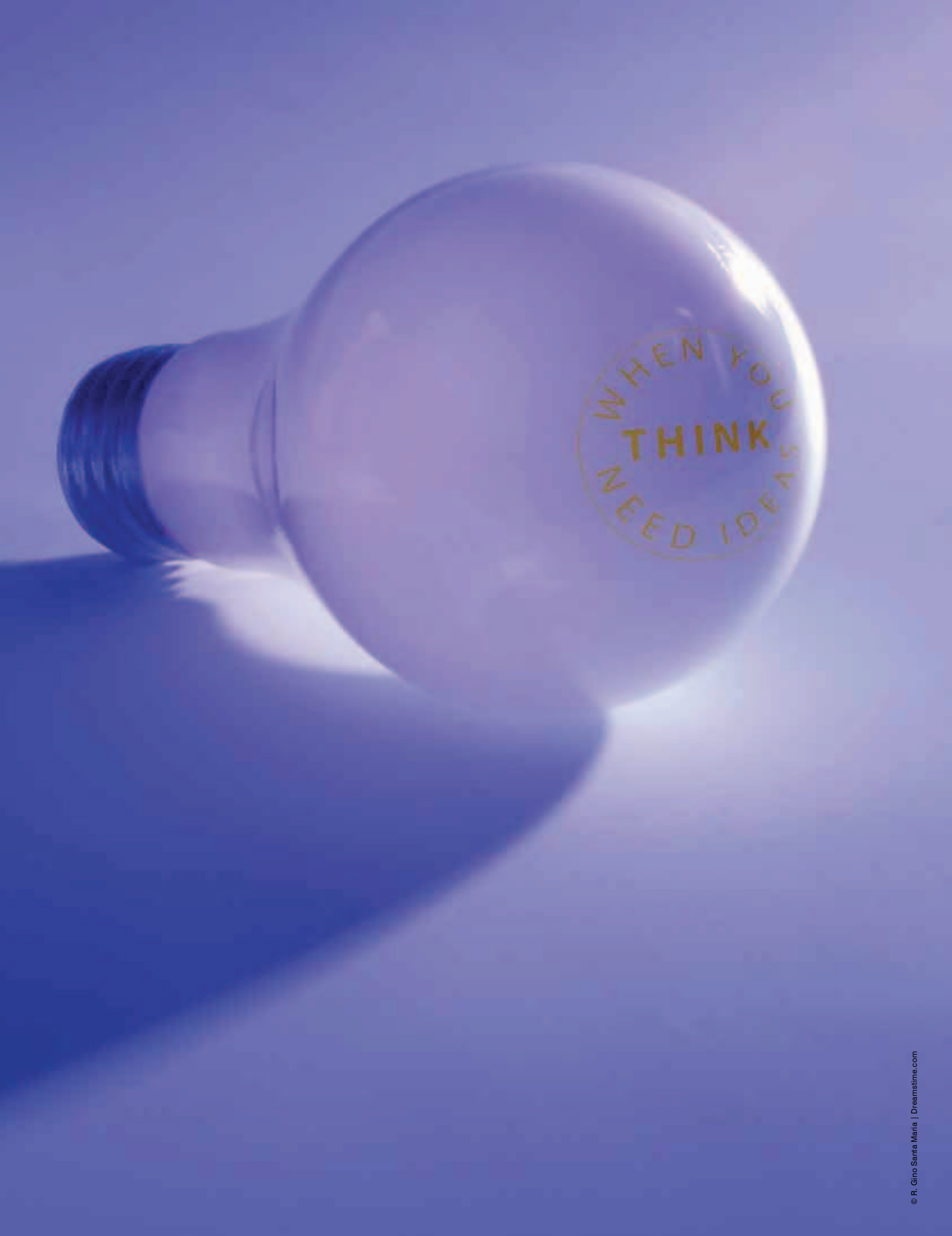


# The Leadership Challenge Is To CREATE

BY TOM WENTZ

For 28 years I have been an agent for an international firm whose products and services are legendary. The mantra or motto of this firm is “*Challenging people to think.*” I have conducted sales and leadership workshops for almost every type of business in almost every industry represented by MANA’s membership. We have now arrived at a time that is unprecedented in our business history. The Industrial Age Business Model that has served as the basis of all thinking is burned out.



**T**hink of a star in the heavens that is 50 light years away. If that star burns out, we will see its light for another 50 years before we realize that it no longer exists. The Industrial Age Business Model, complete with all of its Six Sigma technologies and sophisticated measurements burned out sometime back in the early 1980s. We continued to “work the work” and “think the thinking” within that model with great success on into the glory years of the 1990s.

Symptoms that the star had burned out were ignored. The “excellence” described by Tom Peters in his 1983 epic book *In Search of Excellence* proved that excellent companies could fail. The quality revolution was an attempt to fix many flickering problems. There was some improvement, but most initiatives were too little too late. The teamwork revolution failed. Many reengineering initiatives failed. *Good to Great* companies like Circuit City and Fannie Mae failed. Yet, leaders at all levels continued to “work the work” and “think the thinking” within the Industrial Age Business Model.

**KEY POINT:** | **It was the only way that we knew how to think.**

We were all involved in attempts to solve the prob-

lems within the Industrial Age Business Model. In the Industrial Age Business Model we are sales entities who are supposed to sell what the manufacturer makes and be willing to work on a one-month contract that can be cancelled if they can find a more suitable and lower cost alternative. I was cancelled because I did not “make my number.” Many of us have been cancelled in favor of direct selling approaches. Within the Industrial Age Business Model we are a cost to be reduced or eliminated. Thousands of jobs have been eliminated and sent to lower cost locations. It was the Industrial Age Business Model strategy to be the low cost producer.

