

MICHAEL DONOVAN



THE ART
OF THE
BUSINESS - **MENTOR**

Executive/Business-Mentors Handbook
(Self-instructing Training Edition)

Techniques, skills and observations assembled by

MICHAEL DONOVAN



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Addenda Items ~ Tools that are a bit different

Here are some resources which have been found to ‘break the ice’, offer other possibilities to consider or even approach difficult issues with curiosity and humour. Some are scientific and others metaphors. Do not feel obliged to use them if the fit feels uncomfortable. But remember, stories are a powerful way of opening up difficult issues.



Native American Dakota wisdom says that when you discover you are riding a dead horse, the best strategy is to dismount.

That may seem obvious. If so, then why do so few business leaders follow this advice. Instead, as a mentor might see tactics including:

1. **Changing riders.** (*Appoint somebody new to the job.*)
2. **Saying things like “This is the way we have always ridden this horse.”** (*Refusing to accept that circumstances have changed.*)
3. **Appointing a committee to study the horse.** (*Ignoring the obvious – and instead arranging a meeting to investigate the problem.*)
4. **Arranging to visit other sites to see how they ride dead horses.** (*Refusing to accept failure, and instead copying other organizations and finally failings.*)
5. **Increasing the standards to ride dead horses.** (*Refusing to accept that there is a problem – and instead blaming it on the workforce not working hard enough.*)
6. **Appointing a tiger team to revive the dead horse.** (*Employing external consultants to re-engineer the failed processes. May work sometimes, but not if the process is completely outdated.*)
7. **Creating a training session to increase our riding ability.** (*Blame the workforce for not managing the process properly.*)
8. **Comparing the state of dead horses in today’s environment.** (*Looking at other people with the same problem but instead of saying “we all have a problem” saying “we have a problem but others get it right”. The dot.com boom was a bit like this!.*)
9. **Change the requirements, declaring, “This horse is not dead.”** (*Refusal to see reality.*)
10. **Hire contractors to ride the dead horse.** (*Outsource the work to “experts” rather than accept that the process is dead.*)

11. **Providing additional funding to increase the horse's performance.** (*Spend, spend, spend to try and revitalise outmoded equipment rather than update to more modern equipment*).
12. **Purchase a product to make dead horses run faster.** (*Visit the snake-oil salesman who promises to add a few modifications that will give extra life to out-of-date equipment or processes*).
13. **Revise the performance requirements for horses.** (*Accept that there is a problem, but instead of looking for a permanent solution, lower targets to allow for failing processes*).

So, assisting your mentee to see that they have a strategy that is no longer viable, or are trying to make something that is not working, work, it can be better to get them to start again.

Above all be brutally honest with them - get them to 'dismount' - and select a new horse.

An important aspect of strategy analysis is to be able to tell the difference between dead horses, dying horses, those that with the right medicine can be revived and those that will win races.

Lessons for life according to wild geese.

This Autumn, when you see geese heading north for the winter flying along in 'V' formation, you might consider what science has discovered as to why they fly that way.

FACT: As each bird flaps its wings, it creates an 'uplift' for the bird immediately following. By flying in a 'V' formation, the whole flock has at least 71% greater flying range than if each bird flew on its own.



LESSON: People who share a common direction and sense of community can get where they are going more quickly and easily because they are travelling on the thrust of one another.

FACT: When a goose flies out of formation, it suddenly feels the drag and resistance of trying to go it alone. It quickly gets back into formation to take advantage of the lifting power of the bird in front of it.

LESSON: If we have as much common sense as a goose, we stay in formation with those headed where we want to go. We are willing to accept their help and give our help to others. It is harder to do something alone than together.

FACT: When the lead goose gets tired, it rotates back into the formation, and another goose flies to the point position.

LESSON: It is sensible to take turns doing the hard and demanding tasks and sharing leadership. As with geese, people are interdependent of each others skills, capabilities, and unique arrangements of gifts, talents, or resources.

FACT: The geese flying in formation honk from behind to encourage those up front to keep up their speed.

LESSON: We need to make sure our honking is encouraging. In groups where there is encouragement, the production is much greater. The power of encouragement (to stand by one's heart or core values and encourage the heart and core of others) is the quality of honking we seek. We need to make sure our honking is encouraging and not discouraging.

