically said, "No, mustard doesn't go on corn." You may be asking 'what's the big deal here?' But just think, in a matter of seconds the kid had his idea shot down by an authority figure and was piled on by a peer. Yikes! Being the instigator I am, I could not just sit back and watch this happen. I said, "I like mustard on corn." The kid looked confused. "I do. I put mustard on everything I eat." His eyes got big and he smiled. "You do?" he asked. "Yup, even on spaghetti." Suddenly energy started to take over that little kitchen. Within seconds other kids were getting involved and now mustard on corn didn't seem so foolish after all.

Why did the mom have to shoot the idea down? Why did other kid have to agree with the mom? Why is it when I share this story with people heads start nodding and the response is, "oh yeah, that happens ALL the time."

Does this mom realize the damage she is doing? For those of you who think I am over reacting lets play this out in more detail. Let's assume this was the first time he had ever been to the children's museum. He was probably told by his mom that it is a fun place and there is all sorts of cool stuff to play with. He gets there and wow – she was right! Everywhere he looks there are gadgets and areas that are yelling out to him, "explore, try things, experiment, do what you want." In fact it is

likely he was told all these things in the car on the ride over. But guess what. The split second he tries something a little bit different he hears, "Mustard Doesn't Go On Corn" and he stops. He stops exploring. He stops trying new things that day. He stops experimenting.

Now let's fast forward to a week later and assume the mom asks her children if they want to go to the children's museum. Let's also assume the kid is still too young to be jaded by society. They go and wham – it happens again – he tries something and he is told, "don't try that." Now the pattern starts. Very quickly the young boy starts to realize the game – try things and get told 'not to do that' or stay within the lines and don't rock the boat. If there is one thing I have learned as a parent is never underestimate how smart children are and how quickly they pick up on things.

Let's fast forward ahead another week and his mom suggests going to the children's museum. The kid will be excited, but when he gets there how much exploring will he do? How many new things will he try? How much will he experiment? Not only is his mom keeping him in line, but there is the peer pressure as well. Imagine he tries something and he is laughed at. Or maybe even more people, possibly older and more authoritative, tell him what is 'right' and what is 'wrong.' The pattern is getting worse.

Now let's move forward to first grade. The pattern accelerates when a child goes to school. Stand up. Be quiet. Don't do that. Do this. That doesn't go there. And the list goes on. *In Mustard Doesn't Go On Corn – how respect, openness, and a simple process for innovation can lead to great ideas* I use a quote from Gordon MacKenzie's book *Orbiting the Giant Hairball: A Corporate Fool's Guide to Surviving with Grace*, talks about visiting elementary schools. "How many artists are there in the room? Would you please raise your hands. FIRST GRADE: En mass the children leapt from their seats, arms waving. Every child was an artist. SECOND GRADE: About half the kids raised their hands, shoulder high, no higher. The hands were still. THIRD GRADE: At best,

10 kids out of 30 would raise a hand, tentatively, self-consciously. By the time I reached SIXTH GRADE, no more than one or two kids raised their hands, and then ever so slightly, betraying a fear of being identified by the group as a 'closet artist.' The point is: Every school I visited was participating in the suppression of creative genius."

The fact is the story I have written is not far fetched. It is happening every day. The good news is *Mustard Doesn't Go On Corn! How respect, openness, and a simple process for new ideas can build a great family you and your family can use to build and strengthen your most cherished relationships.* Let's get started.

“How do we do this?”

Families, families, families. Oh the joy they bring and the wackiness that comes along with them. I cannot be so presumptuous to believe that this version of Mustard Doesn't Go On Corn! will solve all your problems – but it can provide a strong foundation with can potentially result in a family that is built on respect and openness.

Parents – you will need to listen more and let go of control. Children – you will need to listen more and let go of control. Now that we have that set we can move forward. This is not simply, “be a better parent.” The theme here is listen, respect, be open, and let go. We will even throw in a simple process for your family to follow to make things easier.

