

# Admap

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## Interactivity

**How to  
create a dialogue  
with your  
customers**

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The secrets of **leadership**

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**Advertising recall** revisited

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Re-thinking **qualitative research**

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# The success-prone genome (and what to do about it)

**Thomas Harrison**, Omnicom Diversified Agency Services, examines what differentiates leaders from followers

**I**N EVERY INDUSTRY CEOs have always focused on the bottom line. How to keep it growing stronger. How to drive cost out of the system and make their businesses more efficient. How to make it more attractive financially to Wall Street, if you are a public company. What happens at your bottom line starts with your top-line management. We must drive value from the top of the organisation or we will be very disappointed in the business outcome.

This article is about squarely facing what is happening at the top of your organisation, not at the expense of the bottom line but at the defence of the bottom line. It is about going back to thinking entrepreneurially. If you are the founder, rediscover the personal qualities that were there when you started the business. If you are not the entrepreneur that launched your organisation but are its current leader – its CEO – what you must do is think entrepreneurially in your corporate environment. I call it 'intrepreneurial' thinking.

I am a trained cell biologist and physiologist who, in my early career, did cancer research and who now sits atop the world's largest holding company responsible for the performance of marketing services and communication entities. We are the Diversified Agency Services division of Omnicom Group Inc. Running the company (as I have been doing for the past eight years) that bought the health care advertising group I founded 14 years ago is probably the best job in this business. It's exciting to spend a lot of time with the entrepreneurial thinkers who manage our business units and the stellar group of over 5700 clients they serve.

## Take risks

As I engage in conversation with the CEOs of some (not all 5700) of our clients, what comes across is a consistent plea: 'Get us to innovation faster, make us more relevant to our end-user constituency, bring us insights and ... take risks.' Yes, take a risk! CEOs today realise they are being compensated to grow corporations, to grow brands. And that calls for abundant risk-taking on their part.

I, too, want us to take more risks – risks based upon the understanding gained by living the consumer experience and by thoroughly listening to what drives the consumer who buys the brands promoted for our clients.

When you consider the most successful start-ups, it is big new ideas, relevancy, fresh insights and risk-taking that are the foundation of entrepreneurial thinking and entrepreneurial behaviour.

So, what does someone trained as a scientist know about entrepreneurialism? Quite a bit, if the scientist also happens to be an entrepreneur. My recently published book, titled *INSTINCT – Tapping Your Entrepreneurial DNA to Achieve Your Business Goals*, highlights my observations (this is what scientists do!) both as an entrepreneur and about entrepreneurs.

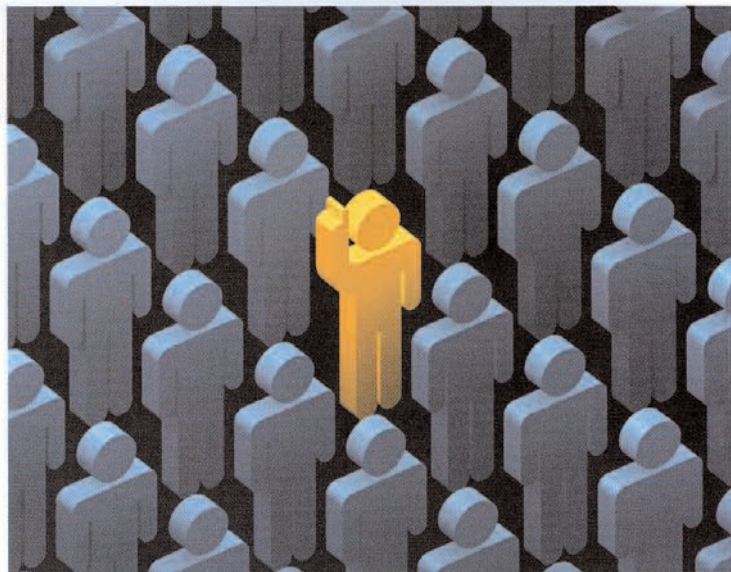
## Nature and nurture

Here is where I came out. The argument is not about nature or nurture. It is nature seeks nurture. We are all born with a

spectrum of five core personality traits – just five. They are:

1. openness to new experiences;
2. conscientiousness;
3. extroversion;
4. agreeableness; and – yes –
5. neuroticism.

We are born with our own special measures of each of these five traits. It is what makes us uniquely different from one another. Too much, or too little, of any one of these personality traits is not the final word on the likelihood of being successful in business. As a scientist, I know that none of us, especially myself, was born with a perfect set of genes – a perfectly balanced spectrum of personality traits. What I have observed is that over the years each of us who wants to climb to the top acquires a set of 'success promoter' techniques or habits that compensate for what may be lacking in what we won in the genetic lottery. We are challenged to capitalise on the favourable genome of our genetic inheritance and mitigate the not-so-favourable genome of our entrepreneurial personality.



