

creatingcustomer evangelists



How Loyal Customers Become a Volunteer Sales Force

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Foreword by Guy Kawasaki

## Creating Customer Evangelists: How Loyal Customers Become a Volunteer Sales Force

By Ben McConnell and Jackie Huba

Foreword by Guy Kawasaki  
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# CHAPTER | 10

## THE HIGH-FLYING SOLUTIONMAN solutionpeople

*“Judge intelligence by the answers given to questions. Judge creativity by the questions asked.”<sup>1</sup>*

—GERALD HAMAN, founder and president of SolutionPeople

Gerald Haman spent \$2,500 to launch his million-dollar business.

Haman’s company is SolutionPeople, a Chicago-based creativity, innovation, training, and consulting firm. It helps companies brainstorm ideas for new products and services, solve existing problems, and improve teamwork skills. Haman launched SolutionPeople not long after the elder George Bush was being sworn in as president. Haman’s idea behind his company: training should be fun, and the tools for it should be perpetually useful.

It was 1989 and Haman bet that investing a few thousand dollars to mingle with the 5,000 attendees at the meeting of the American Society for Training and Development (ASTD) at the Dallas, Texas, Convention Center would be a good strategy for launching his company. The human resources and training professionals who make up the ASTD get together every year to discuss the latest techniques and methodologies to train people in their companies.

Haman had a product that generated a lot of buzz: a handheld tool he called the Pocket Innovator that training professionals could carry in their pocket. Like a deck of cards but with a binding, the card in the Pocket

Innovator was filled with provocative questions that would spur its users to think about their problem creatively.

So, it's 1989 at the ASTD convention, and Haman's booth is next to that of Ned Herrmann, a well-known creativity specialist whose book *Creative Brain* had just been released. Herrmann was a biggie in the business during his career and, in Haman's eyes, a giant who could squash all upstarts. Was it an omen?

"I've never even thought of putting myself in the same class as Herrmann because he was such a pioneer in the field," Haman says. "A lot of his research is a model for ours. His thinking influenced mine. And we were at the same conference in Dallas. That's interesting; I've never thought of that before but yes, I think it was an omen."<sup>2</sup>

This moment in Haman's history did not come lightly. He bootstrapped his company from the outset. To save on expenses, he had recruited his sister, Elaine, to staff the convention booth with him, and they took turns going to the bathroom. But Haman's bet paid off as people lined up dozens deep to purchase the Pocket Innovator. Buzz about the little tool spread quickly on the trade show's floor.

"I think we captured some attention for having a unique tool that people wanted to get their hands on," Haman concedes. "If there's one theme that has allowed us to have people walk away as evangelists is everybody gets a tool that can help them to a certain degree."<sup>3</sup>

Because his product got people talking, two key things happened as a result of the conference: (1) Haman landed two big clients: Hewlett Packard and Digital Equipment Corporation; and (2) he met Linda Stockman-Vines, a writer, who played a central role in helping create huge amounts of buzz for the company.

As a company of one, Haman eventually signed up 50 clients from that weeklong show in Dallas. The tool and Haman's company were instant hits. Did his confidence ever waver before the show?

"I wasn't nervous," he says. "I was excited and intuitively felt it would be successful."<sup>4</sup>

He grossed \$87,000 his first year in business. Twelve years later in 2002, SolutionPeople was doing \$4 million per year and occupying several studios in a converted warehouse in Chicago's West Loop. At the beginning of 2002, he counted 160 of the Fortune 500 among his clients. He charges between \$60,000 to \$100,000 for two and three days of brainstorming facilitation. His annual growth rate between 1999 and 2001 was 30 percent; and Haman keeps a staff of ten people very, very busy.

When he launched the company, Haman had few competitors in what's loosely called the "creativity consulting" industry. In 2002, the landscape of consultants who take organizations through a systematic creativity

process is filled with competitors big and small, from McKinsey to Eureka Ranch and Gary Hamel's Strategos.

Haman's work has taken him all over the world, including Singapore, where he helped 7,500 people at a stadium generate 454,000 ideas in 60 minutes. There he set three Guinness World Records: the highest volume of ideas generated in 60 minutes; the largest brainstorming team ever assembled; and the largest team of facilitators ever assembled. A survey conducted by Northwestern University's Kellogg Alumni Consulting Group reported that SolutionPeople has helped its clients generate over 1 million ideas valued at \$1 billion dollars.