The following is from *Child* magazine, August, 1997. “There's a big difference between chatting with your child in order to build her vocabulary and striking up a conversation just because you like her company. ‘Kids know when they're being 'worked on,'” says Stanley Turecki, M.D., a child psychiatrist at Lenox Hill Hospital in New York and author of *Normal Children Have Problems, Too*. ‘Some of that is worthwhile, of course. But if it characterizes your every interaction, something vital is missing from your relationship.’

Fortunately, Dr. Greenspan has developed a fix. He calls it floor time because, at least with very young children, you literally get down on the floor to play. Here's how it works: ‘Set aside a specific amount of time--at least 30 minutes a day--simply to be together,’ explains Dr. Greenspan. ‘No fair using this as an opportunity to teach your child the alphabet. No fair keeping one eye on the newspaper--the idea is to give your child your undivided attention.’ So what do you do? Whatever your child wants! The key is for your youngster to select the game, direct the action, control the conversation, and tell you what to do. Your role is to follow your child's lead and actively participate without taking charge.”

This sounds so simple yet it can be so difficult for many people. Let's break it down as to how it relates to Mustard Doesn't Go On Corn!

Respect – notice how Dr. Greenspan mention this is not a time to teach the alphabet or glance at the newspaper. Can you imagine if you had something important to tell you child and he or she began glancing off at a newspaper while you were speaking? Then why do parents do it to children?

Openness – You have to do whatever the child wants to do. [One disclaimer: I am no way any family member do things or suggest to do things that are dangerous, illegal, or unethical.] If the child says, "I want to put mustard on corn, guess what? You put mustard on corn! Don't tell the child Mustard Doesn't Go On Corn! Go along and maybe simply say, "I have never had mustard on corn." If you have a little trouble with the control thing then possibly say, "I hadn't thought of that. Why do you want to put mustard on corn?"

The simple process – The process I teach to companies is what my organization, The Innovation Company, calls NEWIDEA!™ As I outline in the first book, the idea is that if people follow these seven simple steps, respect, openness, and new ideas will flourish. It is that easy. Here are the seven key behaviors of the NEWIDEA process:

N – No negativity!



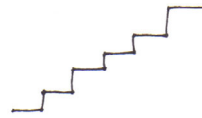
E – Encourage the person



W – Wait...and LISTEN!



I – Include input



D – Document the idea



E – Evaluate and explore options



A – Action!



The complete details of this process and key questions are highlighted in the first book. I will not duplicate them here. For families what I encourage is to focus on N, E, W, and I. Here is an example:

Scenario 1.

Child: "Let's have a soccer game with 3 goals."

Parent: Use 'N' - No negativity, sarcasm, or expressions of 'why that won't work.'

Parent: Use 'E' – Encourage the child to continue. "That sounds interesting. Why do you want to have three goals."

Parent: Use 'W' – Wait and listen.

Child: he or she will explain, "We have three people who want to play goalie so I let's go with three goals."

Parent: Make sure you understand the child and then try and use 'I' – include input. "And since we have extra players today, maybe we could even have three teams."

It's that simple. You have respected the child by listening. You are open to the idea. And you are using the simple process to move the idea forward.

For illustration purposes let's see what happens when these principals are not followed in Scenario 2:

Child: "Let's have a soccer game with 3 goals."

Parent: "That won't work because soccer is only played with two goals. We can't do that."

**Action item:**

Which of the scenarios on the previous page fosters a stronger foundation of respect and openness? Why?

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Which of the scenarios would you rather experience – as a parent or as the child? Put yourself in the child’s shoes for a minute. How would you feel?

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**Action item:**

Use the NEWIDEA! process for the next idea a child of yours presents. What was the result?