I will not chronicle the “rest of the story.” The recession hit without warning and we now know that the Industrial Age Star, the backbone of our economy for more than 100 years, has burned out. The only thing that really matters now is how do we get started toward a new and different future?

**KEY POINT:** | **Never in our history has our leadership mind been challenged to think without the ability to “think about what it wants to think about.” Think about that.**

One of my friends told me last week: “There are days



## We are confronted with an “awareness” gap, not an intelligence gap. *Different* challenges our awareness, not our intelligence.

when I think and nothing happens.” He went on to say: “I have no answers other than to judge what is happening as ‘not right.’ As a leader of a very significant manufacturing firm who sells through reps, he had never felt this way before, yet he was unwilling to admit that he does not have any clear vision going into 2011.

He asked: “What’s happening to me?” He asked the Rep Council who represent what he makes what they think and they all looked to him for an answer. They were all stuck in thinking the thoughts of the past and everyone present was pretending that they knew. They concluded that they should grow. Grow? They concluded that they should work harder and faster and smarter and with more determination to be easy to do business with.

The Industrial Age leaders were great problem solving leaders. Problem solvers can think about a situation because they have thought about it before and have worked the solution in the past. They get paid big bucks to know how to solve problems. So do you. Many of us are great problem solvers but many of our customers are now asking for innovation. Innovation?

Netting this out, *Different Arrived* without warning and no one knows how to “work the work” or “think the thinking” that has never been thought before. All the old thoughts seem useless. Linear predictions of market share don’t make sense. Some Black Belts are still trying to keep the *Titanic* afloat. Many new methods are being developed but being deployed as solutions to problems that cannot be solved.

**KEY POINT:** | The future is not a “problem to solve,” rather something “different” to create.

The antecedent  
for **creating** is vision.

The antecedent  
for **problem solving**  
is the conflict  
from yesterday.

We are confronted with an “awareness” gap, not an intelligence gap. *Different* challenges our awareness, not our intelligence. There are many very intelligent people who are totally unaware when different arrives.

It is important to see that this is a global dilemma. The Industrial Age Star shown its light on the entire world. This is not just a U.S. economy problem to solve. It is a new and different future to create for the whole world.

I suggested to my friend that when different arrives, we need to activate a creating form of leadership. I suggested that it is very important for him to understand the difference between problem solving leadership and creating leadership. They are totally different.

Once again he was confused. He asked for examples as his company website talks about the superiority of his solutions. To him every customer has a problem to solve.

I suggested that “In the beginning God created.” Nothing has ever been solved into existence. Everything that exists is a creation. Yes, some creations are used to solve problems but a burned out business model cannot be fixed or solved. We must begin to create within a totally new and different business model. He tried to think this thought and was immediately confused.

He suggested that his people were creative. I suggest-

ed that “creating” and “creative” are two very different things. “Create” is a verb. “Creative” is an adjective and “creativity” is a noun. “Creating” is the action he was missing from his people. It was true that they have “creativity” and they are “creative,” but they were solving not creating.

Once again, he was challenged to think and that was very difficult for him.

He then asked, “But, don’t we need to come up with “creative solutions” to problems?” Of course, if there are legitimate problems to solve. But, once again I reminded him that a burned out business model cannot be solved. He could not solve something that no longer exists.

He needed another example. I suggested that creating has nothing to do with the creativity of the participants who are involved. Young children create when they scribble. Their creativity has not yet developed. I suggested that his people could begin to scribble in order to meet the challenges of this recession. He went ballistic. I pointed out that his temptation to explode is his Industrial Age Business Model in action. I suggested that many innovations come from people who are scribbling and when the boss is angry, they will stop scribbling and try to work within the rules.

Once again, he was challenged to think and that was very difficult for him.

“Creating” as an activity starts with awareness not intelligence. Edison scribbled many times while creating the light bulb. He could not draw on his intelligence. He would think and nothing would happen. The only question is whether creating is done consciously or unconsciously.

He was getting it but was still confused.

**KEY POINT:** | **Creating leaders know that nothing fails like success. The success of the Industrial Age Business Model finally failed. It burned out.**

This is not a semantics issue. The antecedent for creat-

ing is vision. The antecedent for problem solving is the conflict from yesterday. *Vision leads to action.* Strategies lead to polarized debates from the right and the left. Very seldom are people united by the solution to a problem.

My friend is still confused as he has never been challenged to really think about how things might be different in the future. He is like most of the manufacturers who sell through agents and reps like us. To many we are the problem. We are not selling enough. We are not “working the work” and “thinking the thinking” that was successful in the past. What is market share? It is a burned out concept in this global economy.

I told him that the new business model is called Mass Customization and manufacturers like him are merely components of mass and his reps are now the customizers. This new business model defines a totally new role for his company and a new relationship that he must have with his reps. They must now be partners. They must now have long-term contracts in order to guarantee that the Mass Customization Business Model is sustainable.

He was challenged to think, and the thought about long-term contracts made him mad. He felt out of control.

I told him that partners are invested together, not costs to be eliminated.

He was challenged to think, and that was very difficult for him.

Our conversation lasted for another hour and he said, “My head hurts” and he went home.

He called today and asked: “What does different look like?” That is an excellent question and I said, “Walmart — \$500 Billion and GROWING.” *Want to grow?* There is a totally new business model being executed that supports the “growth” of this great company. AND, it will not be “defeated” by the “thinking” of the Industrial Age. It is called Mass Customization

“*What does different look like?*” This is a very important question for every manufacturer, rep firm, agent, community, state and our nation. In the next article in this series, I will share that vision. 