

How Ideas Make a Difference

You know the difference an idea makes. You may not realize it, but if you look about you where you work, in a large office, on an assembly line, in the government, on a salesman's beat, in a small store, in a laboratory, in the shipping room or the executive suite, you will see the difference an idea makes.

You will see the difference in the men who move ahead. You will see it in the products which make sales records. You will see it in the business which prospers. You will see it in profit and loss statements, on the stock exchange, in the delicatessen which closes, in the headlines. You will see it in your home and other homes, in the family which does things, in your church and lodge, in your political party, in your government. The one quality which turns the ordinary into the extraordinary is ideas.

For example, visit the engineering department of a large manufacturing company, say in the field of electronics, and you will see row upon row of drawing boards and row upon row of engineers, all in shirt sleeves, who look remarkably alike. And they have much in common. Each man in the room has an engineering degree, each has been graduated from the company training program. Most of the men are married, have about the same number of children and the same number of bedrooms in their split-level homes, about fourteen payments left on the car, and seventeen years to go on their mortgage. They all get the same pay, give or take a few dollars.

If you came back in a year to that vast room full of seemingly identical engineers you would see that a strange process had taken place. One man way back on the left had moved his slide rule and drawing pens up to a drawing board at the front of the room. Another came in one day and sat down at a desk, not a drawing board, in an office down the corridor. Still another, apparently lost in the center of the room full of shirt-sleeved workers, moved out to the front office and started to wear a suit jacket and carry a brown leather dispatch case to work instead of a lunch box.

This process might seem strange, mysterious, and completely non-understandable viewed from a distance. You might feel like an anthropologist on a South Sea island viewing some native rites that were unaccountable. But if you investigated you would find an enormous difference between the look-alike men in the look-alike shirts in the hangar-sized workroom: the men who moved ahead had ideas.

Sure, not all the ideas were good ones, not all of them worked, others were too expensive, still others had been tried before. But they were ideas, that ingenious, creative element which makes all the difference in our lives.

Notice I said they had ideas, not an idea, and they expressed those ideas. Actually they had a flood of ideas, and, in effect, the whole engineering department depended on the creative energies of a tiny minority.

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