

URL: <https://stvp.stanford.edu/clips/exposing-more-surfaces>

By appropriating knowledge and thinkers from a broader scope of learning - i.e. exposing more "surfaces" - John Seely Brown, Independent Co-Chairman from the Deloitte Center for the Edge, states that knowledge from outside a field of expertise can be banked and extremely valuable to stirring up innovation in one's own sector. He cites an example of one man who travels to a far-flung conference every year simply to strategize and learn to think outside his comfort zone. Taking an interest in energy (a field outside his own), he created programs and legislation that yielded effective results.



Transcript

And this guy is pretty interesting, and he says, "You know, John, most people today, they get stuck in one frame.. They have one thing that they want to do.. And what I'm finding constantly is I want to find a way to expose more surfaces.. I could go into the way our food system actually works in our body so that I'm not too narrow focused, so I'm prepared to hear things that may not seem immediately relevant right away, but I'm still wanting to listen to them and appropriate them." Because if you have only one surface then, basically, what happens is you actually don't get much out of these knowledge flows, unless you're willing to think a little bit out of the box.. And in the corporate world, what if I know over and over again, and this shouldn't be a problem to you guys have is, how do you get out of your comfort zone? So what Jack does every year is he goes to at least one conference that he knows nothing about? The first day in that conference, he sits in a conference.. He learns the technical terms.. He learns the grace, the scope, the shape of the ideas, and so on and so forth.. The second day, he hangs out in the corridors just listening to conversations.. And the third day, he actually starts to actively participate with people, practicing how do you talk, how do you think about things, but now bringing his broader perspective to this game.. Now, you guys know Jack..

You may know Jack.. At least you know some of the things he's done.. So, Jack shows up at the ASPEN Festival - I mean ASPEN roundtable in the ASPEN Institute.. He decides to drop in on energy.. He knows nothing about energy.. But the third day, he realizes, "Man, this is a serious problem.. I want to get engaged." And so he creates what he calls now "The Carbon War Room," which you can go on the Web and see.. And he talks a dozen incredibly powerful entrepreneurs, one being Richard Branson to join, and attracts enough attention through creating these beacons, he calls them, that people can now start to discover.. To say if you have ideas of a certain kind, come talk to us.. And so, he went from this serendipitous encounter to now shaping a space that started to attract and pull relevant people to him to make something happen..

And you know him for two things.. If you come from New York, he pulled together the resources and the people to create and to get Mayor Bloomberg to put in the hybrid taxi ruling that says by the next four years, basically, half the taxis, or something like this, have to be hybrids.. And you also know the Cash from Clunkers program; that was his that came out of the Carbon War Room by attracting, again, the right set of people to help him make that happen..