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You may be thinking, “this works with little kids but my teenagers will never go for it.” Here is a thought. First, it is never too early to begin practicing and fostering the ideas in *Mustard Doesn’t Go On Corn!* Don’t wait until your kids are 15. If your kids are fifteen, the approach still works. How? By making sure the entire family is part of the creation of this environment. With companies I call this a POP! Culture™ - Applying the Positive Outlook Principal (POP!). What you are doing is creating a family *culture*. It is no different that a work environment or a company culture. And what makes company cultures successful? The company strives to get EVERYONE on the same page. That is what you need to do with your family – get everyone on the same page. The difference between my approach and many other books is that I propose that the entire family read this version of *Mustard Doesn’t Go On Corn!* and the original book. This is not something a parent reads and then ‘does’ to the family.

This point is especially important when a family member ‘slips up’ and uses disrespectful behavior that shows an unwillingness to be open to new ideas. Since everyone is on the same page it is the family comes to the rescue. When I work with companies we develop fun and practical ways the organization can embed these behaviors in their culture.

Action item:

Have each person in your family (if they are at the age where they can read) read this version of *Mustard Doesn’t Go On Corn!* and the original book. As a family, discuss how the NEWIDEA! process can be embedded within your family. What did you come up with?

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Here is an example of the NEWIDEA! process in action:

Child A [Billy]: "Let's try putting the front wheels on the back of the lawn mower."

Parent [Dad]: "That crazy."

Child B [Tommy]: "Hey, dad, wait, let's use the NEWIDEA process and see why Billy thinks that is a good idea."

Parent [Dad]: "You're right. Sorry about that Billy. Why do you think we should put the front wheels on the back?"

Many of you reading this are thinking, "Yeah right. Enough of this touchy feely garbage." But guess what? Life is all about that touchy feely 'garbage.' If trust, respect, and being open to ideas are too 'touchy feely' for you then you should not be surprised when your family finds itself in argument after argument after argument. If I told you that every time you spoke with a family member you had an opportunity to build trust and respect, would you believe me? It is true. EVERY time you communicate with someone it is an opportunity to build trust and respect. And the flip side? It is also a chance to erode trust and respect. The choice is yours.

And the same is true for you kids out there! You have a role in this too. Respect is a two way street. When parents suggest an idea you need to be open and respectful as well.

**Action item:**

Spend a day listening for when ideas are suggested by members of your family. What did you notice?

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**Story: 'That's stupid.'**

I am a big sports fan. One day I was talking with a family member and I suggested something. 'That's stupid' was the response. I share this story because I am not 3 years old. I am much, much older. Where do you think this conversation went that day. You may think an argument ensued. You may think that I defended myself and things got heated. Actually, I said nothing. I realized that there was no point to responding. And that is the morale of the story. The more ideas are shot down, the more disrespectful the situation gets, and the less open to suggestions people become, the more other people shut down and say *nothing*.

Parents: Do you want your children to 'shut down' and say nothing?

Children: Do you want to argue with your parents constantly?

**Action item:**

Parents: Write down what you want your relationship with your children to look like now and 10 years from now.

