

A CORNY IDEA or AN AMERICAN DREAM

By Don Frantz

First, forget everything you know, or think you know, about a maze in a cornfield.

Second, I believe there are three ever-present keys to success:

1. WORK. Meticulous attention to detail, perseverance and what grandpa called 'work ethic.' If you are at this seminar, I assume that this you got.
2. LUCK. All we have, or all that we don't have is not in our power. When we are down, we can have comfort that it is not all our fault. When we are up, we can be grateful.
3. And IDEAS. A tweak, a nuance, a refinement, a new method, a new technology, an innovation, an invention, an out-of-the-box, a blue sky. A silly, stupid, 'of course', 'why didn't I think of that', light-bulb of a moment that you pull down from mid-air.

Today we are going to talk about IDEAS. This seminar is a case study about going from IDEA to REALITY.

My passion is to make ideas real, such as:

Burger King wondered why they didn't have a Ronald McDonald – I became the Burger King,
Chinese historians wondered about the lost secret of one of the 'Four great inventions' – so I
rediscovered the secret of the South Pointing Chariot,

SuperBowl XIII wondered how to make the halftime show truly special – we created magic.
Walt Disney World wanted a modern answer to the Electric Light Parade, so I produced and
directed SpectroMagic.

Michael Eisner wondered if the cartoon "Beauty and the Beast" could transfer to Broadway – We
gave him the answers and it ran for 14 years. And "The Lion King" followed.

Busch Garden's Tampa wondered if they could produce an original Broadway quality show in a
theme park about Animals and Africa – KaTonga was created and ran for 6 years

I wondered why there was no Broadway museum that told the history of the 100-year old theaters
in Times Square – Walkin' Broadway, a 90 minute walking tour was born.

Seaworld wondered why the public didn't feel an emotional connection with their loved collection
of Orca whales - so we created the show "BELIEVE" for Shamu.

Inner Mongolia wondered how to tell their story at the Shanghai Expo – a musical, a parade and a
surround film got the message across.

The Governor of Alashan District on the edge of the China's Gobi Desert wondered why only a few
photographers knew about the national forest of rare HuYang Trees. - The outdoor spectacle "Golden
Huyang" now brings thousands to walk thru the golden leaves.

Central Academy of Drama in Beijing wondered how to teach musical theater - we produced the
first modern Mandarin productions of a Broadway show – "FAME" followed by "Crazy For You."

AND CURRENTLY:

I wondered if a fringe cabaret entitled "Disenchanted" could become an off-Broadway and world-
wide hit musical – And we are on the way.

Istanbul is building Turkey's first modern performing arts center and wonders if a new show could
communicate their rich cultural heritage to the 1,000,000 tourist that visit the city each month.

All of these projects went through the same basic steps that I took in 1991 when I wondered, “How can I build a maze.” This seminar could focus on any one of the adventures listed above, but since most of you have seen a corn maze, today’s case study will be the Invention of The Amazing Maize Maze.

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I am going to take you back to the afternoon when nobody in America paid a farmer \$10 or \$6 or even \$3 to walk into his cornfield. In those days, before 1993 it was more likely that the farmer paid to make sure someone DIDN’T walk into the cornfield.

I will take you back to a day in my life that might be just like your life today. Today you have an idea. The idea has been tugging at you since last night or since last year. The idea might be your own, or it might be your spouse’s idea – in which case it tugs even more.

If you are thinking, “That’s not for me. I never get ideas.” Let’s find out why.

What if you are thinking, “This sounds like something my son and daughter should hear.” They always have crazy ideas! I wish they would just stop with the ideas!” But what if one of those crazy ideas could change your life – and thousands of others? Maybe they have two ideas: Their first idea is to go live in the city. Let’s find out how to listen to the other idea.

What about your daughter’s new, probably temporary, boyfriend? Did he walk into your farmhouse with his MFA in Urban Development with a minor in Psychology and suggest how you could improve your rutabaga crop? Before you install an 11pm curfew, let me explain the funny truth - sometimes that boy’s complete lack of knowledge is just what we need.

Ideas are born every second. Let’s understand the problems and the power of having an idea.

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An outline of the discussion, from day one to the final result, is as follows:

The Ponder - Every answer begins with a question. The creation of an idea begins by someone asking, “Why?” “What if...?” “Did you ever think that....” “Can’t we...?” “Did anyone ever....?” On a summer afternoon on the balcony of the Sheraton Universal hotel, I asked myself, “I wonder how I would build a maze?” In this case there was no specific problem I was trying to solve, no corporate deadline, no paycheck. Just “I wonder.”

The Moment – Commonly referred to as the ‘Ah-Ha Moment,’ it is the second that the light bulb turns on, when the answer appears in an ephiany. There is a rush of excitement. In this moment the chaos becomes calm; the confusion is cleared. You blink your eyes and suddenly there is a vision of the future. The moment for the Maize Maze occurred 30,000 feet above Tennessee. In the 20 hours before this moment there were three defining incidents that created the foundation for the idea. These three pieces, like three jewels came together and gave me the answer. Recently, I realized that there was a life-time of very normal experiences that provided the glue to hold those three jewels together. The “Ah-Ha” always seems magical but behind every illusion there are tricks of the trade and techniques that can de-mystify that moment of brilliance.

The Squash Court - Unquestionably, the first answer on a creative journey leads directly to a mountain of more questions. What happens then? I will share the metaphor of The Squash Court which has four white walls. At my back is the wall with the idea written in bold letters. On the side walls appear everything that is right, and everything that is wrong with the idea. In front of me is what the idea will eventually become. It is a thrilling and infuriating game as the ball of possibility slams into the walls. There are rules to this game, and there are winning strategies, and at the end there is an idea to harvest, or an idea to squash.

The Name – Here is a little big secret. “Once I have a name, everything falls into place.”

The Confession – To Tell or Not to Tell. More often than not people hoard their ideas - keeping secrets from the fear that their idea will be stolen. They are right – the downside of telling your new breakthrough idea is that it will be stolen and someone else will become rich and famous and you won't. Let me tell you the upside. Then let's weigh the benefits of both and discover which answer will encourage growth, change and happiness.

The Work - Researching , planning, scheduling, budgeting, testing, drawing, writing, and more is required for an airy idea to take shape. That imaginary shape must be so well defined that other people begin to believe...they must believe that it is, or could be, real. The hardest work of all requires no sweat and no muscle: You must continue to believe.

The Luck – Luck comes to those prepared to receive it. No one can make it come. The trick is to know luck when it comes.

The Accident – Surprise! Everything that you wanted suddenly changes! Like the maze itself, a creative journey is on an unknown path and no amount of planning will allow you to exactly predict where you will finally arrive. I thought I was going to create a work of interactive landscape art. Instead, at the kitchen table of a farmer in Annville Pennsylvania I realized that I was going to save farms.

OMG! - Hopefully this day will come. Imagination, passion and perseverance drive you to the day when someone says, “Ok Man, Go!” And you say, “Oh My God!” All the holes appear in all the plans that you have made and you wonder, “Can I really do this?” The impossible that seemed possible suddenly appears impossible once more. Again, Work and Luck played a factor. The final rush to opening day of the first Amazing Maize Maze was an abundance of miracles.

The Debut – Finally the Idea is reality and revealed to an audience of strangers. People who do not know you – do not know how hard you worked, or what you have suffered. They will start to talk. Listen to them because, guess what, they will have IDEAS.