Haman keeps a framed copy of his first paycheck—a \$29,000 endorsement from Digital Equipment—in his office. His marketing methodology from the beginning was to investigate what people needed and then to create tools and ideas to meet those needs.

SolutionPeople creates customer evangelists because:

- A unique and helpful tool gets people talking.
- Haman focuses on building networks of fans.
- Expert media relations help fuel interest and belief in his cause.
- Business is theater—SolutionPeople provides a memorable experience.

Let's examine in detail each of these ways by which SolutionPeople creates customer evangelists.

## HOW A UNIQUE AND HELPFUL TOOL GETS PEOPLE TALKING

Gerald Haman has always been on the creative side of business. In the early 1980s, he was a concert promoter for Air Supply and Cheap Trick. Tiring of the road, he landed at Procter & Gamble in 1982, selling Crest and Scope.

He migrated to Big Five consulting firm Arthur Andersen in 1987, where he was a researcher in the company's Professional Education Division. It was at Andersen that Haman's ideas for his own company started to take shape.

Frustrated that few people at Andersen seemed to care much for the overweight training manuals the company issued in bulky three-ring binders, Haman decided to test a hypothesis: Did anyone really use the things?

"The firm was spending millions of dollars a year on training materials," he says. "The only people who seemed to appreciate them were the people who designed them. They would go in for their performance reviews and say,

‘Yeah, I developed this one-day seminar, and here’s my big, fat three-ring binder. Look what I accomplished.’”<sup>5</sup>

Being the Big Five consulting professional he was at the time, Haman launched a formal study. His hunch that the girth of the training binders made them impractical to use consistently proved right. One day, while shopping in a tile store, Haman picked up a swatch of tile color samples, and the proverbial lightbulb—Haman’s trademark icon—clicked on. How about a training tool that could fit in one’s pocket yet provide structure for the creative process? With that, the Pocket Innovator tool—which eventually became the KnowBrainer tool—was born. (See Figure 10.1.)

Like those color sample strips in Figure 10.1, the KnowBrainer tool performs in the same type of theater. Imagine 96 of the strips bolted together with information on each side. Add scads of descriptive phrases and provocative questions such as, “What is needed, wanted, or wished?” or “What should people KNOW?” Organize them according to four strategic

Figure 10.1 | The KnowBrainer



categories of “Investigate, Create, Evaluate, and Activate” (what Haman calls the Diamond Solution Process), and you have the KnowBrainer tool.

What makes the tool a strategic and viral element of Haman’s marketing prowess? For starters, it’s portable, slipping easily into a purse, a pocket, or a palm. It’s unlike most other training tools, although the KnowBrainer seems familiar—just like holding those color swatches from the tile or paint store.

In evangelism marketing terms, the KnowBrainer tool is a Napsterized version of Haman’s knowledge. Using it day to day doesn’t require a \$150 per hour consultant (although it can help).

“My attitude has been to get as many of these out there as possible so that people talk about them,” Haman says. “Napsterized is a good way to think about it. If you think about the ease of sharing, that’s key, although these are difficult to photocopy, and I don’t know if people would go through the work of copying one of these, which has been one of the clever aspects about it.”<sup>6</sup>

In addition, the KnowBrainer works pretty well as a sales tool for landing future customers. Haman ships the KnowBrainer to prospects in advance of their meeting and uses it to discover the companies’ problems and issues. “It always makes for an engaging discussion,” Haman says.<sup>7</sup>

With SolutionPeople clearly labeled on each KnowBrainer, the tool reminds its users—whether they have met Haman or not—of its origin. Unlike most traditional marketing trinkets, this one provides real value.

“What makes it viral is that it feels pretty good to have in the palm of your hand. It just feels comfortable to have around to play with. But if everyone can generate some ideas that are useful, they’re going to tell other people and say, ‘Hey, this helped me; it might help you.’ Then I think the virality potential is really good.”<sup>8</sup>

Twelve years after their creation, Haman estimates he has sold roughly 150,000 copies of the pocket-based tools.

Lessons learned:

- Understand and study what doesn’t work in your industry.
- Your product or service must be unique and deliver immediate value.
- Size matters; in this case, smaller is better.

