

FIVE JEDI STRATEGIES

THAT COULD CATAPULT YOU
AND YOUR BUSINESS INTO
THE FUTURE



I remember the first time I watched a consultant perform magic.

As his client rambled, struggling to hide his frustration and fear, it happened. The consultant swept the client into an “Aha moment.”

It was magic!



I and the others who sat around the table, wondered, “How’d he do that?” Although some shrugged it off, I knew what we saw was intentional, skilled, and was not an anomaly. This was Michael Jordan slipping gravitational pull, and I wanted to know how he did that.

We all know consultants who do good work, but they don’t mesmerize. That’s why I have pursued those who did, the ones who had “it.” I watched, asked questions, scribbled notes, and asked more questions. Then I practiced, sometimes successfully and many times not.

Finally, a few years later, sitting at a similar table, but this time as the consultant, I saw my client touch that magical moment. Afterward, when a friend asked how I did that, I had to admit, “I really don’t know.”

Like most professionals, what I do is intuitive. That’s good enough for me, but not sufficient if I want to give to others. That’s when I realized I was running in the dark. My reliance on my subconscious gift was keeping me from mapping a clear path for others to follow.

So, after rummaging through my stacks of little black moleskin books, holding years of notes and observations, I honed it all down into five tools that

I’d unwittingly refined into my five “Jedi Strategies.”

Because I’ve tested them in the crucible of my consulting business for years, I believe you or anyone can use them to create magical moments consistently.

Here they are:

1. CONVERSATIONAL LISTENING

Most everyone agrees that learning to listen is essential. But how do you do that?

LISTEN CAREFULLY TO WHAT IS SAID

Words have power. Each word contains possible insights into a person’s motivation, history, mindset, fears, hopes, and biases. Hearing the precise words used is very important in establishing your listening skills. It’s strategic to examine why those specific words are used and in the order in which there were expressed.

LISTEN FOR WHAT IS NOT SAID

During an employee review, I often ask, “Where were you born and what’s happened since?” I’m interested in what is said, but I’m also intrigued by what is not stated as a person tells their story.

Several years ago, my firm encountered a productivity issue with an excellent employee. And it all coincided with hiring a young man to be her assistant. So, I pulled “Elaine” into a friendly conversation.

As we talked over coffee, she cheerfully shared the details of her early life and education. She told me she had two sisters and that she was the first in her family to graduate from college. After holding a few odd jobs, she landed in our firm, which became her dream job in her field of study.

Later, I asked her sisters’ names and birth order. And, then I asked how her father dealt in a house full of women. She paused, gazed out the window, looked at the floor, and began to cry. “I also have a brother,” she said.

A simple conversation designed to gently solve a problem delivered a beautiful work and life breakthrough moment for Elaine and a solution to why she was avoiding help from her new male assistant.

Every conversation forgets or hides essential information. It is usually important, sometimes crucial, to encourage it to the surface. What is not said holds as much insight as what is verbalized.

LISTEN FOR WHAT’S SAID BETWEEN THE LINES

It’s often said that music happens between the notes.

In that same way, people speak clearly beyond and between language symbols. Physical posture and gestures (what we call “body language”), facial micro-expressions, and artistic energy are non-language expressions that communicate motive, attitude, honesty, trust, and truth. These silent messages sometimes eloquently fill the gaps between words. But something else happens between the lines.

Those who know how to listen can translate inarticulate or even silent “secret messages.” Those messages often come out “sideways,” sometimes as expressions of extreme emotions, both too little and too much. At other times, they roll out of bizarre and incongruous conversations. But, regardless of how they show up, they may be critically important. And, I’ve often seen them ignite the “Aha.”

THE POWER OF OVERHEARING

I’m a big fan of open workspaces. Despite the “research” exposing the problems of the open floor plan, I remain an advocate. One word explains why: overheard.



Overhearing often surpasses the effectiveness of direct communication. How? Consider the power of gossip. It is a form of overheard, admittedly often dark and hurtful. But, by its very nature, gossip spreads further and infects quicker than

other communication platforms. Whether you call it eavesdropping, gossip, or overhearing, that form of communication gets others to “speak” and “hear” for you.

Second, overhearing communication allows you to address someone from the “side.” By that, I mean it allows you to communicate at a time when the person hearing isn’t prepared to listen from a “respond” stance. Knowing or assuming that you will respond to the one speaking forms an entirely different kind of communication. However, overhearing what is actually spoken to others doesn’t require a response or direct engagement at all. Therefore, the mind is free to reflect and form actionable steps.

That’s why overhearing provides fertile soil for magical moments. When we overhear an unscripted (for the hearer) flow of words, our brain forms new thoughts, almost by osmosis. It’s much like what happens when we arrive at a solution in the shower, and not directly thinking about the problem. It’s what happens when we are awakened in the night with just the right words to say during the next day’s meeting. Our brain seems to be at its most magical potential when it’s eavesdropping on life.

These four listening practices can be helpful anywhere, with anyone. You can employ them the next time you talk to your spouse, children, accountant, coach, boss, or anyone else in your life.

You can employ them the next time you’re asked to review (listen to) your financial statements. Or, think of how often email has caused problems in your office or home. Trust me; every time you take the time to listen, you can better hear, or overhear, what’s

said, not said, and what's said between the lines. And that will often catch the sound of magic.