FACT: When a goose gets sick, wounded, or shot down, two other geese will drop out of formation with that goose and follow it down to lend help and protection. They stay with the fallen goose until it dies or is able to fly again. Then, they launch out on their own, or with another formation to catch up with their flock.

LESSON: If we have the sense of a goose, we will stand by our colleagues and each other in difficult times as well as in good!

ROCKS of LIFE

The busier you are, the more important it is to stop and read this story.

One day, a successful business leader was speaking to a group of business students and, to drive home a point, used a physical illustration they could take with them and never forget.



As he stood in front of the group of high-powered overachievers, he said, “Okay, time for a quiz.” He then pulled out a ten-litre, ‘wide-mouth’ mason jar and set it on the table in front of him. Then he produced about a dozen fist-sized rocks and carefully placed them, one by one, into the jar.

When the jar was filled to the top and no more rocks would fit inside, he asked, “Is this jar full?” Everyone in the class said, ‘Yes’.

Then he said. “Really?” He reached under the table and pulled out a bucket of gravel. He then proceeded to dump some gravel in and shook the jar. This caused pieces of gravel to work themselves down into the space between the bigger rocks.

He then asked the group once more. “Is this jar full?” By this time the class was on to him. “Probably not,” one of them answered.

“Good!” he replied. He reached under the table and brought out a bucket of sand. He started dumping the sand in the jar and it went into all the spaces left between the rocks and the gravel.

Once more he asked the question. "Is this jar full?" "No!" the class shouted. Once again, he said, "Good". Then he produced a pitcher of water and began to pour in the liquid until the jar was filled to the brim.

Then the business leader looked at the class and asked, "What is the point of this illustration."

One eager Beaver raised his hand and said, "The point is that no matter how full your schedule is, if you try really hard you can always fit some more things in it."

"No", the speaker replied, "That's not the point. The truth this illustration teaches us is this: If you don't put the big rooks in first, you'll never get them in at all. What are the big rocks in your life?"

Your partner	Your friendships
Your children	Your dreams
Your loved ones	A worthy cause Becoming a better person

Remember to put these big ROCKS of LIFE in first, or you'll never get them in at all.

"If you sweat the little stuff (i.e. gravel, the sand) then you'll fill your life with little things and will never have the real quality time you need to spend on the big, important stuff. When water is added say, through pressure in a job, then your life is a serious misery because you do not have the big rocks to sustain you.

So, whenever you contemplate and reflect on this example, ask yourself this question: "What are the "big rocks" in my life?" One might be work, but then again it may not.

Then put those in your jar first.

An extra bit of fun

The following short quiz consists of four questions and will tell you whether you are qualified to be a professional. The questions are NOT difficult.

1. How do you put a giraffe into a refrigerator?

The correct answer is: Open the refrigerator, put in the giraffe, and close the door. This question tests whether you tend to do simple things in an overly complicated way.

2. How do you put an elephant into a refrigerator?

Did you say, Open the refrigerator, put in the elephant, and close the refrigerator? Wrong Answer.

Correct Answer: Open the refrigerator, take out the giraffe, put in the elephant and close the door. This tests your ability to think through the repercussions of your previous actions.

3. The Lion King is hosting an animal conference. All of the animals attended except one. Which animal did not attend the conference?

Correct Answer: The Elephant. The elephant is in the refrigerator. Remember, you just put him in there. This tests your memory. Okay, even if you did not answer the first three questions correctly, you still have one more chance to show your true abilities.

4. There is a river you must cross but it is used by crocodiles, and you do not have a boat. How do you manage it?

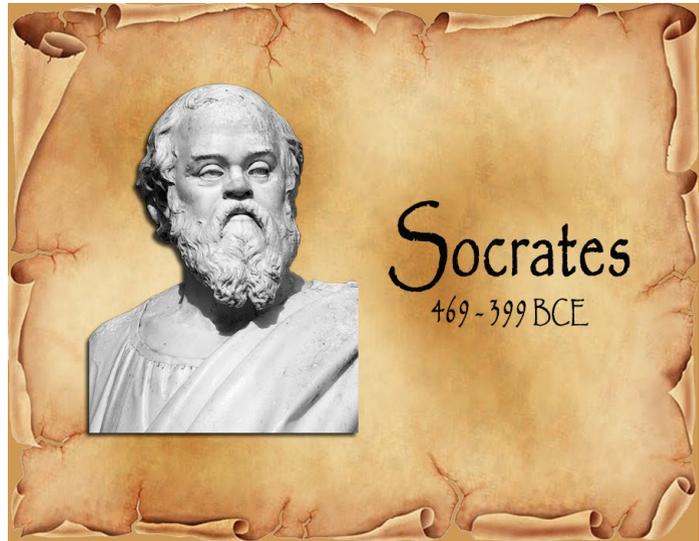
Correct Answer: You jump into the river and swim across it. Have you not been listening to anything I've said? All of the crocodiles are attending the animal conference called by the Lion King. This tests whether you learn quickly from your previous mistakes.