## HAMAN’S FOCUS ON BUILDING NETWORKS OF FANS

Haman launched SolutionPeople without four-color brochures or a Web site (it was 1989, after all) and not much marketing collateral: just a well-defined service, a solid elevator pitch, and a contagious tool that cre-

ated buzz. “We didn’t even have a letterhead until about two years after we started,” Haman says.<sup>9</sup>

For those who labor under an assumption that growth comes from advertising strategies dedicated to “creating brand awareness and building brand equity,” Haman’s success is evidence that a grassroots approach can build a long-term, sustainable company. It can even work for a company that wishes to remain small, which is Haman’s objective.

“Can I imagine having built my business through advertising?” Haman asks, then laughs. “It’s kind of fun to think about it, I imagine. But no, I can’t.”<sup>10</sup>

Thirteen years after SolutionPeople landed its first customer, the company still lacks four-color brochures. Other than its Web site, <www.solutionpeople.com>, the company has not produced any sales collateral. Haman has grown his business through three types of marketing connections (not in any particular order of importance).

1. Membership in organizations
2. Appearances at conferences and networking events
3. Referrals from friends and associates

To understand his success with grassroots marketing, let’s begin with the personal, people-based evangelism that SolutionPeople has enjoyed. We spend a few hours with Haman in the “Thinkubator,” Haman’s name for his studio, to trace the routes that have led to his client engagements.

Because Haman maintains a database of nearly everyone he’s met, we’re able to build diagrams of the connections. We create a detailed network map of people, association memberships, and speaking engagements. Three hours later, we have scribbled names, dates, companies, and events on five large easel sheets. We leave the Thinkubator convinced that even one person can create a confluence of connections and a roster of paying clients.

Take, for instance, Dan Pink, the author of *Free Agent Nation*, a book about the growing ranks of the self-employed in the United States. At one point in his career, Pink was the chief speechwriter for Vice President Al Gore.

He’s also a contributing editor for *Fast Company* magazine as well as what author Emanuel Rosen calls a “network hub”: a person of influence whom people rely on for information. Haman calls Pink “a master networker.”

In 1998, Pink posted a note to *Fast Company*’s online communities, which are known as Company of Friends cells (see Chapter 6). At the time, Pink was conducting research for *Free Agent Nation* and visiting Company of Friends cells around the country to meet free agents.

Enter Neil Kane, a friend of Haman's since the early 1990s. Kane told Haman about the online note and encouraged Haman to contact Pink. Haman did, and they enjoyed a good conversation. As a result, Pink recommended to his colleagues at *Fast Company* that SolutionPeople would make an interesting magazine story.

The *Fast Company* editors were intrigued. A few months later, in April 1999, the magazine featured a three-page article about life in the Thinkubator. The 769-word article in *Fast Company*, which included a color photograph of Haman dressed as his superhero alter ego "Solutionman," was directly responsible for landing nine clients, eight of them Fortune 500 companies.

Let's trace the web of connections from that single, evangelistic response Neil Kane posted in reply to Dan Pink's question as shown in Figure 10.2 and the 12 steps depicted in the figure.

1. Dan Pink posts a question to a Company of Friends list.
2. Neil Kane notices the post and forwards it to Haman.
3. An article about Haman is written for the magazine.
4. An employee of Adidas reads the *Fast Company* article and calls Haman for more information. Adidas becomes a client.
5. An employee of Adidas loves the work and evangelizes SolutionPeople to contacts at Harvard University, several of whose MBA graduates eventually become SolutionPeople clients.
6. A representative of a company called Momentum Marketing reads the article and decides SolutionPeople is just what its client, General Motors, needs. Several weeks later, the Buick division of GM joins the SolutionPeople client roster.
7. *Fast Company* invites Haman to speak at its 1999 RealTime conference in Naples, Florida.
8. At the conference, *Fast Company* gives away 500 KnowBRAINER tools to attendees. The tool giveaway is central to landing new clients General Electric, American Express, and the Tom Peters Group.
9. At the RealTime convention, Haman meets Andy Hines, who at the time was with Kellogg's. Several weeks later, a team from Kellogg's journeys from their Battle Creek, Michigan, headquarters for a session at the Thinkubator. Their brainstorm eventually produces new cereal products.
10. Hines departs Kellogg's and joins Dow Chemical. Shortly thereafter, Dow becomes a SolutionPeople client.
11. Hines evangelizes Haman's company to his peers in the chemical industry, and eight months later Haman is speaking before the Chemical Specialties Conference in Chicago.

