

A WEEK IN *Learning*

Unconventional Inspiration

Jared Allen, Learning & Development Manager

A great leader once said, “The problem is not the problem. The problem is your attitude about the problem.” Over the years, this has served as an important reminder to me that, while we often can’t anticipate the problems we’ll face each day, the one thing we can control is how we approach them. So who was this wise leader? Steve Jobs? Oprah Winfrey? Richard Branson? No, it was actually Captain Jack Sparrow in *Pirates of the Caribbean*. A fictional rum-swilling pirate probably isn’t the first person you’d look to for leadership advice, but it’s great advice all the same. The point being, inspiration can come from anywhere. At times, your greatest inspiration can come from the unlikeliest of places.

In 1941, electrical engineer George de Mestral went on a hunting trip with his dog in the Swiss Alps. When he returned home, he noticed that several burrs were stuck to his clothes and his dog’s fur, so he began the long process of removing them. He became curious as to how these burrs worked, so he examined one under a microscope. De Mestral noticed that they contained hundreds of tiny hooks that enabled them to stick to just about anything. From this observation, de Mestral eventually invented, and patented, Velcro. What started out as a minor annoyance became a multimillion-dollar industry.

In 1965, retired test pilot Owen Maclaren watched his daughter struggling with a heavy, bulky child’s pushchair. After observing how an airplane’s landing gear folded up and collapsed upon takeoff, Maclaren saw a solution to the problem. Maclaren went on to design the lightweight collapsible baby-buggy, which many of us still use to this day. The Maclaren Company, still in business to this day, was born from looking at an airplane’s wheels.

Earlier this year, I was asked to develop a team-building workshop for our One-Stop locations. This was a new business venture where our team members were working alongside state and city employees, so there was a need to develop teamwork and communication skills. I was batting around a few ideas, but nothing seemed to fit the bill.

A few weeks prior, my wife took my friends and I to an “escape the room” experience for my birthday. We had 30 minutes to solve a number of puzzles in order to unlock a door to another room. My friends



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and I had to work together, use problem-solving skills, be creative, and communicate constantly in order to win. Using this example, myself and Leti Villa developed a “puzzle gauntlet” teambuilding event. At this event, our One-Stop team had to solve a number of job-seeker themed puzzles in under 30 minutes. The event was a success and a unique experience was produced for our One-Stop employees. What began as my birthday present, became a way for our team members to learn to communicate and work together.

When we are looking for solutions to a problem, we often refer back to resources that we have used time and time again. However, if this is a recurring problem, referring to those old resources will likely lead to the same result and you will be stuck in that vicious cycle once again. Take time to consider looking where you have never looked before. You may find inspiration from an unconventional source. It may be an airplane’s wheels, a birthday present, or even a rum-swilling pirate.

To contact Goodwill’s Learning and Development team, please email learninganddevelopment@goodwillaz.org

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