

How challenger-brand thinking can be used for entrepreneurship

 By [Abey Mokgwatsane](#)

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Recently I had the honour of speaking at Cape Town Entrepreneurship Week, a four-day event that was held at the Cape Town City Hall. As per my usual style of presentation, it was made up of images that I spoke to, rather than words on slides. So since distributing my presentation won't help, I wrote this summary to share what I spoke about.

My speech was based on how challenger-brand thinking can be used as a framework for entrepreneurship and some other thoughts. Challenger-brand thinking is based on *Eating the Big Fish*, a book by London-based business strategist Adam Morgan.

The book establishes eight credos or behaviours that are consistent across 'challenger brands' such as Nike, Apple, Pepsi and even [Nando's](#). I have adapted some of the credos to creating a more meaningful dialogue on entrepreneurship.

Behaviour 1: human behaviour is predictable

The Bell Curve, by Harvard psychologist Richard J Herrnstein and published in 1994, was a good place to start. The book covered the distribution of IQ across the American population, with some rather controversial findings, mainly because of its hypothesis that there was a correlation between race and IQ.

I won't deal with that now, however; the key point it made was that most people have an average IQ, with a smaller number of people with a high and low IQ - hence the term "bell curve".

This "bell curve" pattern also applies to many other forms of human behaviour - most people behave in the same way, with a smaller percentage of people deviating from that pattern - sleep patterns, bad habits, income and so on. The implication for entrepreneurs is that predicting human behaviour on the whole is quite simple.

So, if you want to introduce a product or service, take a look at human behaviour and let that guide what you do. You can aim to change behaviour or leverage that behaviour. There are plenty of free statistical resources available online that can help you.

Behaviour 2: old rules don't necessarily apply

The world is changing faster than ever before and advances in technology are accelerating this pace of change. In this new world, opportunities for entrepreneurs are abundant as cracks start forming on the walls of established businesses,

brands and institutions.

Who would ever have guessed that PEP Stores would be the largest distributor of mobile handsets in the country? It's crazy to think that the iPad didn't exist two years ago and that iTunes would be the world's largest distributor of music. Only one of the companies (Shell) in the *Forbes* top 500 companies list of 2001 is on the list today.

When the world changes, someone drops a ball and that presents entrepreneurial opportunity.

Behaviour 3: everything you do communicates

Often marketers think that their responsibility for communication lies in the traditional marketing media they control (TV, radio, events, websites). They have a blind spot about the way they treat their staff, about small things like the customer feedback box, big things like their trucks on the road, or - my favourite - the look, feel and etiquette of the security guards at their entrances.

Everything communicates - your customers don't selectively look at your tailored communication; they absorb everything and inconsistencies are glaring. Entrepreneurs can take advantage of this and ensure that everything that represents their universe is consistent with what they want to communicate to the world.

Everything is a medium of communication; use each one effectively and you will stand out.

Check out this clip from South West Airlines - the world's most consistently profitable airline. It illustrates how even a mundane safety announcement can be used to say something special about a brand.

Behaviour 4: assume thought leadership

[Thought leadership](#) is about reflecting a vision of the future in the things that you do. It could be through writing, speaking, product or marketing innovation. It's different to market leadership, which belongs to the established player in the market, but it exudes momentum and energy which most market leaders struggle to do.

Eating the Big Fish gives simple yet effective tools on how to achieve this. It says that thought leadership is about breaking the existing convention of how products are communicated and experienced.

When Miller Genuine Draft (MGD) was launched into the country in 2003, it broke many conventions about how beer brands were promoted. While most advertising focused on the heritage of the brand, MGD launched with an ad that looked

like a music video. Its launch event in three airport hangars in Johannesburg, Durban and Cape Town is still spoken about almost 10 years later. It changed the way beer brands engaged consumers by breaking expected conventions.

[Disclosure: Mokgwatsane was working as brand manager for MGD at the time.]

There are conventions in all categories and entrepreneurs can exploit the 'normality' of life to their benefit.

Behaviour 5: hit the refresh button

People are generally too busy to pay attention to your brand all the time. You need to constantly be entering their mind space. This doesn't mean, by the way, that having ATL exposure will do the trick - it becomes wallpaper. What you need to do is refresh your brand and make people notice you.

Audi did it with the launch of the TT in 1998 and again with the introduction of the LED beams that most motor manufacturers are now copying. What does your refresh button look like?

Behaviour 6: sacrifice

"If you try and be everything to everyone, you will be nothing to no one" - Bob McClain. It's as simple as that. Often entrepreneurs don't have sufficient resources to do all they want to do but that's a good thing because sacrificing a segment of the target market or a particular distribution channel or even a communication medium, such as TV, gives you the resources to do what you are able to do, better than anybody else.

Grolsch, for instance, is running one of the most effective networking and consumer programmes (Swing Top Circle) I know of. I don't think it's a coincidence that it focuses so much energy into it as it has a limit on the media it is able to use due to the size of its budget.

Most established businesses and brands are so thinly spread that the best strategy is to eat the elephant in bite-size chunks - just make sure you've invested in some razor sharp, titanium teeth.

Behaviour 7: over-commit

Linked quite closely to sacrifice, over-commitment is possible when you focus your resources effectively. Malcolm Gladwell speaks of the 10 000-hour rule, which purports that one must practice for at least 10 000 hours if you are to become an expert at what you do.

This rule obviously applies to different activities relative to what your field of business is. Most people will never even get half way there, so that should encourage you to commit yourself; being better than the rest isn't that far off.

Behaviour 8: leverage technology and popular culture

Social media and technology have made it cheaper to communicate to customers. Leverage social media tools such as Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn to amplify your message, which allow two-way communication with your customers. Leverage this capability to share knowledge and interact with your customers.

New technology, in the form of mobile and tablet computing, introduces new channels of engagement. Eighty-five percent of cellphones in South Africa will be smartphones by 2015, so this becomes a real and significant channel for everyone.

Behaviour 9: be idea-centered, not consumer-centered

Henry Ford once said, "If I had asked my customers what they wanted, they would have said a faster horse." People will only give you incremental ideas, not revolutionary ones - we simply aren't wired like that. Idea generation is a skill that entrepreneurs must harness. Ideas are the currency of the future.

In Daniel Pink's book, *A Whole New Mind*, he argues that the world has moved from the knowledge age into the conceptual age. Economic growth will come from nations and people that are able to conceptualise new ways of using resources and solving problems.

The entrepreneurship fallacy

Finally, the fact that you have to leave your organisation and start your own enterprise to be an entrepreneur is a fallacy. Entrepreneurship is an attitude. All the behaviours I listed above can work just as well within organisations as they do outside of one. Don't let the fact that you have a job detract from your entrepreneurial spirit.

Books I recommended

Eating the Big Fish - Adam Morgan

The Pirate Inside - Adam Morgan

The Tipping Point - Malcolm Gladwell

Outliers - Malcolm Gladwell

A Whole New Mind - Daniel H Pink

The Power of Now - Eckhart Tolle (the summary; the full version is just too heavy)

Disclose added at 4.27pm on 29 November 2011.

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Abey Mokgwatsane is CEO of Ogilvy & Mather South Africa (www.ogilvy.co.za; @OgilvySA). Apart from being one of South Africa's *Mail & Guardian* top 200 young leaders in 2011, he was voted one of the country's top 25 "game-changers" in *The Annual 2012*. Mokgwatsane also founding of Young Business for South Africa, Think Tank Initiative and Experiential Industry Association of South Africa. Tel +27 (0)11 709 6600, email raeesah.mosa@ogilvy.co.za and follow @Abeyphonogenic on Twitter.

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