

## **Boomerang Your Way to the Best Possible Solutions**

### **By Carol Ring**

Endless meetings...stalled plans...unresolved issues...poorly recycled ideas. These are just a few of the challenges prevalent in today's workplace. If you're tired of getting nothing but blank faces when you ask for solutions to your company's tough issues and want to go beyond ideas that are nothing more than a tweak of an old process, then it's time for you and your organization to start thinking in new ways.

Unfortunately, the way many people think today rarely allows employees to unlock the limitless potential of their minds. Too often, they seem to be on autopilot, just providing a knee-jerk response to any problem that may arise. The reason for that isn't so much because of *what* they think as it is because of *how* they think. Companies have done so much process improvement and are running at such a fast pace that the truly visionary entrepreneur skill set is not valued. As a result, the corporate world has become an assembly line of production to get things out the door faster and cheaper. And because people are so focused on the problems, they rely on quick fixes or they settle for the first solution (which often isn't the best solution).

Most people don't use the full capabilities of their mind to find better answers to today's tough problems. Instead, they've trained their way of thinking to follow a straight line, rarely veering off a predictable path. They choose a solution because "it's how we've always done it." Or they choose a solution because it's the easiest or cheapest one.

Such a way of thinking limits people's professional and personal careers. And in fact, often the best answer is not the first one or the obvious one—it's the one that comes after some clear and original thinking. To do this, you need to release the talents and experiences your team has inside of them with a process called Boomerang Think™.

### **Boomerang in Business**

A boomerang is a tool and weapon of Australian aboriginal origin that comes back to you if you throw it properly. It is usually carved out of wood and consists of two wings connected at an angle. One side of the boomerang will be slightly curved, and this is usually decorated. The other side will be flat. Of importance is the smoothness of the boomerang, as the wings act as an airfoil. As the air travels faster over the surface of one wing than the other, lift occurs. The angle of the two wings causes the boomerang to fly out straight for a distance and then begin to turn to the left, returning to the thrower. One of the secrets to a successful boomerang throw is the smoothness, the lack of burrs or extra weight along the wings.

Just like the successful flight of the boomerang, Boomerang Think™ has special features and steps.

#### **Step #1: Create a Barrier-Free Environment**

In order to fly correctly, a boomerang needs a smooth surface. The same concept applies to your new way of thinking. You cannot have barriers weighing down the flight of ideas. In most organizations, once you announce a problem and a potential solution, people quickly list all the excuses why the solution won't work: "It costs too much," "The boss will never agree," "It would take too long," etc. At this point, have everyone

stop and put all those issues on sticky notes. Put the sticky notes on the wall and instruct everyone to forget about those issues for a moment.

Often the solution you need is obvious, but you only see it when you're issue-free. If you spend all your time talking about the issues and all the reasons why you can't do something, you'll never move forward. Therefore, allocate a certain amount of meeting time to voice those issues so you can get them out of the way. If you don't allow people to voice them, then they'll silently let the excuses simmer and block the group's creativity. Remember, a boomerang won't fly if you weigh it down.

### **Step #2: Brainstorm or Dream about the Best Possible Solution**

Once you open your mind and toss the boomerang, you are now into the second step, or the straight part of the flying pattern. This is when you have the opportunity to stretch your thinking and come up with that best possible solution. Have everyone think in terms of limitless opportunities...no boundaries...the sky's the limit. You may have to do this part in two steps. First, get people warmed up to the idea of thinking creatively. Then, encourage them to take it further.

For example, if you ask people to describe the best possible airline flight, they'll begin with such answers as, "No lines at the gate," "The airplane leaves on time," "My luggage doesn't get lost." But are these answers really describing the best possible airline flight? No. These are the "warm up" answers that describe the okay possibilities. Once people are warmed up, they can take it further and start describing the best possible solutions. For our airline flight example, they'll continue until they start saying such answers as, "I'm in first class," "I'm on a flight to Cancun for a month's vacation," "I'm sitting next to Tiger Woods." These are the "stretch" answers that start to depict the best possible solutions.

### **Step #3: Stretch the Solutions Even Further**

The third step of the process occurs at the apex of the flight. Here you list all the elements of the *very* best possible solution. At this point, after people voice each possible solution, ask "What would be even better?" Keep asking this question over and over until the answer is amazing. For example, using our airline flight example, the amazing answer might be, "I'm on a private jet flying to my vacation home in Cancun, where I'll be spending the next six months working on my latest project from my home office, which of course overlooks the beach. With me on the plane are my family and my closest friends, including Tiger Woods." That answer is quite different than simply wanting short lines and an on-time flight. Remember, if the answer is not amazing, then there's still something better.

### **Step #4: Assess Your Ability to Implement the Best Possible Solution**

Just like a real boomerang comes back to your hand, you have to bring your best possible solution back to the current business situation. This is when you take your amazing idea and start to break it down into steps. When you start to break the idea down and brainstorm the components of it, you often find that you can actually do them. Granted, about 20 percent of your idea won't work. You rarely get it all. But getting 70-80 percent of your best possible solution is way better than getting 100 percent of your first possible idea.

## **Throw Your Own Boomerang**

The following is an example of how to use Boomerang Think™ with a business challenge.

Suppose you have to train 300 employees on a new technology. Your sticky notes would include such phrases as “Not enough training rooms,” “Too expensive to rent additional training rooms,” “Not enough time to get everyone trained.” Now that the issues are out of the way, you can begin to dream about the best possible solution. In this case it may be to have all the training done in 30 days and to do the training in multiple locations around the city rather than your lone in-house training room so you can train more people at the same time.

With the vision of the best possible solution in mind, you would break it down and assess the viability of each individual component. In this case, you may realize that some of your suppliers or clients have offices with training rooms in them. Can you use those? You’re also a member of the Chamber, and they have board rooms that are free for members to use. Could you use those board rooms as training rooms? After a few phone calls, you learn that you have multiple options for additional training rooms that are either free or very inexpensive.

This is the power of Boomerang Think™. You would never have started the conversation by saying, “Let’s talk to our suppliers or Chamber about training rooms.” Instead, you have to go all the way out with your solution and then come back in with it. So throw the boomerang in your organization today. The results you’ll achieve will amaze you.

### *About the Author:*

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