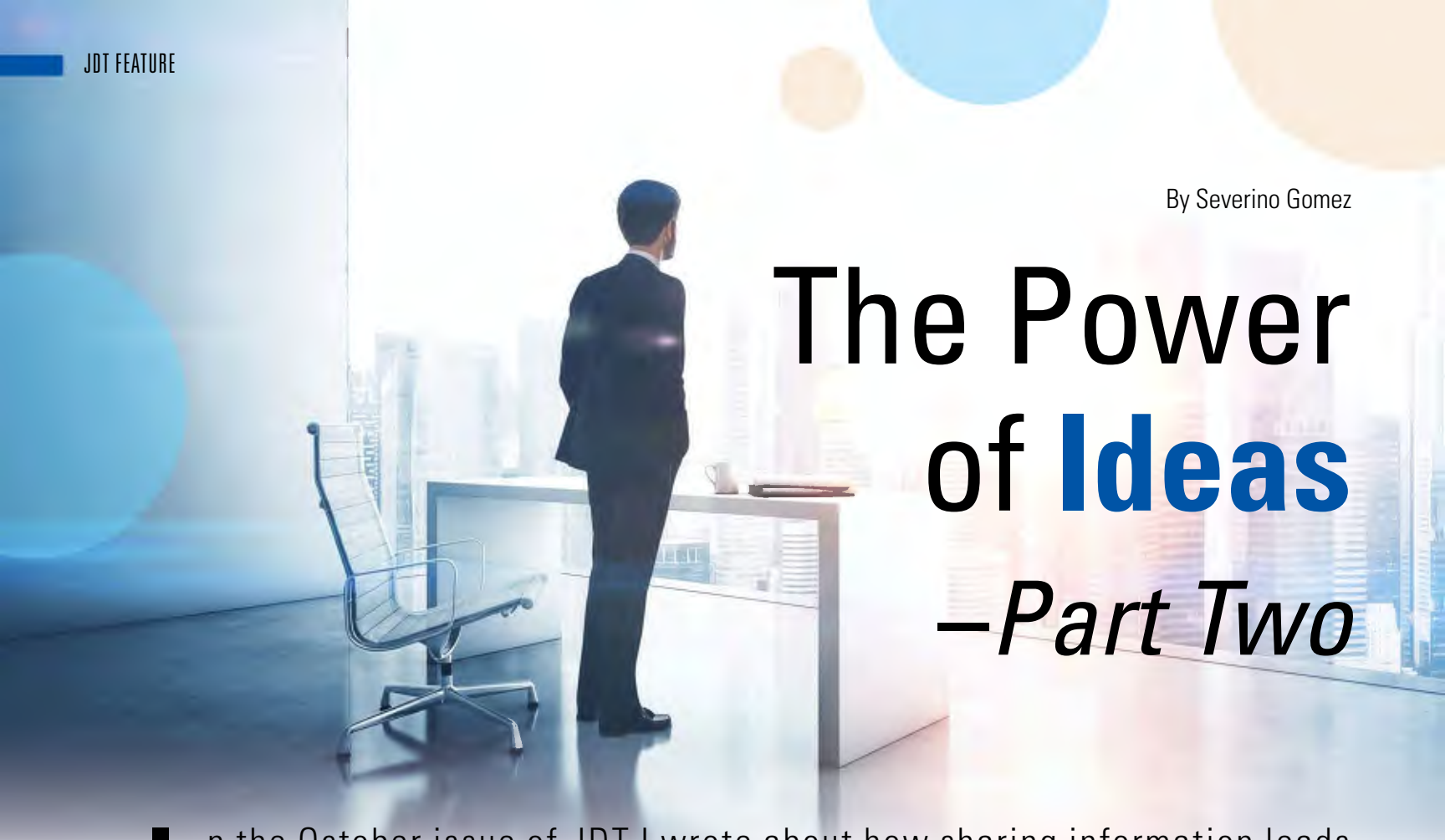

By Severino Gomez

The Power of Ideas –*Part Two*

In the October issue of JDT I wrote about how sharing information leads to knowledge and enables the creation of ideas. I explained that many people seek advice and information but do not share it. You would think that I would stop feeding them information.

I don't. Why…?

It does not matter how much information you might have or know. If you don't share, you only possess one viewpoint and your learning curve becomes slower because you are not being fully enriched or influenced by others. Without relating and connecting the dots, ideas suffer. True differentiation between the doers and the people full of excuses comes into play when it's time to implement and execute change.

