

Crazy Ideas Can Be Valuable

Contributed by Steve Gillman
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Crazy ideas can sometimes teach us something new and valuable, as you can see from the "thousand mile hole" and the "deniaphant."

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Sometimes it is just fun to create and share crazy ideas. For example, I recently read about one man's idea to give away free gas. The catch was that there were remote-controlled paintball guns with cameras on them, connected to a web site on the internet. People would pay to fire paintballs at drivers as they filled their tanks. Apparently this gentleman even went as far as to ask city officials if they would allow such a business. They wouldn't, but it was worth a good laugh in any case.

{bot_wrgoogle}Apart from the humor and fun, though, there is often something to be gained from exploring crazy ideas. The more obvious examples are ideas that eventually lead to practical solutions for business, like the idea of eyes on shoes that lead (by a circuitous route) to safety reflectors which make joggers more visible at night, so drivers don't hit them. But there are also important questions of philosophy, psychology and morality that can be profitably explored from the perspective of an unusual idea. The following is an example of that.

The Thousand Mile Hole

One day I had a crazy thought. I imagined that somewhere in an isolated forest, a hole a thousand miles deep and several hundred feet across is discovered. Rather than ignore this idea, I worked with it a bit. It wasn't long before I imagined falling into the hole, and I realized that because of air resistance, I would soon reach a terminal velocity of around 120 miles-per-hour. That meant I would have eight hours before hitting the bottom and dying.

Put yourself into this scenario. You can't have a much more certain countdown to death. You know you have roughly eight hours to live. What do you think about? Does it matter? If you can hold a pen and piece of paper against the wind, what would you write?

If you assume for a moment that someday your remains will be discovered, you might actually still have something to offer the world with your writing. That's an intriguing thought, isn't it? Being the first person to fall a thousand miles to your death would generate enough interest that people would surely read what you had written as your final thoughts. What insight would this eight hour journey provide? What could you share that might help others?

But what if you had no pen? You are simply going to die, and nobody will ever know what happened during these eight hours. In that case, does everything you think or do become irrelevant? We like to think that with even eight months left to live what we do matters, but what about eight hours? Would you still try to live the "good" life for that remaining time? What would that mean? Thinking loving thoughts about others? Trying to see the bright side of life?

I explored these questions in my own mind for a while. One question in particular that came to mind was about the reason for morality. Is thought or action morally good only on the basis of an expected future outcome? There is hardly a future when falling eight hours to one's death. Is there a moral value to thoughts and actions that is in the moment, in the action itself?

I also wondered at the metaphorical value of the above scenario. Is there a "thousand mile deep hole" that we can fall into? Do we gain a new spiritual perspective in the process, with which we are "reborn" after the fall?

The Value Of Crazy Ideas

When we allow crazy ideas to arise, they may come from unconscious places that are trying to show us something. Even if the "trying to show us" part is not strictly true, these images and thoughts from the unconscious mind are an opportunity to look at things from a new perspective. For example, imagine a new creature, the "deniaphant," an enormous being who is human-like but with elephant-like feet which were so large that he regularly steps on and kills

people. This makes him very sad, so what is his solution? He stops looking down.

It's a silly thought, and yet it immediately suggests itself as a metaphor for what we humans actually do. We stop looking at the pain and suffering we cause others, because that's much easier than watching where we step. If we were to develop the story of the deniaphant further, we might see what the consequences of such an approach are, and perhaps what could be done about it. Examples like this hint at the value of crazy ideas when they are explored with an open mind.

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