According to Anderson Consulting Worldwide, around ninety (90%) percent of all professionals tested got all of the questions wrong, but many of the preschoolers tested got several correct answers. How often do we not pay attention to the detail of conversations, actions and decisions?

Socrates' Triple Validation Test

In ancient Greece, Socrates was reputed to hold knowledge in high esteem. One day an acquaintance met the great philosopher and said 'Socrates, do you know what I just heard about your friend?'

'Hold on a minute,' Socrates replied. 'Before telling me anything I'd like you to pass a little test. It's called the Triple Validation Test.'



'Triple Validation?'

'That's right,' Socrates continued. 'Before you talk to me about my friend, it might be a good idea to take a moment and Validation what you're going to say. The first Validation is Truth. Have you made absolutely certain what you are about to tell me is true?'

'No,' the man said, 'actually I just heard about it and...'

'All right,' said Socrates. 'So, you don't really know if it's true or not. Now let's try the second Validation, the Validation of Goodness. Is what you are about to tell me about my friend something good?'

'No, on the contrary...'

'So,' Socrates continued, 'you want to tell me something bad about him, but you're not certain it's true. You may still pass the test though, because there's one Validation left: The Validation of Usefulness. Is what you want to tell me about my friend going to be useful to me?'

'No, not really.'

'Well,' concluded Socrates, 'if what you want to tell me is neither true nor good nor even useful, why tell it to me at all?' The well-meaning friend walked away shaking his head.

So that's the story. What are the potential lessons?

- **The 'friend'** - can equal a colleague, department, director, customer, supplier or the Company ...
- **Truth** - always remains a constant (but also remember that truth and accuracy are partners in making informed decisions) ...
- **Good(ness)** - Is this something you or I can do something positive about? Will our time spent together discussing the issue motivate us to improve the situation? Will discussing it make us feel any different as we continue our job? How might it improve our effectiveness or efficiency?
- **Useful(ness)** - Is what we are talking about a priority, relevant to our current key issues?

Outcome ... time and energy wasted or a positive contribution and relationship building exercise that moves us all forward productively. This encompasses personal responsibility, accountability for success and the resolution of issues as opposed to blame.

Incidentally, it also explains why Socrates never found out his best friend was having it off with his wife.

How to use the Brain Game with a group.

This game works best when the group know each other and have worked in teams together:

The purpose is to take a break, have some fun but to get the participants to consider that they each have quite different ways of thinking as they work to assemble a team, solve problems with new approaches and to appreciate alternate ways in which our brains work to solve issues.

Set-up

- o Distribute a copy of panel 1 to each member playing'
- o Ask them to consider the descriptors and rank them between 1 and 5 (5 being highest ranking)
- o Total each bracket of descriptors
- o Ask the players to gather in the same corner of the room according to their highest ranking i.e. all L1 together
- o Distribute panel 2 to each group
- o Ask them to discuss the predictive descriptors for their group with each other
 - Do they believe the assessment is accurate for them?
 - If they have two equal scorings, let them decide if they wish to change groups based on the descriptors - What set do they feel, they fit into?
 - Before they do, ask others who work with them if the assessment to change is real or imagined - from the perspective of co-workers/boss/direct reports
 - Let them move if they honestly or strongly believe they are more closely aligned with the other group
- o Distribute panel 3
- o The task now is for the group to allocate skill-sets according to the criteria listed as Processes or Behaviours
- o Now ask the group to recall a project or complex tasks of recent times that didn't go well
 - Assign project or task tasks to the best skilled people in the group and challenge them to use their perceived skill-set to redo the project or task with the group being their assessors

- o It's a game but be prepared for some unlikely outcomes
- o At the end distribute panel 4 which indicates which brain hemisphere they sit in
- o Some people can quite adequately cross-over different hemispheres depending on the challenge. They are rare but very valuable as monitors.
- o What was learned about perhaps identifying and using skill-sets more wisely when next assembling a team to tackle a task?