Figure 10.2 | Web of Connections from One Evangelist



Source: SolutionPeople

12. Sitting in the front row at the conference was an executive from Capital One, the financial services firm. The executive liked what he heard and shortly thereafter a Capital One team was jamming in the Thinkubator, brainstorming new products and ideas.

All told, one evangelist—Neil Kane—was indirectly responsible for at least \$2 million in revenue for SolutionPeople.

## How Two Davids Partnered to Help Goliath

Kevin Olsen is the founding partner of One Smooth Stone, a strategic communications and marketing firm that works primarily in the meetings and events industry. In 1995, Olsen took the same calculated risk Haman had three years earlier by investing several thousand dollars in a trade show as a bet-the-company marketing strategy. But the trade show, the Chicago Society of Association Executives, was a bust. “We couldn’t catch a cold there,” he says. “And we only met one person. It was Gerald.

“We were ready for Gerald.”

It turns out that Olsen and his young company needed the systematic approach toward creativity and innovation that Haman offered. The two became fast friends. Olsen involved Haman in several of his company’s projects, and as they worked together, they referred clients to one another. There was Xerox, A.T. Kearney, Navistar, Motorola.

Olsen quickly grasped the idea of evangelism marketing—it turned out that he is the son of a preacher.

“An evangelist is one of the highest callings there is,” he says. “I am an evangelist of what I believe in: building relationships that win. Gerald is a classic example of a relationship that will have legs for a long time.”<sup>12</sup>

Lessons learned:

- Cultivate relationships of quality, not quantity.
- Keep good records of people you meet.
- Help your friends as much as possible.
- Get involved with organizations you believe in.

## EXPERT MEDIA RELATIONS HELP FUEL INTEREST AND BELIEF IN HAMAN’S CAUSE

The power of the media can be exponential, and Haman has created a solid strategy to help journalists quickly accomplish what many of them seek: a good story about a colorful character.

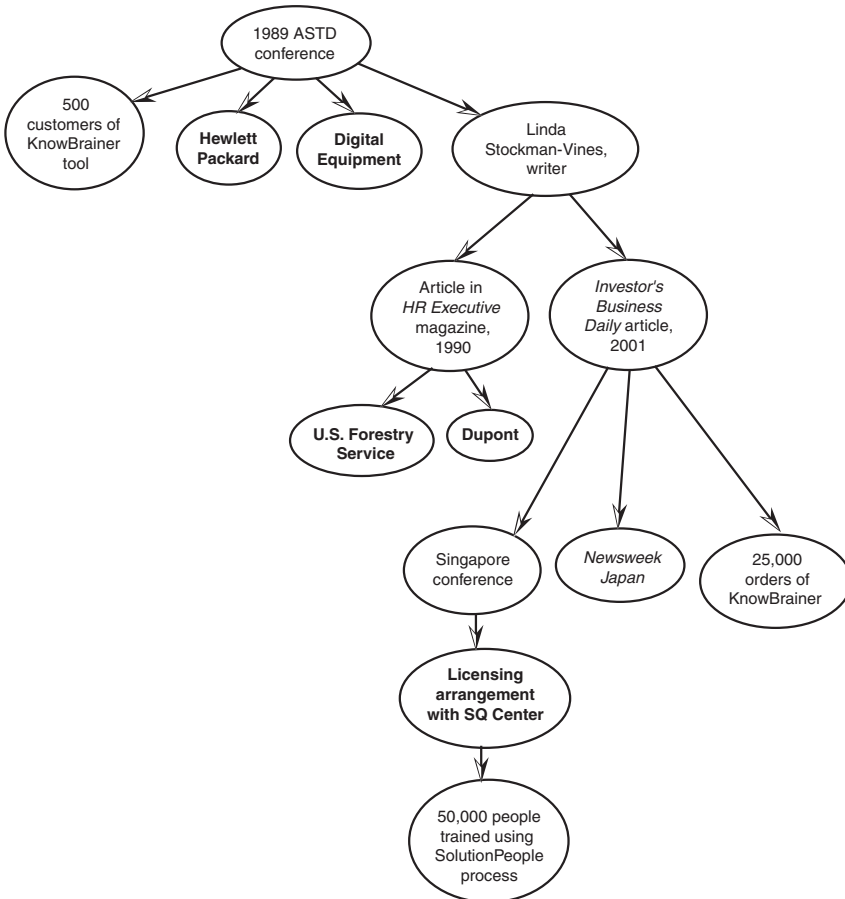
He sends the KnowBrainer tool to reporters before an interview and uses it during the interview as a live demonstration of the tool’s effectiveness as well as for providing reporters a new avenue for asking questions.

