

## MILLION-DOLLAR IDEAS

Winning money-making strategies

# Substance, With Style

**M**uch has been said about substance, but what is the substance of expertise? And why is it important?

Substance is the difference between facade and fact, between appearance and reality. It is about going beyond perception and providing proof. The substance of expertise is in acquiring, using and teaching ideas with impact, and continuing to think, research, create and deepen the reservoir of useful knowledge.

Here are some of my reflections on the substance of expertise along with a couple of ideas from colleagues:

**1** Thought leadership bestowed by the marketplace is more powerful and credible than thought leadership claimed by the thinker. Ross Shafer, CSP, CPAE, says, “You aren’t an expert until your audience repeatedly hires you as such. You aren’t a thought leader until you spur prominent leaders to action. You aren’t an innovator until you’ve walked in the shoes of conventional thinking ... and originated a future path.”

**2** What are you rethinking? If you’ve not re-examined earlier opinions and conclusions, you are in danger. Rigidity of thinking is the enemy of substance and expertise.

**3** Are you a commentator or an innovator? It is one thing to gather ideas and report on them but quite another to originate thoughts and communicate them creatively.

**4** If you read, listen and study only common sources, your output of ideas will be common.

**5** It isn’t what you’ve done, but what you’ve learned—and the insights you can share—that give your expertise substance.

**6** Be clear on your real expertise. For example, you can be an expert on global business or an expert on American business that is of interest to international companies. Both are in demand, but they are not the same.

**7** Be as concerned with the quality of how ideas and insights are expressed as with the quality of the ideas and insights. To be most effective, expertise needs to be communicated well.

**8** I’m frequently reminded that even sophisticated audiences that claim they want to be educated also want to be entertained. You have to “let the tigers out of the cage” (a phrase used by Eric Chester, CSP, CPAE).

**9** Reinvention is easier said than done. The best way to reinvent is to look at new applications of timeless truths in new contexts. An expert can translate how to apply those timeless truths in new ways.

**10** Search for that intersection between what you uniquely bring to the world and what the world will pay you to share.

**11** If you think you really understand everything that is going on, think again. None of us can figure it all out, but we don’t have to. Figure out what is most important to the success of those you love and those you serve in the marketplace. Leave some of the mystery for others to deal with.

**12** In an age of complex problems and unbounded opportunities, we need communicators willing to think deeply and create generously.

So, why bother with all these considerations? While you might be able to attain some measure of success without the substance of expertise, true success will be difficult—if not impossible—to maintain without it.

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