At the next break distribute the Lateral Thinking challenge sheet 1 and see how individuals in the group go. Who can see the need to step out of the square to succeed? What are their skill sets.

Peoples 'Thinking Processes – Which part of our Brain do we like best?

Consider the descriptions in each box. Give each a mark out of 5.

Five means it is really like you.

Grade use – 5¹, 4², 3³, 2⁴ & 1⁵ in each set.

<p>L1</p> <p>Likes working with facts _____</p> <p>Precise and exact _____</p> <p>Logical and rational _____</p> <p>Mathematical / Financial _____</p> <p>Rational _____</p> <p>Technical _____</p> <p>Performance Driven _____</p> <p>Analytical _____</p> <p>SCORE _____</p>	<p>R1</p> <p>Sees whole picture – not detail _____</p> <p>Likes change – trying new things _____</p> <p>Does several things at once _____</p> <p>Imaginative _____</p> <p>Always looking for alternatives _____</p> <p>Enjoys challenges and risks _____</p> <p>Intuitive about new ideas _____</p> <p>Future oriented _____</p> <p>SCORE _____</p>
<p>L2</p> <p>Prefers traditional thinking _____</p> <p>Likes detail _____</p> <p>Procedural _____</p> <p>Likes security and safekeeping _____</p> <p>Sequential and chronological _____</p> <p>Punctual / time conscious _____</p> <p>Reliable _____</p> <p>Organised and orderly _____</p> <p>SCORE _____</p>	<p>R2</p> <p>People focus _____</p> <p>Empathetic _____</p> <p>Intuitive towards others _____</p> <p>Expressive when communicating _____</p> <p>Caring and supportive _____</p> <p>Experiences strong emotions _____</p> <p>Likes personal interaction _____</p> <p>Enthusiastic _____</p> <p>SCORE _____</p>

The Whole Brained 'US'

<p>L1</p> <p>Focussed</p> <p>Accurate</p> <p>Logical</p> <p>Objective</p> <p>Critical</p> <p>Performance driven</p> <p>Realistic</p> <p>Factual</p> <p>Analytical</p>	<p>R1</p> <p>Big Picture</p> <p>Flexible</p> <p>Risk-taker</p> <p>Looks for alternatives</p> <p>Imaginative</p> <p>Curious</p> <p>Intuitive</p> <p>Unstructured</p> <p>Simultaneous</p> <p>Prefers change</p>
<p>L2</p> <p>Organised / orderly</p> <p>Planned</p> <p>Structured</p> <p>Step-by-Step</p> <p>Detail</p> <p>Traditional</p> <p>Task-driven</p> <p>Neat</p> <p>Punctual</p> <p>Reliable</p>	<p>R2</p> <p>Feeling</p> <p>People-focus</p> <p>Sensitive</p> <p>Playful</p> <p>Expressive</p> <p>Enthusiastic</p> <p>Body Language</p> <p>Touch</p> <p>Cooperative</p> <p>Interpersonal</p>

Thinking Processes & Key Behaviours

L1

Likes working with Facts
 Precision and accuracy
 Logical and rational
 Likes working with numbers & figures
 Technical
 Performance Driven
 Analytical

R1

Sees BIG Picture, not details
 Likes change and trying new things
 Imaginative
 Always looking for alternatives
 Enjoys challenges and risks
 Innovative
 Future orientated