The first article about SolutionPeople in 1989 created ripples of subsequent articles that continues years later. Haman met Linda Stockman-Vines, a journalist who writes about training, human resources, and creativity issues, in 1989 at the ASTD conference in Dallas. Intrigued,

Stockman-Vines wrote an article about the KnowBrainer tool for *Human Resource Executive* magazine. We can trace the effects Stockman-Vines had on Haman’s business and the roots of SolutionPeople at the 1989 ASTD convention by examining Figure 10.3 and a chronology of the 12 steps represented in the figure.

1. Haman rents a booth at the ASTD conference in Dallas.
2. Five hundred people purchase the KnowBrainer tool (known then as the Pocket Innovator).
3. Hewlett Packard and Digital Equipment Corporation become clients.

Figure 10.3 | Early Roots of SolutionPeople



Source: SolutionPeople

4. Haman meets writer Linda Stockman-Vines.
5. She writes an article about Haman for *Human Resource Executive* magazine.
6. Executives at Dupont and the U.S. Forest Service read the article and sign on as SolutionPeople clients.
7. In 2001, Stockman-Vines writes another article about Haman, this time for *Investor's Business Daily*.
8. An official with the government of Singapore reads the second article and invites Haman to help brainstorm government improvement strategies, which leads in turn to setting a Guinness World Record.
9. The Singapore conference leads to a KnowBrainer licensing arrangement (and one of Haman's key strategic objectives) with a Singaporean company.
10. The Singapore licensing arrangement trains 50,000 people in Asia using the SolutionPeople approach.
11. *Newsweek Japan* publishes an article on Haman's company, an Indonesian consulting firm that reads the article licenses the KnowBrainer tool.
12. Haman sells thousands of KnowBrainer tools because of the *Investor's Business Daily* article.

Lessons learned:

- Talk to the media at every opportunity.
- Help the media tell a good story—don't expect them to blindly promote you.

## BUSINESS AS THEATER: PROVIDE A MEMORABLE EXPERIENCE

Gerald Haman is not afraid to be out there. To dress up in a costume; to stand out in the crowded business field; to introduce theater into business.

Meet Solutionman.

Solutionman sports a red cape, tights, and a sturdy chin not unlike Haman's boyhood hero, Superman. Solutionman was born when Lari Washburn, one of Haman's clients at Lucent, said out of the blue one day, "You're such a solution man." That was another lightbulb moment, and soon Solutionman was being photographed for *Fast Company* magazine, making appearances in schools, and canvassing trade shows.

