



Chapter 5

WORK LESS, THINK MORE

The significant problems we face in life cannot be solved at the same level of thinking we were at when we created them.

Albert Einstein

Companies pay \$450,000 and up for Joey Reiman's big ideas, some of which take him only a month to produce. One CEO, Jim Adamson of the Advantica Restaurant Group, proudly boasts, "I paid Joey Reiman \$1 million just to think!" Joey, erstwhile ad agency owner, heads BrightHouse, "the world's first ideation corporation." His autobiography of adventures into both sides of his brain, appropriately titled *Thinking for a Living*, was a gift to me from one of my associates on our company's seventh anniversary.

And the book? After browsing just one chapter, I ordered copies for every member of our staff and made it required reading. Then I scheduled an off-site session for all

of us to explore, individually and as a firm, how to improve our thinking. I remember my children's surprise that morning at breakfast when I told them the firm was shutting down operations to talk about *thinking*. (Regretably, this announcement would puzzle many adults too.)

Joey Reiman's passion for good thinking and his six-to-seven-figure fees for doing it definitely had my attention. On the last page of his book, Reiman invites his readers to write him personally; so I wrote that not only was I challenged, but I had purchased his book for every employee of my public relations firm (sufficient flattery for most authors), and I wanted him to speak to us at a "thinking lunch."

A few days later Joey Reiman's office called and said yes to lunch. We paid Joey around \$1,500; and though we were fortunate to tap his mind, the wonder that day was his enthusiasm for thinking, something I preached around our shop since day one. As he closed, Joey invited any of us to drop by the BrightHouse headquarters in Atlanta; but first he warned us. "You won't find people hustling and bustling around," he said. "They'll be sitting in their offices with their feet propped on the desk, *thinking*." And we heard again about his half-million-dollar fees.

Well, Joey Reiman *was* entertaining and motivating, but hundreds of thousands for a month of work? Marketing sizzle, I thought. A little hype, perhaps. Five years later, I was having lunch with an executive of a major corporation in the

Southeast when Joey's name came up. Turns out, my lunch companion's company was well into a BrightHouse month of thinking.

I said, "I need to ask you something."

Without waiting to hear my question, he said, "It's true."

"The fee?" I asked.

"The fee," he said. "Half a million dollars. We're paying it." And he said it as if they'd snagged a bargain.

The corporate world is naturally tilted toward furious doers rather than great thinkers. Everyone, it seems, is busy designing, writing, building, producing, implementing—unfortunately, too much of it is divorced from good *thinking*. So we continue to design, write, build, produce, and implement . . . doing business as usual.

The business of public relations requires considerable doing, but I determined long ago to distinguish our firm for thinking. Anyone can issue a news release, schedule a press conference, or buy an ad. A thinking PR professional might do those things, or something altogether different.

Part of the problem is that thinking looks so suspiciously like resting. Lest anyone see a BrightHouse professional tilted back in her desk chair, feet up, and conclude that her hard work is time off, think again. Henry Ford called thinking "the hardest work there is, which is probably why so few engage in it." Joey Reiman said that when people hear what he does for a living, they usually have two responses: "Wow, what's a

thinker?” followed closely by “What does a thinker think about?” To which Joey answers: “A thinker thinks about everything.”

Where *are* the thinkers? I’d say they’re bottlenecked behind two big challenges. First is the time and quiet that good thinking requires. The rest of the world crams our mental space with television, radio, iPods, BlackBerries, books, magazines, meetings, e-mail, video games, and the Internet. Good thinking isn’t one more task of a multitasker; it needs its own time. So the question becomes how to get the time and space.

One suggestion would be to turn off the car radio or CD player, at least some of the time. Another might be to exercise without television or music—just you and the birds, or just you and the treadmill motor. On that day, you will think for thirty minutes more than most exercisers.

Warren Buffett is universally revered as the world’s greatest investor, and is one of the richest men alive. He heads Berkshire Hathaway, a \$136 billion investment firm, and is personally worth some \$43 billion. Maybe you’re picturing him in a Wall Street penthouse, but Mr. Buffett was born in Omaha, Nebraska, and never left. “You can think here,” he said. “You can think better about the market; you don’t hear so many stories, and you can just sit and look at the stock on the desk in front of you. You can think about a lot of things.” This comes from a man whose company stock trades at more than \$100,000 per share.

Here's another idea: eat lunch alone at least a couple of times a week. I dine alone probably four of every five business days not because I'm a quiet guy, but to think—or to read and think, or to write and think, or to plan and think.

While working on this book, I visited a Barnes & Noble bookstore where a business title jumped off the shelf: *Never Eat Alone, and Other Secrets to Success, One Relationship at a Time*. The premise is that every minute is ripe for networking, schmoozing, trading business cards, connecting, and following up. No, some minutes are ripe for thinking . . . *alone*. And be honest—more often than not, restaurant patrons and much of the business crowd are colleagues socializing. Not to take away from the benefits of human contact, but if thinking is a priority, you can deliberately and more frequently also lunch alone.

A second challenge to good thinking is that too few people and organizations value or demand it. Most people are busy doing what they've always done. As if bosses and clients believe motion alone justifies a paycheck, busyness becomes its own end. But precede that work with deliberate thinking (maybe even some feet-on-the-desk time), and the result might take you somewhere completely different, even better.

Joey Reiman distinguishes great thinkers from others this way: “Great thinkers think *inductively*, that is, they create the solution and seek out the problems that the solution might solve; most companies think *deductively*, that is, defining a problem and then investigating different solutions.”

U.S. News & World Report recently ranked *New York Times* columnist Thomas Friedman among “America’s best leaders.” Friedman, whose column appears in seven hundred newspapers worldwide, was praised for his “rarefied position in journalism, several rungs above a talking head or policy wonk.” Friedman, the magazine said, is an “influential thinker.” What a compliment.

For a guy with no PR background (no school courses in public relations, communications, or journalism), I confess that at the beginning, in the news release and press conference fundamentals, my firm was average at best. Our unique selling feature was the think factor. What we may have lacked in form on the front end, we supplied in a well-thought-out reason for what we did.

That practice is far from new, and has impressive pedigree. In 1501 when the Arte della Lana commissioned Michelangelo to create a statue of David, they gave him the same block of marble that Agostino di Duccio had unsuccessfully tried to sculpt some forty years earlier. The story is told that every day for three months, the twenty-six-year-old Michelangelo stood and stared at the marble block. He would leave at the end of the workday and return the following morning, repeating the routine to the great puzzlement of onlookers.

“What are you doing?” someone asked.

“I’m working,” the master sculptor replied.

Think about it.