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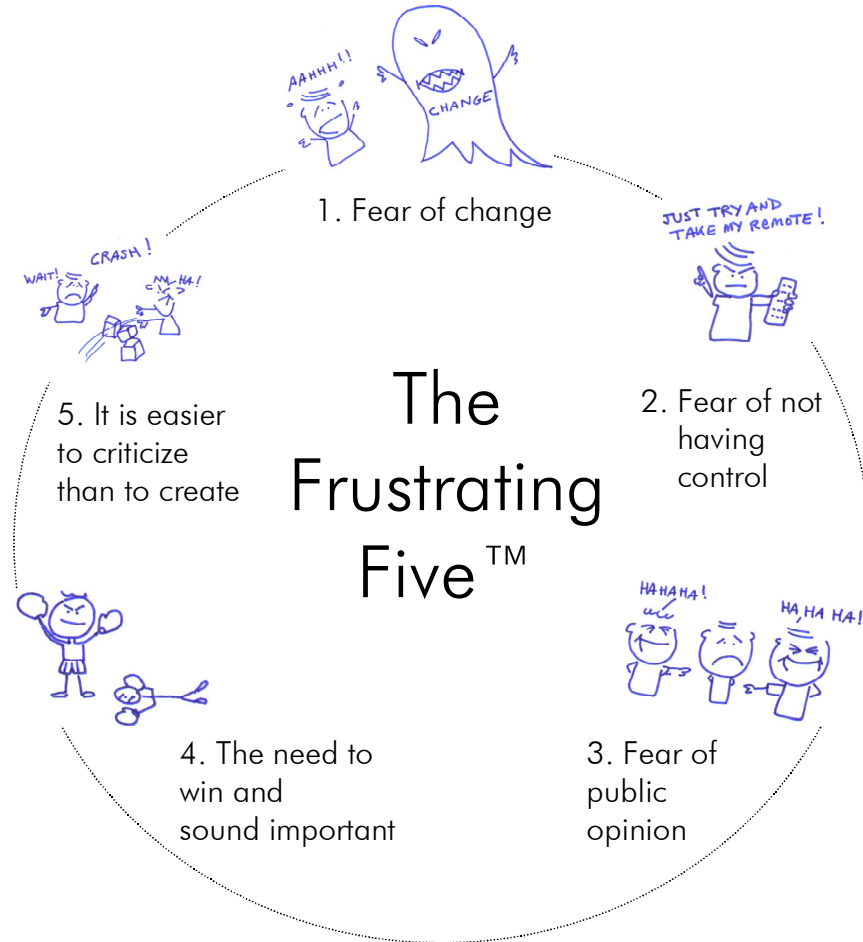
Children: Write down what you want your relationship with your children to look like now and 10 years from now.

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In the original book I talk about what I call The Frustrating Five™ I propose that it is these five behaviors that cause innovation to fail within companies. I also propose that these five behaviors are what cause families to have problems. They illustrated in the graphic below.



I will not go into each behavior in detail since they are covered in great depth in the original book. Here are some action items for you to discuss individually and then ideally as a family. The answers may be difficult to discuss or admit. If you need help or feel the questions may be too volatile then get assistance from a professional who can guide you through this process.

***Action item – questions:***

What do I do when presented with change or a new idea? How does our family respond to change or new ideas?

Do I need to be in control? How comfortable am I with giving up control? How much does our family need to be in control?

Is our family an environment in which everyone feels safe to share ideas without any fear of being laughed at or disrespected?

Do I find myself in situations where I need to 'win'? Is our family one which fosters individuals having to be 'right' or one that truly respects diverse points of view?

Does our family spend more time building on ideas (how to make things happen) or knowing ideas down (why things can't happen)?

You may be asking “Does this approach work?” The resounding answer is YES!

***Story: My wife***

My wife and I both have realized a significant difference in the way we communicate with each other and with other family members. If a person were to spend a day with us he or she would inevitably here the phrases, “that’s interesting” or “can you explain that in more detail?” Plus, my wife and I now have a way to catch each other when one of us goes down the path of the ‘old behavior.’ In fact, we are able to diffuse situations that could typically lead to arguments. And it has worked with friends and other family members as well. My children are little but already we are creating our POP! Culture for our kids.

***Story: The spaghetti sandwich***

My wife and two daughters were having dinner one night and my 2 year old daughter began to put her spaghetti on a piece of bread. I looked at her and said, “Sophie, that seems like a great idea. Are you making a sandwich?” She beamed. I then said, “Sophie, mommy and daddy would normally tell you why you can’t make a spaghetti sandwich but we know not to do that. ” My wife smiled. Then she and I made spaghetti sandwiches. Guess what – they are great!