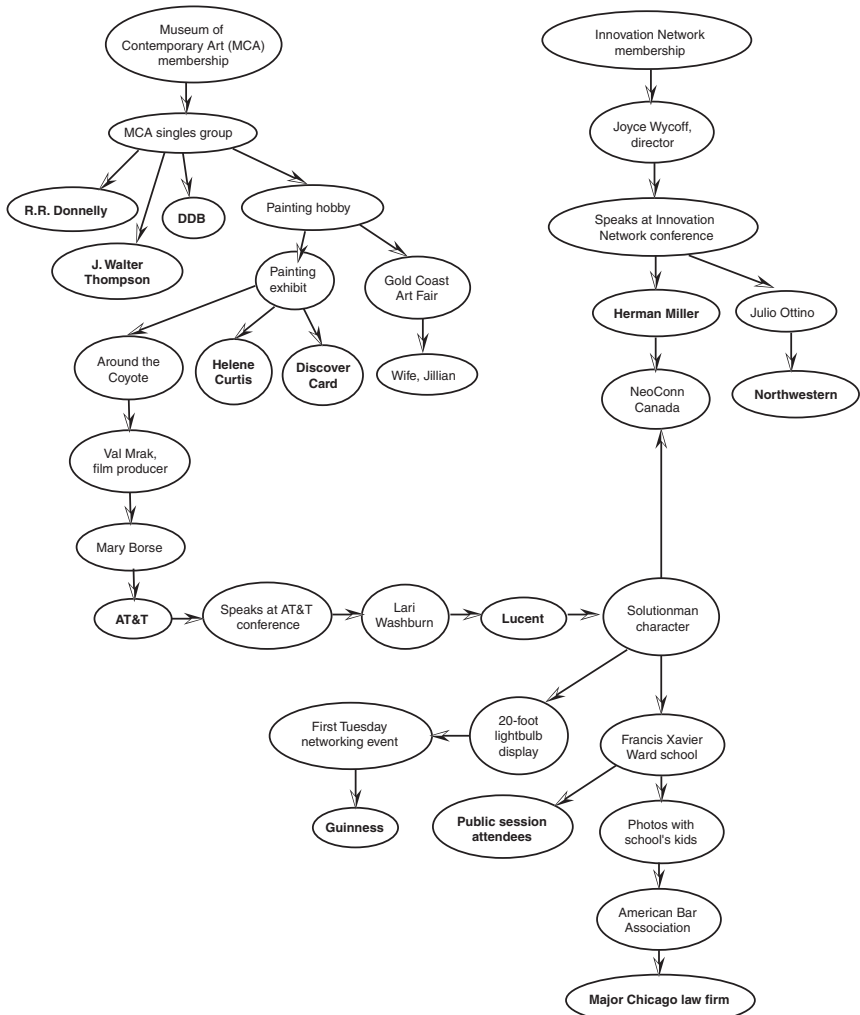
An appearance at Chicago's Francis Xavier Ward grade school in 1997 created a good deal of buzz. Solutionman teaches kids in various

Chicago schools several times a year about the value of teamwork and creativity. He also has pictures made with the kids he teaches, and the pictures are developed with a Solutionman sticker on the back. One photograph caught the attention of a parent who wondered what the Solutionman business was about and called Haman for more information. The parent, a lawyer for a large Chicago-based law firm, liked the pitch and thought the American Bar Association (ABA) could use Solutionman's help. Soon, the ABA was a client and later the parent's law firm itself.

The creation of Solutionman is part of a larger network of connections in the history of Haman's company that began years earlier with Haman's membership in Chicago's Museum of Contemporary Art, as depicted in Figure 10.4 and explained in the following 11 steps.

1. Haman joins Chicago's Museum of Contemporary Art.
2. He becomes active in the museum's group of art evangelists.
3. His involvement with the group introduces him to several future clients: R.R. Donnelly, the large printing company, and two advertising agencies: J. Walter Thompson and DDB.
4. His involvement with the museum inspires him to pursue his hobby of painting.
5. His hobby results in two exhibitions.
6. At one of the exhibitions, Haman meets two future clients, Helene Curtis and Discover Card. He is also invited to participate in another art exhibition called *Around the Coyote*.
7. At another exhibition, he meets his future wife, Jillian.
8. At *Around the Coyote*, Haman meets Val Mrak, a film producer, who introduces him to Mary Borse, at that time an employee of AT&T, which later becomes a client.
9. AT&T invites him to speak at a conference, where he meets Lari Washburn of Lucent, which soon becomes a client. His work with Lari leads to the development of Solutionman.
10. At an appearance at a Chicago school, Solutionman's picture piques the interest of a parent, who eventually helps Haman land new business with the American Bar Association and a large Chicago-based law firm.
11. Solutionman inspires the creation of a huge lightbulb display, which gets the attention of a Chicago networking group (*First Tuesday*), and eventually leads to landing another client, Guinness UDV, the beverage company.

Figure 10.4 | SolutionPeople Buzz Map



Source: SolutionPeople

After each major event, SolutionPeople posts a 100-page, picture-heavy PowerPoint document on its Web site. The photos prominently feature people and the event’s accomplishments. A 20-person event held at an English castle in March 2002 generated 5,000 viewings of the online document, Haman says.

## Life in the Thinkubator Theater

A common element among our seven case study companies is an unwavering emphasis on an enjoyable experience. A utilitarian experience is not memorable, but an enjoyable and fun experience creates buzz. A day at the Thinkubator, Haman's name for his studio where people journey to brainstorm ideas for their companies, gets people talking. Coauthor Jackie Huba signed up for an Accelerated Innovation seminar held in October 2001.

