



## 20 Ideas in 90 Minutes – The Companion Piece

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This document provides background information related to my presentation.

**Slide one.** *Life-long learning.* Kaizen is a Japanese term that means “improvement” or “change for the better.” [Here's a link to the Wikipedia entry for kaizen.](#) In Japan, it was closely tied to continuous improvement within manufacturing. Life-long learning and improvement is an important trait in any aspect of anyone's life. In a fast-changing environment, “kaizen” allows one to stay fresh and on top of an altering landscape. John Spence did a fantastic job of highlighting how this can help you as an employee or as an organization. [Here's a link to an 8-minute video where John talks about this idea.](#)

**Slide two.** Legend has it that legendary Rock and Roll band Van Halen had a clause in their contracts that demanded a bowl of M&Ms. But the clause demanded that all brown M&Ms be removed from the bowl. *What jerks!* Just another example of a star losing touch with reality. Right? Wrong.

The M&M clause was real. Van Halen did use it. But not to be jerks. The following comes from David Lee Roth, the lead singer in the band.

*“Van Halen was the first to take 850 par lamp lights -- huge lights -- around the country,” explained singer David Lee Roth. “At the time, it was the biggest production ever.” Many venues weren't ready for this. Worse, they didn't read the contract explaining how to manage it. The band's trucks would roll up to the concert site, and the delays, mistakes and costs would begin piling up.*

*So Van Halen established the M&M test. “If I came backstage and I saw brown M&M's on the catering table, it guaranteed the promoter had not read the contract rider, and we had to do a serious line check,” Roth explained.*

Well then. That paints a different picture, doesn't it?

So often, we jump to conclusions. We see something we don't understand, and we assume it was done randomly...without thought. But that M&M clause might be there for a reason.

**Slide three. Gut reactions.** Much of the research into “gut reactions” and intuitions was started by Dr. Gerd Gigerenzer, a German social psychologist. Here is a [New York Times article](#) that discusses his research. In short, humans rely on simple cues that exist in our environment. With scores of different variables, our brains have found a way to seize on one or a small number of data points to make a determination. *Danger – run. He looks suspicious. Something about this transaction doesn't seem right.* This idea was the subject of Malcolm Gladwell's book, [Blink](#). Research shows that intuition or “gut reactions” should not be discarded out of hand. They are useful ways for people to quickly cut through all the excessive “noise” in our lives.

**Slide four. Meetings.** There's no silver bullet here. Rather, I find it interesting that meetings are one of the most common complaints within organizations. But it begs the question: what are folks doing about it? This slide simply shares a few ideas that can help organizations start to improve the processes.

- Watch out for these [5 types](#) of people at meetings
- Maybe you have too many meetings, because you have [too few good meetings](#).
- Here are [9 tips](#) to have a good meeting

**Slide five. John Wooden.** Coach Wooden is one of the greatest coaches in American history. He believed that if you took care of the small things, the big picture took care of itself. Coach Wooden looked for certain characteristics, which comprised his [Pyramid of Success](#). If you focused on those traits, success was inevitable. His UCLA teams won 10 national championships in a 12-year span. And seven in a row. Perhaps he was on to something.

**Slide six. Beware of Sally.** (Same as last year.) Every organization does things on a regular schedule. It could be a board meeting. An annual meeting. Staff training. While a template for these types of events can create consistency, those templates can also breed complacency. Here's a good goal – take one “Sally” event, and blow it up. Simply start anew. And see if the new version is better.

- [Regcompli@nafcu.org](mailto:Regcompli@nafcu.org) was our old email address for the compliance division. It was created back in the day when email addresses were limited by size. No one could remember that email address! One day, a NAFCU employee asked...*Can we change it to [compliance@nafcu.org](mailto:compliance@nafcu.org)?* We could. And we did. *Contacts increased by more than 10% after the change.*
- Ross Johnson was the CEO of RJR Nabisco, and a pivotal character within the book [Barbarians at the Gate](#). He loved to shake up divisions, rearranging organizational charts. His thought was this: blow things up, and folks will rebuild. They'll use what was useful, discard the things that never made sense, and create a better model.
- Computer crashes? Have you ever worked on a document only to have your computer crash? *And the document is not recoverable?* It has happened to me. I've always found that when you are forced to re-write it, you usually produce a better document.

**Slide seven. Workplace interruptions.** Here's a question. How many of you have slipped into work at a very, very early hour, or on the weekend? Here's another question – were you more or less productive? I bet I know the answer. There were no incoming emails, or at least far fewer. The phone wasn't ringing. And there were no meetings. You could actually...work. So here's a question: *If interruptions are a big deal, what are we doing about it?*

- [Why you can't work at work anymore](#), is an interesting take on the modern workplace. Jason Fried's goal is to remove every interruption possible.
- Jason talks about instant messaging within a workplace. This [2008 article](#) talks about this technology a bit more.

