Getting Food Distribution Research Applied In The 1970's

An Industry Research Approach

To get there understand priorities, have a sense of direction, reality, future strategy of company, alternative approaches, management involvement, and be willing to move.

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For me to be asked to speak at this gathering had a special attraction. I am a University of Maryland graduate. Yes, I am a Terrapin. I remember the decal on my jalopy of a Terrapin crawling out of a test tube -- the sign of Chemical Engineering students. There is some significance to this symbol related to the present topic. A turtle crawling out a test tube. The test tube signifying research and development -- and too many of us acting like turtles. All too often we depend on the turtle's defense mechanism toward the cruel world. We stick our heads out only when the world is safe. When a predator arrives on the scene, in goes our head.

Let's draw this analogy a bit farther. We research minded people all know that the supermarket industry is overcrowded with barracudas. And among these voracious animals we swim around. I am not saying that to exist we must turn into predatory creatures ourselves, but neither can we keep retreating into our shells everytime danger lurks.

You know, in nature, a turtle lives a lot longer than a barracuda, so we may feel perfectly secure knowing that in the long run we'll outlast these daily bloody encounters. But this is still a very competitive ocean we are swimming in, and it is our chosen profession!

All of us, no doubt, have heard speeches or read statements by the tycoons in Business Management. They place great value on Innovation. And really this is the "Applied Research" we are talking about.

And yet, we, the Appliers of Research Findings, often find it difficult to introduce our ideas within a company, governmental department or university.

Now, in my opinion, the solution to this dilemma doesn't lie so much in how brilliant or how skillful we ourselves are. Rather, I believe the key to our success, that is the success of the Applied Researcher, is the recognition by Top Management that there is a need for Objective Research and Evaluation.
that there is a need of **New Methods**, and that there is a need for **Innovation**.

The climate, or environment has to be created and cultured and kept alive by a very conscious effort of Top Management. Without the existence of this first prerequisite there will be no chance at all, regardless of our own qualifications.

If you think that this is a passive approach, let me assure you it is not! A full realization of this idea will impel you to change jobs until you find the right climate. At any rate, this was what I felt I had to do, regardless of the risks involved in change. Too many people choose to remain at the same job, despite daily frustration hoping for a better day.

I suspect that many a promising career of potentially good "Implementers of Research" has ended after a few years of frustration and or bitterness.

The trouble with this is that discontent is a *poor catalyst* for a fertile mind and the creation of innovative ideas. All too often the turtle pulls in his head and waits for retirement or as more often happens, to be retired.

Once we have found a compatible boss and Top Management, we have to train ourselves to be realistic. We, the Implementers, have to do the following things:

**First**, we must make a real effort to understand the priorities of our organization. No matter how simple our business or department is, there is always much more to be done than there are resources available to do it. The opportunities are always more plentiful than the means to realize them. Priorities have to be set by Management and by you, or you'll feel needlessly frustrated.

**Second**, we have to gain a sense of direction. To do this we must know the internal capabilities available for the implementation of any good research idea.

**Third**, we should send forth only those ideas that fit within the existing framework. We cannot expect to sell an idea if it doesn't fit within the existing framework or image of our company. In other words, one of our functions is to screen the possible efforts our company can expend, and present to Management only those which are relevant now and which promise a maximum return. We should remain in the real world of here and now. We have to realize that few people and fewer companies can afford the ideal. It may just not fit in the operation, or it may just be too expensive.

**Fourth**, we must have an understanding of the strategy of the future development of the company. It makes no sense trying to implement an idea to improve a system which is intended for the scrap heap.
Fifth, we must be able to consider the fact that there are different approaches to the same goal; that our approaches often have to be modified for the best economic return.

So we always have to remind ourselves to ask of our own projects - How can we modify this concept to compromise within the existing framework of our company to reach an optimum return on investment?

Let us also remember that Top Management, even if it wishes to implement innovation, it often is not in the position to do so. Capital requirements often are such that their hands are tied, they are in a squeeze. Often Top Management is in a real sense the trustee of money of widows and children. But still, the overriding desire to Innovate has to exist.

I believe that this is where a society such as this one comes in. It permits me to know and cultivate many friends -- good, down-to-earth friends, who can help me a "idea hounders." I cannot overstress the sincere belief that several people right here have repeatedly provided me with great help.

To go back to Top Management -- this same Top Management has to inform us of the framework of priorities, the directions, and the goals and limits for those activities so that acceptance and also economic justification are both present when a project appears to warrant implementation.

I think it may be worthwhile to discuss an example from which I learned very much. In 1961 and 1962, Dale Anderson, Marvin Volz and others proved that Central Meat Processing was a technical reality. It'll probably be another five to ten years before a great number of the chains implement the fundamental ideas. Why should it take so long? The need was there in 1961, but most Top Managements did not understand the American economy sufficiently to tackle the many road blocks which were promptly put in the way -- unions, meat merchandisers, packers (who could do it for you") controllers, rivalry, politics, etc. I am convinced that the idea is sound, that Central Cutting has to come, and that only Top Management involvement can get it off the ground. I am also convinced that without Top Level commitment, we would have never made it to the moon.

If your management or boss doesn't believe in these things, and is unable to logically tell you why, change bosses and companies! There is no way in the world that you can expect to change the typical manager, production or line manager, or whatever you want to call him. Know that applied research represents a real, not only imagined, threat to many people who typically run a department of a company. It'll upset a tightly running ship. Don't rely entirely on your own ability to "sell ideas." They often are unwanted and even feared. Rather, find the right climate and prove yourselves worthy to this rare event.