A week before I am to attend the seminar at the Chicago-based Thinkubator, I receive a "KnowBrainer Pre-Seminar Planner" via e-mail. It asks nine questions about my understanding of creativity and innovation and how I might apply what I learn. I'm asked to send back the answers before the seminar.

Training day: Once inside the Thinkubator's front door, I'm mesmerized. A toy frog at the entrance delivers a welcome croak. The room is a colorful splash of life. Everything from the furniture—large, red-lip chairs and comfy couches—to the dozens of lightbulbs-as-idea sculptures to a bathroom whose tub doubles as a tank for Solutionfish creates brainstorm sparks. It's like stepping in to Pee Wee Herman's Playhouse minus the talking chair. I can't wait to talk about everything in the room being crazily out of the ordinary.

It's 8 AM, and the other workshop attendees are already jazzed; music jukes the background. We settle in on the comfy funky couches and beanbag chairs. Haman introduces himself to our group of 25. We are marketing specialists, organizational development consultants, executives of associations, and managers of various companies in and outside of Chicago. We learn this will be a bite-size chunk of what Haman's Fortune 500 clients pay up to \$100,000 to experience over several days.

Haman explains that one day during his junior year at the University of North Dakota he arrived late at his philosophy class. His professor, Dr. Benjamin Ring, was not pleased and asked Haman to consider the question What motivates people? By the end of class, Haman had written that question over and over until he filled 25 pages of his notebook. (Interestingly, Dr. Ring had also posed the same question to a previous student, former NBA star and renowned coach Phil Jackson.) In 1981, the question of what motivates people burned inside Haman's mind, eventually driving him to launch SolutionPeople. The answer to the question: being creative.

Thanks to a study by a graduate student at Northwestern University, Haman learned that people are 13 percent more productive when not wearing shoes, and 20 percent of people think faster when standing. Haman invites us to remove our shoes and slip on brand-new white tube socks that he gleefully distributes. Everyone is quite amused.

It's time for work. We begin with the "Know Your Brain" game. We file into a room filled with color-coded cards—blue, red, green, yellow—each of which has a word imprinted on it. We are told to pick three cards that best describe ourselves. I select two reds (Enthusiastic, Passionate) and a green (Planner). We file back into the main room and introduce ourselves, our colors, and why we chose the colors we did. As I circulate in the room, I make connections with my fellow reds, knowing that we belong to a community of passion.

Haman keeps the motivation mojo going by announcing he will distribute tickets to those who actively participate in today's session by asking questions or volunteering. (It seems Dr. Ring has taught him well.) At the end of the day, he will conduct a drawing for prizes for people who gather the most tickets. Immediately, we're intrigued. Win prizes? This is going to be fun.

Haman tells how Einstein was once asked: If you were given an hour to save the world, how would you spend the time? Einstein said he would spend 55 minutes investigating the problems and 5 minutes coming up with ideas.

He says, "Judge intelligence by the answers given to questions. Judge creativity by the questions asked."<sup>13</sup>

This is a segue into the "Question" game. We are each to pair up with someone and practice using the "Flash Word" technique, just as Haman does with real reporters. I pair up with John, whose firm helps companies improve shareholder value. One of us is to play the "reporter" and the other an "expert." Using the tool, John plays reporter first and randomly asks questions from each of the four steps in the process. I'm stumped by several questions. The KnowBrainer surfaces issues I would have never imagined, especially in my profession.

The challenge is dialed up a notch because John takes satisfaction from playing mean reporter. I find the KnowBrainer such questions as "What do you want people to feel?" and "What do you want people to think?" interesting because they're uncommon. John throws in his own, with some derisiveness: "Why would anyone care about what you do?" I guess that my answers don't immediately add up to shareholder value. I decide that John could have a new career on Fox News.

Now it's time to form "colorful teams of twisted thinkers." We organize into groups of four and five. Our mission is to apply Haman's Diamond Solution Process to a problem. We tackle "how to choose a Halloween costume." Our group does OK in the investigative and creative steps, but falters in the evaluative step, and we're not sure why, even though our problem seems straightforward.

The metaphor of how this happens every day in companies across the world—settle on an idea and move forward—is not lost on us.

By now it's time for lunch, which is being served in the Thinkubator's disco, which is part dance floor and part carnival. Freed from our natural adult states, we play with some of the toys, such as the basketball shoot. Music, of course, is playing. We gather around three large round tables with white tablecloths and heavy silverware. Food is gourmet and so is the conversation. When I ask the eight people at my table how they heard about Haman and SolutionPeople they reply it was from another person.