***Story: The tongs***

If you have children you know getting kids to eat, especially when they are young, can be a challenge. One day my daughter was playing with some kitchen spoons and tongs in her little play kitchen. During dinner that evening she was not eating and of course the battle began. “I want to use the tongs,” she said. My first thought was ‘you don’t use tongs to eat dinner.’ Whoa – that was close. I got up, gave her the tongs – and she ate her whole dinner! We went to a Chinese restaurant and she saw someone using chop sticks. She looked at me and said, “they are using tongs to eat their food.” A lesson learned for me.

**Story: *The glue, the glitter, and art class.***

I had taken my daughter to a parent child art class and one of the activities was to put some glue on paper and then sprinkle it with glitter. My daughter was picking up the glitter and pouring it into the glue. I was thinking 'oh, she doesn't get it.' But it was me that didn't get it. She then took the glue – with the glitter in it – and spread it on the paper. Same result, just a different approach. Kudos to the kid!

**Story: *The library hour***

I brought my daughter to a story hour at a library and the person reading the book showed the kids a picture of spaghetti. She asked, "what do you use to eat spaghetti?" A little kid said, "your fingers." For the next minute or so all we heard from the librarian how that wasn't proper and a person should use a fork. We never went back. And my daughter has never mentioned she misses it.

I share all of these stories because they are fun. Plus I am a proud parent and any way I can work my kids into a book I will (at least I am honest). I also share these because they show how these little, tiny moments in time set the stage for years to come. There is not a situation too big or too small for this process.

Action item:

What does it feel like to watch your child do something in a way that is different than the way you would have done it?

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A final thought.



The final thought I have is this: Kids will model what you do. If you shoot down ideas, they will shoot down ideas. You may have a kid that can do calculus like Einstein, but if he or she is someone who does not foster respect and openness and use the simple process for ideas I propose, ask yourself this: have I truly prepared my child for success? Will his or her family be one that encourages the philosophy outlined here – or will they be known as the person who ‘always tells you all the reasons why something can’t happen?’

***Action item:***

As a family discuss this version of Mustard Doesn’t Go On Corn and the original book. Here’s a tip – be open to the ideas people share!

In summary, applying the principals and philosophy of Mustard Doesn’t Go On Corn! can provide a strong foundation with can potentially result in a family that is built on respect and openness. Who wouldn’t want that for his or her family?

I always find it ironic that parents complain about the hours they have to play ‘boring’ games with their children (store, hide and seek, go fish) and then the children complain about having to spend ‘boring’ time with their parents as life goes on.

Your family is a gift – embrace it.



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### The Innovation Company's mission and vision

#### *Mission*

The mission of The Innovation Company is to inspire individuals and organizations to create respectful, open, and innovative work and family environments that encourage people to constantly share and implement new ideas.

#### *Vision*

The vision of The Innovation Company is one in which all individuals, regardless of their position in the workplace or society, can present new ideas and suggestions and receive a respectful response from others that demonstrates the sincere willingness to be open to different points of views.



## About the author

Rich Trombetta is a 15-year veteran of corporate America, working in various roles for such organizations as GE Capital, Fidelity Investments and Thomson Financial. In addition, he worked as a sports producer for an ABC affiliate in Providence, Rhode Island, was an NBC Page in New York City.

He is currently the President of The Innovation Company, LLC located in Acton, Massachusetts. He works with companies that want to get EVERY employee constantly sharing and implementing new ideas. His clients include Pfizer Pharmaceuticals, Genworth Financial, AIG, and CARQUEST.

Rich is involved with several non-profit organizations and even co-founded his own non-profit company, SpeakUp, Inc., which taught presentation skills to urban youths. He also serves on the Board of Directors of Generations Incorporated, a leader in uniting children and older individuals to improve literacy in Boston's public schools.

Rich holds a degree in Electrical Engineering from the University of Massachusetts at Amherst and has completed graduate work at Northeastern University. He lives in the Boston, Massachusetts area with his wife, two daughters, and two cats.