How many times have you gone to industry meetings and liked two or three ideas? Typically, when you get back to your office even though you might want to implement new ideas people are not prone to change. Perhaps it is because they are not motivated, they do not want to learn or because they don't think it's necessary to enhance their knowledge or skills. I've heard it said, "….don't give me twenty reasons why not to do it, but just one why we should do it…"

Keeping this in mind, how can someone change if they are not able to listen or learn from someone else?

Unfortunately it is vicious cycle. You need to exchange and share knowledge and information in order to learn. Once you learn you are able to establish new connections; with new connections comes change and with change comes innovation.

Most people are scared of sharing, however, or think there are very few people that they can learn from. This belief is the worst enemy of change, improvement and innovation. Furthermore, it's impossible to progress into Lean Thinking or Kaizen. On the other hand, there are those who listen, share, change and innovate. I am happy to say that most of my clients eventually get into this exchange of ideas mode and even though they are not aware of it, they are on the path to Continuous Improvement and Lean Manufacturing/Operations.

The art of debate is a lost art that I truly appreciate and one where I learn the most.

Now let's talk about execution.

Here is how I would normally proceed: Gather a team of people. Sometimes the team is given to me and I don't get to choose. Don't start thinking negatively that members are not up to your level. It's your mission to get them there.

Share with them experiences and failures and get them up to speed without holding back. Start by letting them know what you want to do and your view of the industry.

The challenge is to create a team of different people with different backgrounds that can add value. It's not easy managing; if it were it would only pay minimum wage.

Figure out their strengths and main motivation. Motivation is what drives people further. Learn what they like to do and where they would like to be in couple of years. Remember you are going to spend more time with them in a week than with your family.

Define what project should be implemented. My best recommendation is sit down and plan your actions.

- Write down your goals
- What barriers you will face
- The capital and labor needs you will have
- Break it into steps and place dates on it
- Then go back to your team, share, change, improve upon it and agree

Once you have established a blueprint it is easier to follow it. Always start with very simple projects that have visibility. It's important to build trust and empowerment within your team and this can be achieved with a few quick successes. It is critical that you listen to the team and agree on the actions taken; don't force with a top-down approach. I find I have good ideas, but the best always come from my team members. At some point, someone will run into trouble. Help them but don't give them the solution. Just mentor them to reach the solution. As Taiichi Ohno used to say, "Ask 'why' five times about every matter" and if you are not satisfied ask again.

Another piece of advice is to never improvise even if you can get away with it. I was a great improviser until one day it caught up with me. Thankfully, I had a great boss and mentor that helped me change. Improvising is like not doing preventive maintenance to your critical equipment. Why would you want to be caught in that position?

One of my biggest weaknesses is that I can be terribly impatient. When a manufacturer dealer or another department takes more time than expected, I always look for alternative ways to go around the problem to solve it. I never take a NO for an answer if I am convinced that it can be done. This is critical when you are implementing projects and have to meet a deadline. On the other hand it is one of my biggest strengths. Many people stall in these situations and you will need to help them. Remember that there is always more than one correct answer for each opportunity (problem).

I have had the best work experiences in my life working as team and it is where I have learned the most and established lasting friendships.

Finally, there is innovation. I am convinced it just naturally happens when you are in the right environment with the right group of people that work as a team by collaborating, sharing and learning from each other. Most people think that innovation comes out of R&D labs, Silicon Valley and high-tech firms. However, I believe that innovation comes from companies that have Continuous Improvement in their culture. Yes, in their culture, not in their strategy. Everyone knows "culture eats for strategy for breakfast." When you have in your culture a bottom-up approach where each employee is constantly thinking about how to make things faster, cheaper and better, then innovation is happening. You might not see it at first, but it's the little things that start changing the people's perception. In The Tipping Point from Malcom Gladwell there a few examples like the crime wave in New York City that explain beautifully how it's all a matter of perception and how the smallest details can change this.

I really hope you enjoyed these articles as much as I enjoyed writing them. With this I also expect that it made you think. Please feel free to contact me at sgomez@b2strategy.com, especially if you don't agree. The art of debate is a lost art that I truly appreciate and one where I learn the most.

Remember: "There is always more than one way to skin a cat." **JDT**

About the Author

Severino Gomez has more than 15 years' experience in the dental industry and is founder of Business Strategy Consulting (www.b2strategy.com). His firm specializes in business and technology consulting. Its customers range from manufacturers, distributors and dental labs. Severino has acted as CTO for companies such as BonaDent Dental Laboratories and Dental Services Group.