Most are here to experience the Solutionman's creativity and brainstorming exercises firsthand as a toe-in-the-water reconnaissance mission to evaluate SolutionPeople for a full, three-day session, or to hire Haman as a speaker for their conference. All have paid to be here. The idea of the bite-size chunk works beautifully for the Thinkubator.

After lunch, it's time for karaoke. We divide into teams and take turns singing lead and backup for several songs that everyone knows. There's nothing quite like belting out "Takin' Care of Business" at the top of your lungs after lunch to stave off the effects of turkey sandwich tryptophan. We venture back to the Thinkubator to work through the Diamond Solution Process on our individual projects.

Once finished, Haman poses a to-the-point question: How many of us brainstormed an idea that will make \$5,000? \$10,000? \$50,000? One participant says his idea could generate \$1 million. This has everyone's attention. By positioning our work in terms of returned revenue, Haman deftly illustrates the relationship between creativity and making it pay. Marketing is the same; it should have well-defined returns for each idea invested.

Are we ready for the "Thinkathon," Haman asks. He distributes sheets filled with lightbulbs that represent ideas for a problem that's posed at the top of the sheet. Each lightbulb represents an idea of how to tackle the problem. Haman tells us about his customer at Abbot Labs, the large pharmaceutical company: The customer tapes Haman's lightbulb sheet to the door of his office, with a problem/challenge at the top. All visitors must add an idea to the sheet before entering his office.

Haman distributes sheets filled with drawings of lightbulbs. Our challenge is to think of ways to introduce more creativity into our workplace. We have three minutes to brainstorm ideas. When our time is up, we pass our sheet to the person on our left and add ideas to the problem that has just been handed to us from the person on our right.

It's the end of the day and time for the prize drawing. Good thing, too; by now we're brain dead. Prizes are think bars, lightbulb toys, squeezable brains, and Einstein paraphernalia. Haman gives everyone a hat that looks like a brain, with everyone designated a "brainiac."

An expert marketer, Haman reminds us about the value we received during this day of creativity.

- A binder with models of how creativity and innovation work
- Our own KnowBrainer tool
- Thinkathon template sheets (lightbulb sheets)
- A small notepad to capture ideas (with an extra paper replacement pack)
- Ideas from our individual projects that should return actual value

He also tells us we'll receive an e-mail survey asking us to rate the session. Even though we're exhausted, many of us find it hard to leave. We're in a cool and creative space, where we had fun, led by a warm and smart leader, and we met some great people. Some linger to inquire about Haman's ability to help them with their companies.

For many of the assembled participants, leaving meant going back to a job and office politics and a decided lack of creativity. Armed with the tools and knowledge of the session, they hope to change that. All of them will tell others about the workout their brains received.

Lessons learned:

- Gathering pre- and postexperience feedback is valuable.
- Give customers opportunities to meet one another.
- Comfort is more valuable than style.
- Fun matters.
- Provide sampling opportunities during every step of your sales process.

## EVANGELISM SCORECARD: SOLUTIONPEOPLE

### Customer Plus-Delta

- Every customer is given the opportunity to grade her experience.
- Quantitative and qualitative data are gathered, collated, and reviewed.

### Napsterized Knowledge

- The KnowBrainer tool is a handheld encapsulation of Haman's methodology.
- By creating an interactive experience, Haman has provided the means and the tools for customers to conduct better brainstorming in their own companies.

## Build the Buzz

- ¥ A unique product spreads buzz quickly.
- ¥ A positive and fun experience spreads buzz quickly, especially with the media.

## Create Community

- ¥ Participating at the Thinkubator is joining a community for a day.
- ¥ Displaying talents within a community creates connections.

## Bite-Size Chunks

- ¥ For those who are uncertain about investing \$100,000 for a dedicated session, a company representative can first attend a daylong public session for several hundred dollars.

## Create a Cause

- ¥ Haman launched his company to help people discover their creative potential.

## Coordinates

Company:	SolutionPeople
Headquarters:	Chicago, Illinois
President:	Gerald Haman
Description:	A creativity, innovation, training, and consulting firm
Industry:	Training and development
Ownership:	Privately held
Web site:	< <a href="http://www.solutionpeople.com">www.solutionpeople.com</a> >