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DAILY NEWS

# Wacky ideas wanted

## Author's book shows companies how to foster creativity

By Kathy Uek

DAILY NEWS STAFF

You have a great idea, and you can't wait to tell your boss.

**"Mustard Doesn't Go On Corn!"**  
By Richard Trombetta  
Trafford Publishing  
157 Pages, \$17.95

The day of the staff meeting finally arrives and you announce your idea. But before you have an opportunity to talk about the benefits -- wham! Your boss shoots down your big idea.

Author Richard Trombetta, founder of The Innovation Co. in Acton, wants to help you avoid getting shot down, as well as encourage companies to promote new ideas rather than foster a negative atmosphere. In "Mustard Doesn't Go on Corn!" Trombetta outlines a process of how companies can create innovative environments that promote new ideas.

He knows from working in his business that the process works. His clients know it, too. "The process is simple and practical, and it had a tremendous impact on our company's culture," said Judy Johnston, senior vice president of operations for a division of AIG, a Fortune 100 insurance and financial services company.

Why the title, "Mustard Doesn't Go on Corn!"? While visiting a children's museum with his daughter where words like "explore," "discover" and "imagine" were prevalent, Trombetta witnessed a frustrating experience. A child of about 3 or 4, who was holding a plate with plastic corn on it, said to his

mother, "OK, Mom, I'm going to put mustard on your corn," to which the mother replied, "Mustard doesn't go on corn." "It was at that moment...I realized why innovation is so difficult for companies and our society," the author writes in his book.

Trombetta calls his process for promoting innovation: NEWIDEA. The acronym stands for No negativity; Encourage the person; Wait and listen; Include input; Document the idea; Evaluate and explore options; and Action. For instance, say you have an idea for increasing sales by taking all your clients to lunch. Using Trombetta's NEWIDEA process, a conversation about the idea might go like this:

- No negativity: "That's interesting," the boss would say.
- Encourage the person: "What do you mean by that? Tell me more about that. How would that work?" the boss would add.
- Wait and Listen: "Let the person totally finish what they mean by the idea," says Trombetta.
- Include input: "Maybe we could bring everyone together all at once or send them a gift card," Trombetta suggests the employee could add. "Focus on how to make things happen," Trombetta recommends.
- Document the idea: Write it down. "It becomes the group idea and they focus on what's on the white board," Trombetta said.
- Evaluate and explore options: "Determine if this is a good idea and evaluate the pros and cons," he said.
- Action: "What are we going to do with this? Not every idea is a good idea. Some ideas are bad ideas," said the author.

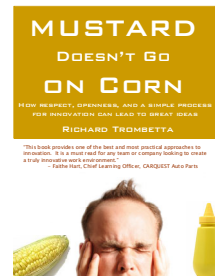
This process has a more positive reaction than when your boss emphatically says no. "When an idea is shot down and people are not respected, on the surface they say that's doesn't bother them, but inside it does," Trombetta said. "We've all been there. But the next time, those people don't offer their ideas and others don't either. Then it seeps through the whole company. The frustrated employees begin to talk badly about the company and the boss and it trickles down and plants seeds in other people's minds until they leave six months later."

Trombetta has a passion for promoting innovation that is easy, fun and improves productivity. "The principles in my book are easy to follow," he said. "I simplified the approach, and the process used to come up with new ideas. In corporations, society has made this very complex. My argument is: It's not that tough." Simply put, in creating a culture in which all employees are open to ideas and respect each other for their input, innovation flourishes, said the author. "It's not that people on the team accept every idea, but 'yes' gets a better response than 'no.'"

Trombetta, an electrical engineer with a degree from the University of Massachusetts-Amherst who has also completed graduate work at Northeastern University in Boston, has 15 years of experience working with companies such as General Electric, Fidelity Investments and Thomson Financial. He said he knows how innovation impacts the bottom line. "Everyone in corporations is always asking for money and

resources," said the author. "Don't judge ideas as soon as you hear them. The debate that gets personal and starts to linger is reduced or eliminated. It's not battles for the sake of battles. People get energized. That's how productivity goes up. They go to work and say, 'Hey, I'm engaged.'"

**In "Mustard Doesn't Go On Corn!," (author Richard) Trombetta outlines a process of how companies can create innovative environments that promote new ideas.**



Trombetta suggests always writing a line item in the budget that says: "NOT being open to new ideas -- how much is that costing the bottom line?" Most importantly, Trombetta's process stresses having fun. "You spend more time at work than with your family," he writes in the book. "Why not enjoy it the most you can? If you work about 50 hours a week for 30 years, that's 75,000 hours."