2. THE OPPOSITE IS ALSO TRUE

I still love high school team debate. The ability to respectfully argue a point with adrenaline pumping through your body is a real "high." Of course, every debater must learn how to argue a position from both sides.

As one who held strong opinions, I hated acquiring that skill. My coach used to ask me to consider what if the opposite position is valid. "Yeah right," I thought. However, through his training, I learned how to hold my beliefs with a loose grip. After all, the opposite is also true.

For example, when personal computers first landed on everyone's desks, many predicted we would soon become a paperless society. After all, why would we need paper and carbon copies of documents that could and surely would be neatly filed digitally?

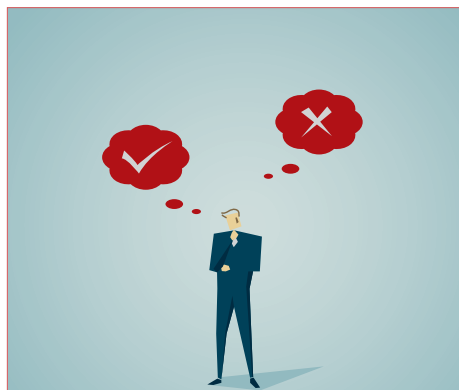
So, while it's true that we use less paper for the purposes we once did, it's also true that we use more paper than we ever have.

To see and comprehend that the opposite is also true is to also understand both sides hold truth. That is a revolutionary truth. No wonder it leads to "Aha." The next time you hear a binary statement, think, "The opposite is also true" and see what new way develops.

3. PRODUCTIVE WRONG

In 1968, as 3M was developing new adhesives, they accidentally created a

glue that would barely stick to anything. The C-Suite shrugged; a failed formula. The product was shelved until 1973, when Arthur Fry, a 3M executive, needed to bookmark his hymnal while singing in the church choir. When he recalled that failed adhesive, he requested a sample. It worked for his purpose. And, that marked the birth of Post-it Notes.



In 1943, a naval engineer searched for a spring support that could stabilize sensitive equipment on ships. When one of the helical springs he developed fell to the floor and kept pulsating back and forth in continual motion, he saw the possibilities for a kid's toy. Today more than 250 million Slinkys have sold worldwide.

One morning in 1879, a busy, forgetful researcher at Johns Hopkins forgot to wash up before lunch. He then discovered his bread tasted unusually sweet. When he tied that to a chemical he'd earlier spilled on his hands, the first artificial sweetener was born. Mass production of saccharin launched in 1884.

Learning from mistakes has long been seen as a major key to success. But that isn't entirely true. Learning from failures isn't the real key; making failure productive is.

Often a wrong solution or application can become the breakthrough

discovery for another use. When listening to descriptions of failed approaches, discoveries, or products, don't rush to "learn" from those mistakes. The best first step may be to consider, "What idea or product does this discovery provide a solution for?"

4. TRUST DISTRUST

We all live with the reality that distrust is becoming public enemy number one. Trust is a desired solution for everything from personal relationships to company culture to product purchases. Trust and distrust seem to be at opposite ends of a spectrum. However, recent brain science says that just isn't true. Trust and distrust are processed in different areas of our brains. Distrust is an instinct, formed in our amygdala, and trust is a decision made in the pre-frontal cortex. We decide to trust, and we feel distrust.

Distrust's primary purpose is safety. But, trust builds relational capital. Trust can't accomplish its main goal without first knowing it is safe to do so. So, distrust and trust are allies.

As we learn to lead from our gut (distrust) and our head (trust), the magic will increasingly show up.

5. YOU ALMOST ALWAYS GET WHAT YOU ASK FOR

During a bad day, I met a friend at a coffee shop to blow off some steam. She patiently listened as I ranted about how I wasn't getting what I wanted from a situation. After a 30-minute seethe, I suddenly stopped to see if she had any words of wisdom. I'll never forget her response. "You almost always get what you ask for."

After a couple hours of arguing, she won me over. She revealed that I'd unknowingly sent messages that asked for a different response than the one I'd hoped for. I was getting exactly what I had asked for, not what I wanted, and that was my fault.

Of all the strategies presented here, this one is the most difficult to learn. However, I've learned that every time I'm frustrated, or coaching someone who is, I simply ask, "Did you ask for the response you are receiving?"

Much of my work is focused around helping people clarify their message. Most of the time that leads to a marketing review and hearing how their website isn't performing. After reviewing over 1000 sites, I know that people usually do what you ask them to do.

For example, the action button may read "Learn More," but the company hopes people will use it to "Buy Now." I can assure you that most people do not click "Learn More" unless they want to learn more. If you want them to buy, give them a "Buy Now" button.

This insight applies far beyond marketing or websites. All of us—spouses, parents, bosses, partners, and friends—experience the frustration of asking for one thing when we want another. Yet, when we take a step back and evaluate if we asked for what we received, the answer will almost always be, "Yes."

SUMMARY

We've all developed our own toolbox for the work we perform. These five strategies, my tools, have helped me build greater effectiveness, collaboration, and innovation in many companies for many years. Despite

the years and the miles, I'm always surprised at how well they continue to work.

I present them in the hope they will help you too.



If you'd like to know more or hear how I can help you or your company reveal hidden opportunities, I invite you to contact me at joseph@josephrmyers.com