- Today's email flurry is forcing employees to make a difficult choice: [\*be responsive, or be thoughtful.\*](#)

**Slide eight.** *Watch out for that monkey!* This [classic management article](#) is a must-read for anyone who manages for a living. In this article, "monkeys" are problems. After someone comes to management with a problem, who owns that problem after the meeting is over?

**Slide nine.** *Twenty bad habits.* Every manager should read [this list](#) every week or so. It is 20 habits that can sometimes be positive. But if you are a manager, they can be deadly.

**Slide ten.** *Lottery, Free Will and Motivation.* Why do people treat rental cars differently than their own cars? Why do some people trash hotel rooms? The answer to all these questions is *ownership*. If you own it, you treat it better. With this in mind, please read [this blog post](#) from the Harvard Business Review. In it, Scott Keller discusses a fantastic study that shows the power of personal choice and ownership.

In short, when employees have ownership in an idea, *or a lottery number*, they value it much, much more. Five times as much, it seems.

**Slide eleven.** I love my kids. My wife and I hope to empower them to be smart, independent people who look out for their fellow man. I also hope they aren't the subject of a COPS episode. So we try to teach them life lessons whenever we can.

But here's the thing - *they often teach Mandy and me a few things.*

My daughter Kate has a wonderful purse that she treasures above all other things. My son Briggs saw her one day with a purse, and announced that he wanted a purse as well. I told him that purses are for girls, but I didn't really press the issue.

Well, he somehow found a purse and adopted it. It is now Briggs' purse. I told him, gently, that girls use purses. Men use wallets. And manly men use money clips. (I use a wallet, by the way.) Briggs replied that "Daddy has a purse." I simply dropped the matter.

Later that week, I was getting ready for work. I went through my goodbye routine, which consists of a round of tickling, kisses and hugs. As I walked away, Briggs said the following.

*Daddy, I want a purse like yours.*

I realized that I had my messenger/computer bag slung over my shoulder. *And it looks just like a purse. To a 4-year-old!*

I've thought about this a bit. It must be so hard to be a four-year old. All you want to do is fit in. You want to be like Mommy and Daddy. Like your sister. Like Gamma and Grandpap. You look for clues. Kate has a purse. Mommy has a purse. *And so does Daddy.*

And so it must be for new employees. They start a new job, and they want to fit in. They want to succeed. There's the employee handbook. There's orientation. But they'll look to see what managers, directors, executives and board members do. What they say. How they act. How they behave.

They are always watching. And that's a good thing to remember.

**Slide twelve.** *Is Brainpower Overrated?* Many of you know the story of Billy Beane, [Moneyball](#) and the Oakland A's. The cash-strapped Oakland A's needed to find a different way to compete against the big guns of New York, Boston, Anaheim, and Chicago.

Beane turned to [Sabremetrics](#), which studies baseball using cold-hard facts. Bill James, perhaps the [Godfather](#) of Sabremetrics had a theory - most baseball teams overvalued some statistics (batting average, defense, speed) and greatly undervalued others (on-base-percentage, and slugging percentage). Beane leaned heavily on James and Sabremetrics to take advantage of market imbalances. He refused to pay for speed. All he wanted were players who could get on base. And many of them came cheaply. Enter Hollywood, stage left.

Do we, as organizations, value prospective employees accurately? Perhaps not. Read this article: [Intelligence is Overrated: What You Really Need to Succeed](#). (Forbes.com) The author, Keld Jensen, highlights some interesting data. Carnegie Institute of Technology research shows that 85 percent of a person's financial success is due to skills in *human engineering* – a person's personality and ability to communicate, negotiate, and lead. Only 15 percent is due to technical knowledge.

As an organization, are we properly measuring a person's social skills?

**Slide thirteen.** *As in Apollo 13.* In 1970, NASA launched the Apollo 13 mission, which was to take a crew of astronauts to the moon. On the way to the moon, one of the liquid oxygen tanks exploded, and the other one began leaking. The space craft had two major problems - there wasn't enough air, and there wasn't enough electricity to get the men home.

As you can imagine, NASA's mission control was up in arms. What happened? Who screwed up? Enter Gene Kranz, with his iconic vest.

He took charge, and over the course of the crisis, he uttered four iconic.

1. **Work the problem, people.** Kranz knew that every problem has a solution, or at least the damage could be managed. But you have to be methodical and work through the issues. Stop worrying, and start working. Once you understand the problem, you have to answer these questions: What can you do? What is beyond your control? Where can you get help?
2. **We've never lost an American in space, we're sure as (heck) not going to lose one on my watch! Failure is not an option.** Tenacity and resilience. It could get done, and it would get done. Do not treat failure as a viable option or outcome.
3. **I don't care what anything was DESIGNED to do. I care about what it CAN do.** As NASA's scientists worked the problem, Kranz made them think outside the box. They broke down systems and used the parts to create new tools and systems that helped saved lives. How many solutions or skill sets are there for the taking in what you already have?
4. When the NASA director said that this could be the worst disaster in the history of NASA, Kranz cut him off. **"With all due respect sir, I think this is going to be our finest hour."** Perhaps that's the gem. As a leader, you aren't paid to coast on the good times. I really think you earn your pay when you face a problem.