Unique individuals: we are all born with a spectrum of five core personality traits – it is what makes us uniquely different from one another

‘Certain parts of the genetically inherited personality push the successful leader to forcefully pursue risk and bypass the “no” in getting to the desired “yes”. For success-prone individuals, “no” does not exist. It immediately is transposed to “not now”’

Over the years, in meeting this challenge I have observed eight drivers that shape a success-prone personality. As an entrepreneur heading my own business I became aware of these forces first-hand. What I found later was the same eight success-prone characteristics evident in the day-to-day activities of the two-dozen highly successful entrepreneurs I interviewed for my book. And it is also the very same instinctive pattern of behaviour seen so often among the entrepreneurial leaders (over 100 of them) found within Omnicom Diversified Agency Services as each senior executive expresses himself or herself within the framework of a unique personality.

While I do not have space in this article to go into all eight of the techniques, I have singled out one of the most important success drivers to share with you.

#### Seeing round corners

It is the uncanny ability to ‘see around corners’ and believe what you see. Openness to new experience allows you to see things in business, in markets and in

interpersonal relationships that other people just don’t see. Bill Gates saw that computers would be ubiquitous. Fred Smith of Fedex was among the first to realise that business people wanted important mail delivered ‘the next day’. Richard Teerlink saw that Harley was selling an experience, not just steel and rubber. Al Neuharth imagined that readers really wanted a national newspaper that had colour – *USA Today*. And Don Panoz looked around the corner and saw that medicines could be administered transdermally through a patch. Each of these men had a vision, each of them saw something that others did not or could not because they were not ‘open’ to what was possible in their industry. Each had a vision that led to phenomenal success at starting or turning around what became a trail-blazing business.

Successful entrepreneurs have an ability to ‘paint a picture’ of success – of what they would like to see happen, or what a market or business would look like in an ideal situation. Knowing where they are starting and ‘seeing the endpoint’, the entrepreneur can determine just what steps need to be taken to get to success, whatever that success really means for them. To some, it is starting a new business; to others, creating a new industry; and to still others, it’s increased share of market, personal recognition or maybe financial gain. Knowing what success ‘looks like’ in their picture allows – or forces – the entrepreneur to stay on ‘forward focus’, to take logical steps forward, to remain singularly focused and to realise the final end-point. That forward focus is vitally important to keep the entrepreneur challenged and linearly moving to reach his unique goal. They persevere in turning that picture into reality. They fear neither the risks involved in getting there, nor the naysayers.

Every entrepreneur who was interviewed for *INSTINCT*, every entrepreneur whose business I have acquired for Omnicom Group, and even myself as an entrepreneur, took and managed risk. Risk to a success-prone person is redefined as ‘opportunity’. Sam Zell was



**Thomas Harrison** is CEO of Omnicom’s Diversified Agency Services. [tom.harrison@dasglobal.com](mailto:tom.harrison@dasglobal.com)

buying commercial real estate when others around him were selling. Bernie Marcus, having been fired at 50, took a risk founding Home Depot. People bet on him failing. And Kay Koplovitz, who like me studied science in college, founded USA Network and established the cable TV industry that risked competition from the three large, well-established broadcast networks.

#### Bypassing ‘no’

Certain parts of the genetically inherited personality push the successful leader to forcefully and vigorously pursue risk and bypass the ‘no’ in getting to the desired ‘yes’. For success-prone individuals, ‘no’ does not exist. It immediately is transposed to ‘not now’. They know they have not created a compelling enough argument to get to ‘yes’. Can you imagine if Fred Smith would have bagged the Fed Express business plan when he got a poor grade from the professor who reviewed that plan? Can you imagine someone telling Steve Jobs that the iPod was a bad idea and that no one would download music and displace their CDs? These innovators were too committed to their entrepreneurial idea to turn around. To stop. To say, ‘I guess they’re right.’ They ignored the ‘no’. They didn’t even acknowledge naysayers. For me, it was making the 25th call to a client I wanted to represent after starting my health care agency before getting him on the phone and then as one of our largest clients.

What is called for in business – every business – today is the ability to think and behave entrepreneurially. To know what your individual, specific success personality is and to intuitively and instinctively put to work some or all of the eight success promoters outlined in *INSTINCT*. Without understanding these inherited or learned capabilities, success can elude you and, in the long run, neither you nor your business is likely to survive in your chosen field of endeavour. ■



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