

# Thinking Managers

Edward de Bono of [www.thinkingmanagers.com](http://www.thinkingmanagers.com) argues that our obsession with certainty detracts from our ability to consider other possibilities.

## Action and Possibilities

Everyone is able to try things and experiment, but people tend to prefer certainty as the basis for action. Having such certainty instils in us the confidence to drive forward.

In reality, this belief and the certainty might not necessarily be based on fact, but we need to act on the assumption that it is, especially if we need the approval or help of others for our actions to take place.

Because of this, we shy away from possibilities, making no effort to generate them in case they might dilute the certainty we feel necessary for action.

An answer that appears to be adequate acts as an effective block to further thinking. Only by generating possibilities can we remove the block.

There is a case in medicine that represented a huge change and acts as a powerful illustration of the importance of 'possibilities'.

The peptic ulcer, or duodenal (stomach) ulcer, was a very unpleasant condition. Sometimes sufferers had to take antacids for 20 years or more while being restricted as to what they could eat or drink. Sometimes part of the stomach had to be removed via surgical procedure. This was the outlook for patients and doctors for decades.

However, an Australian doctor by the name of B.J. Marshall had an idea and explored the possibility that peptic ulcers were the result of an infection. The conventional wisdom at that time was that infection was an unlikely explanation as it was thought that the powerful hydrochloric acid in the stomach would easily kill any bacteria. Therefore, the simple and adequate explanation was that ulcers were caused by the acid itself.

However, Marshall was not satisfied with the adequate. He made a culture of the bacteria he suspected was the cause and deliberately gave himself an ulcer. After a while, his point was proved. So now, instead of spending 20 years on antacids, sufferers of peptic ulcers can be cured with a seven-day course of antibiotics.

Generating possibilities from within an organisation can be difficult because experience, values and guidelines often direct the executive mind away from possibilities and instead towards a firm conclusion.

So how can we take care of possibilities? Who should concern themselves with generating possibilities? A solution to this problem could be a 'possibilities officer'. Their task would be to generate and collect possibilities for any situation. They would need to be senior enough to have access where needed and to make decisions, but not so senior that there is no time for the new role.

### About the author:

*Edward de Bono is the world's leading authority in the field of creative thinking and the teaching of thinking as a skill.*