Hopefully your workday doesn't give you life or death dilemmas. But no matter the problem you face, think of Mr. Kranz. Work the problem. Expect to succeed. Use all options. And know that by facing and overcoming adversity, you will experience some of the best stuff life has to offer.

**Slide fourteen.** *Ego.* Courts have attached the duty of loyalty to directors and officers. The thought is simple: the more a person can put the interests of the organization before his or her own, the better off the organization will be. Why limit this to directors and officers? The more we can remove “ego” from the workplace, the better. But how do you do that?

- How many of you ask questions about what folks did in high school. People fudge resumes all the time, but they often don’t think fast enough to build up a false high school resume. Were they in team sports, band, clubs, etc.?
- It does flow both ways. An organization that tries to get rid of “ego” will allow frank discussion of important issues. If the person at the top stifles conversation or pulls rank, others will see that some folks are more important than others.
- Understanding [what employees want](#), can shed some light on this issue. Folks want to work where they have purpose and direction. They want to be involved. They want flexibility. A workplace full of “egos” tends to erode what most employees want out of a workplace.
- And this post from The Leadership Freak serves as a good reminder. The reason we’re here is to [serve](#) others.

**Slide fifteen.** *Employee health.* We focus on small things at work. But what if we focused on big things, like the health of employees? In this [video](#), a research talks about how important it is to be active for 30 minutes a day. We showed that in an all-staff meeting. How much do we focus on the overall health of our employees? And if we did, or if we could improve our employee’s health, what would be the effect?

**Slide sixteen.** *Hidden tabs.* Most boxes of Reynolds Wrap have little tabs on the end of the cartons. They are *end locks*. Their appointed task is to hold the roll of foil or plastic wrap steady inside the box as you pull on it.

Say goodbye to the endless toil and frustration of the roll coming out of the box as you pull. Or the roll flopping around the box, especially as it shrinks, and floating up against the cutting blade as you pull, causing you to clutch and bend the box to hold it in place.

Just press in the tabs the first time you use the roll, and presto. Welcome to a whole new world.

How many of you knew of them? I hadn't. Neither did Mandy, my wife.

It makes you wonder...*does your credit union have hidden tabs?* Some innovation, product or service that you rolled out to your members...*and one that many members have missed completely.*

**Slide 17.** *Habits and success.* Are people destined for success, or can anyone become more successful by following certain habits shared by many successful people? My money is on the latter. An [article](#) by M.A. Tohami share shares 10 habits of successful people. *And it is hard to argue with that list.*

1. Wake Up Early
2. Read Vigorously
3. Simplify
4. Slow Down
5. Workout
6. Practice Daily
7. Network
8. Keep a Gratitude Journal
9. Be Prolific
10. Have a Blog

**Slide 18.** *The Day before a Vacation.* Why is it that we get so much done the day before a vacation? Focus. And [prioritization](#). What if we treated every day like it was the day before a vacation?

**Slide 19.** *Living off the Grid.* When you grapple with an issue, it is very wise to find "the grid." This is the known universe of law, research regulation or guidance that can help you find an answer to your quest. For example, if you are considering whether to discipline an employee, the grid would include the following:

- Your employee handbook
- A discussion with your HR manager to discuss possible discrimination issues
- A thorough review of your file, communications, emails, etc., regarding the issue
- Your HR manager may review EEOC regulations, guidance, or may find it appropriate to reach out to in-house or outside counsel
- You may wish to consider whether similar situations occurred in the past, or if similar situations are taking place in other divisions at the same time

Now that you have the grid, start pouring through the information. There's a potential issue that you must consider. [You may find that your research takes you off the grid](#). There isn't a clear answer to every question. Regulators, courts, and outside consultants do not provide information that addresses every conceivable situation. Like I said, you'll often have a question that is not answered on the grid.

So, what do you do? Here are some possible solutions.

1. Plow ahead blindly
2. Hit the brakes.
3. Move forward while controlling the risk.

I recommend number three. That being said, how many individuals have a methodology to making decisions? Especially when the issue is off the grid?

**Slide 20.** *Decision Fatigue.* It is a simple fact that making decisions takes a toll. This New York Times [article](#) discusses research on the toll that it takes. It follows a parole board in Israel. As the parole board tires after constant decisions, the decision making process becomes far more erratic. If you are "The Decider," you need to watch out for fatigue. Your decision process breaks down otherwise.