

The Hampton Roads Idea Bank

August 20, 2014

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“Everything that can be invented has been invented.” Charles H. Duell, Commissioner, U.S. patent office, 1899 (attributed).

Although this is in urban myth, the idea that someone would be so shortsighted as to think nothing else could ever be invented is fodder for great conversation.

There will never be a shortage of ideas. The core concept here is that ideas are perpetual. TED (Technology, Entertainment and Design) has lots of people coming forward with great ideas. Take a look at TED.com

What does that mean to us as citizens of Hampton Roads? Let’s consider the opportunities our region has in front of us.

- We have the opportunity to consider how to diversify our economy.
- We have the opportunity to consider new business sectors to help
- We have the opportunity to consider how to create economic growth with (among other methods) entrepreneurship and small business growth.
- We have the opportunity to consider how to slow our brain drain and convert to brain gain.
- We have the opportunity to consider how to create regional transit mobility.
- We have the opportunity to consider how to act as a region and not independent cities.
- We have the opportunity to consider things that we haven’t even talked about yet.

You get the point, I’m sure. We certainly have lots to think about and probably haven’t even put a dent in it the overall thought dome yet.

Next comes the question: “Who’s thinking about these things?” I’m a movie guy and this causes me to think about one of the final scenes from Indiana Jones, Raiders of the Lost Ark. Indy is questioning a government official about the Ark and the G-man’s quote was, “We have top men working on it right now.” Indy’s response: “Who?” G-man’s response: “Top Men”. [Ark Top Men](#)



All kidding aside, my point is that there’s a great deal to think about and just about when we think our top people have thought of it all, we find out that this is not at all the case. Creativity and ideas for improvement must be a constant flow from anyone into a some sort of portal of consideration.



Back in corporate America, I recall years of “Suggestion Box” thinking. Sometimes the Suggestion Box was thought to be a waste of time. There was even plenty of light hearted visuals of the suggestion box being located over a garbage can (Suggestions Welcome). I’m sure they were just kidding, right?

At a leading company in the area, we actually created a “Suggestion Central” system where ALL employee ideas were not only taken seriously, but responded to and if appropriate, deployed to improve our operations or customer satisfaction. The results: Industry leading results with customer and employee satisfaction.

No magic - just asking for opinion, accepting ideas and executing what makes sense. There are examples of this mentality all over the world. Why not in Hampton Roads?

Comparing our region to a company, we are completely decentralized. Our cities and community efforts are all too often disconnected. The result: the left hand not being in sync with the right. We all know what that's like.

List any community organization you want and there's an example of ideas from their constituents. Sometimes these ideas bubble up for the good of the organization, but sometimes they don't go the full distance to be considered for the region.

Conceptually, we're talking about ideas for improvements from anyone, anywhere in the region. A regional suggestion box of sorts. An area where creative ideas will be viewed.

Here's the reality. We're all in this together. No one has all the answers. Some of us get so close to a problem that we can't see the solution. It sometimes takes a fresh set of eyes and thoughts to achieve the breakthrough idea. The "AHA" moment.



I think we should consider creating a regional on-line system called HamptonRoadsIdeas.com (just a label placeholder for now).

As always, the devil is in the details. How would we position a regional suggestion box? Who would staff it and review the recommendations? With whom would we share the ideas?

Given that there is no single decision making body for all issues, we have a distributed model of information flow to consider.

Perhaps a single site with categorization of ideas (i.e. transportation, brain drain/gain, entrepreneurship support, economic development, infrastructure, etc.). Under each category header is a free flowing stream of ideas.

Any citizen could enter and submit an idea. A resource somewhere would simply review for appropriateness and post.

Then, anyone from anywhere can log on to view the comments and perhaps share the AHA moment toward action. City governments, educators, businesses, communities - everyone - could view and just scroll through citizen ideas.

Could this be an opportunity? I don't know. Could this be managed somehow? I don't know. What I do know is that lost ideas are bad for business, bad for our region and bad for us all.

I think the idea has merit. I think we need to consider some sort of regional suggestion box. How do we create a Hampton Roads Idea Bank? Let's get to work on that, shall we?

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