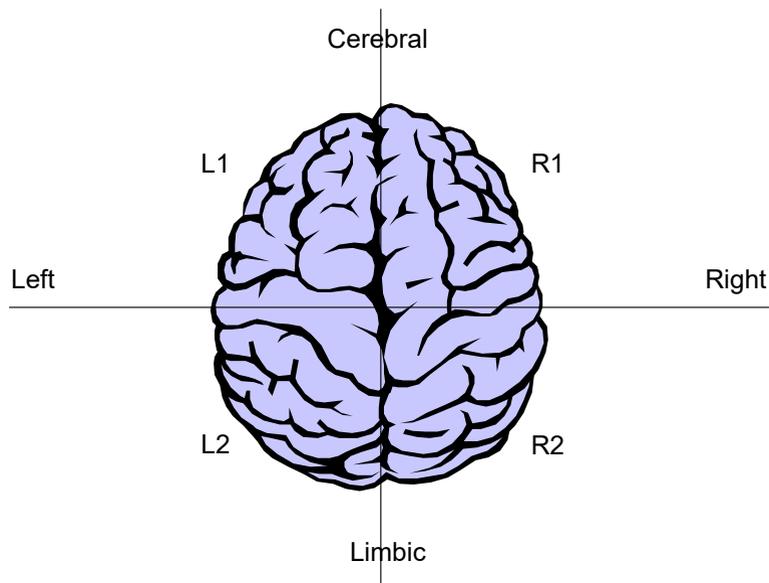
L2

Prefers traditional thinking
 Facts must be organised and orderly
 Likes details
 Stable and reliable environment
 Procedural
 Sequential and chronological
 Task driven

R2

Experiences facts in an emotional way
 Understandin agd intuitive towards people
 Likes interaction / not remote
 Expressive when communicating
 Empathetic
 Enthusiastic when liking ideas

I thought I was wrong once,
 but I was mistaken.



An exercise in lateral thinking.

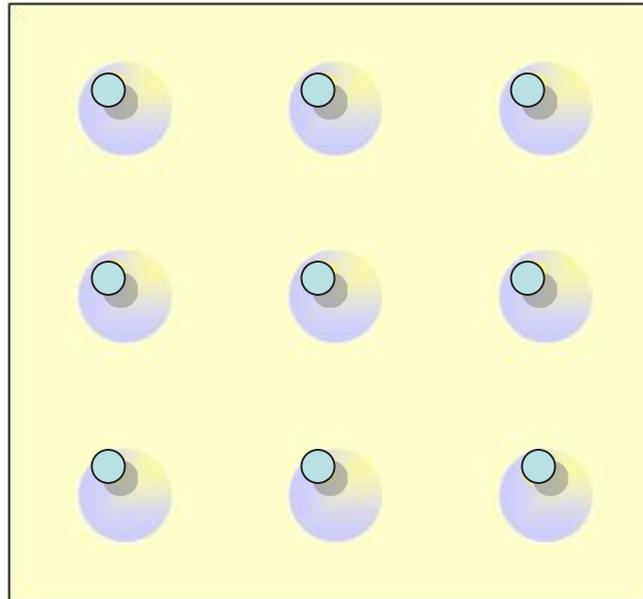


Fig. 1 : The Problem ~
Try to connect all nine dots with four straight lines without lifting the pen or cursor

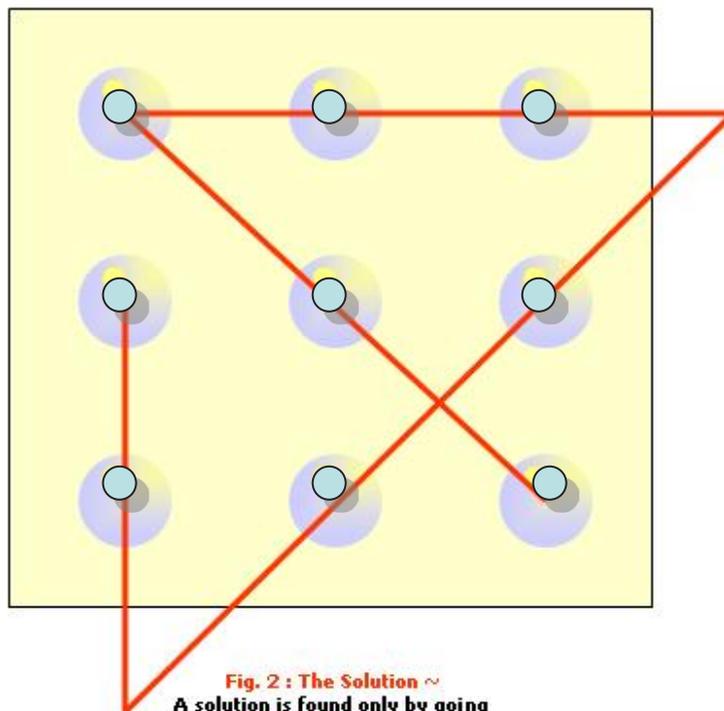


Fig. 2 : The Solution ~
A solution is found only by going outside of the boundaries

