

#2



THE CUSTOMER IS YOUR GUIDE

Anyone who pays close attention when they install a software update is likely to make a remarkable discovery. Many of the new functions and features aren't innovations by the designer, but improvements suggested by users. The program is suddenly capable of more than the original maker could ever have imagined. Sometimes you need your customer's eyes to reveal the real potential of a product.





#7

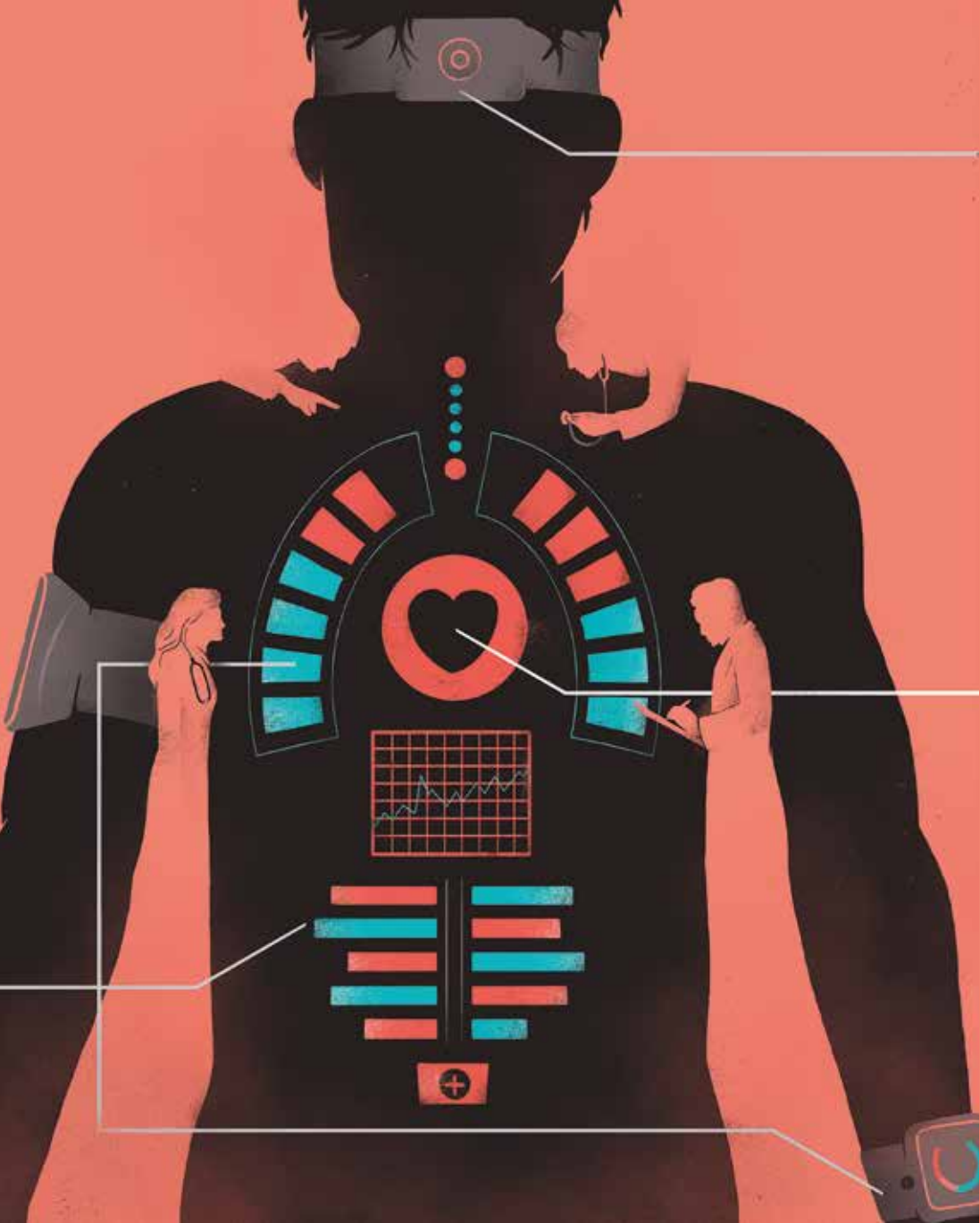
ENVY IS THE WRITING ON THE WALL

Envy. In general, a negative quality and one we learn to suppress in ourselves and to deny when challenged about it. Envy isn't pretty. Yet sometimes it's a good guide to long-cherished desires. What we envy in others can point the way to our own happiness. Envy says more than you think – as does indifference. ■

#9

BREAK-THROUGHS COME FROM OUTSIDE

The greatest advances in public healthcare have been made not by doctors, but by engineers. In the nineteenth century they built water mains and brought us modern sewers. As they did so, average life expectancy increased by leap and bounds. The breakthroughs came from outside. And they still do. There's evidence that adolescents' performance in school improves immensely if they start later in the day, get more exercise during classes and work in cool surroundings. No teacher can argue with the science. For real innovation, outsiders are in the best place. ■





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BE THE ALTERNATIVE

In business, it's considered a matter of faith: there's always room for an alternative provider. When I was director of a postgraduate school of Business Administration, we introduced a Master's degree program for public-sector managers. There was already a similar but far more expensive course, so we were offering the affordable alternative. And when that expensive course closed, we celebrated. In our eyes, we'd "won". But we soon started losing business, too. That's because we were no longer the affordable alternative, but for many potential customers had become a "vastly overpriced" monopoly. ■





#18

IF YOU CAN'T DO IT THE WAY IT SHOULD BE DONE, DO IT THE WAY IT CAN BE DONE

We can all start something, but the point is to finish it. Perseverance is a vital trait for entrepreneurs. That may seem at odds with flexibility, but really it's all about the art of the possible. And, if something does prove impossible, having the courage to decide to do something else. The Dutch politician Jan de Koning used to say, "If you can't do it the way it should be done, do it the way it can be done." Stubbornly pursuing the impossible may show determination, but true perseverance lies in seeking another path. ■



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REPEAT IT LIKE IT'S THE FIRST TIME

First and foremost, leadership is about creating joy in the repetition of what you've already said. Every actor knows that, and so does every president. Barack Obama's "Yes We Can" campaign spread through America like a gospel. Leadership is a performing art. ■



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SAY YES TO PRINCIPLES, NO TO RULES

A person with principles can live without rules. Look at the roads. Traffic lights and road signs represent rules. But "Slow vehicles take priority over fast vehicles" is a principle, not a rule. Just as the roundabout embodies a principle. That is, traffic already on it has right of way. If there's none there, you can enter the circle unhindered. No prescriptive measure can beat this adaptive arrangement. How often have you stood at a red light with no other traffic in sight?





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DON'T INSPIRE, BUT BE INSPIRED

True professionals don't ask for motivation – they already have it. No, what they want is inspiration. And that's not an activity, not something you do – it's something you are. Inspirational people are people who are inspired themselves. People who put their all into their work, and who have no difficulty in imbuing others with confidence in theirs. Nothing is as inspiring as being trusted. Because people who don't trust themselves don't trust others. ■

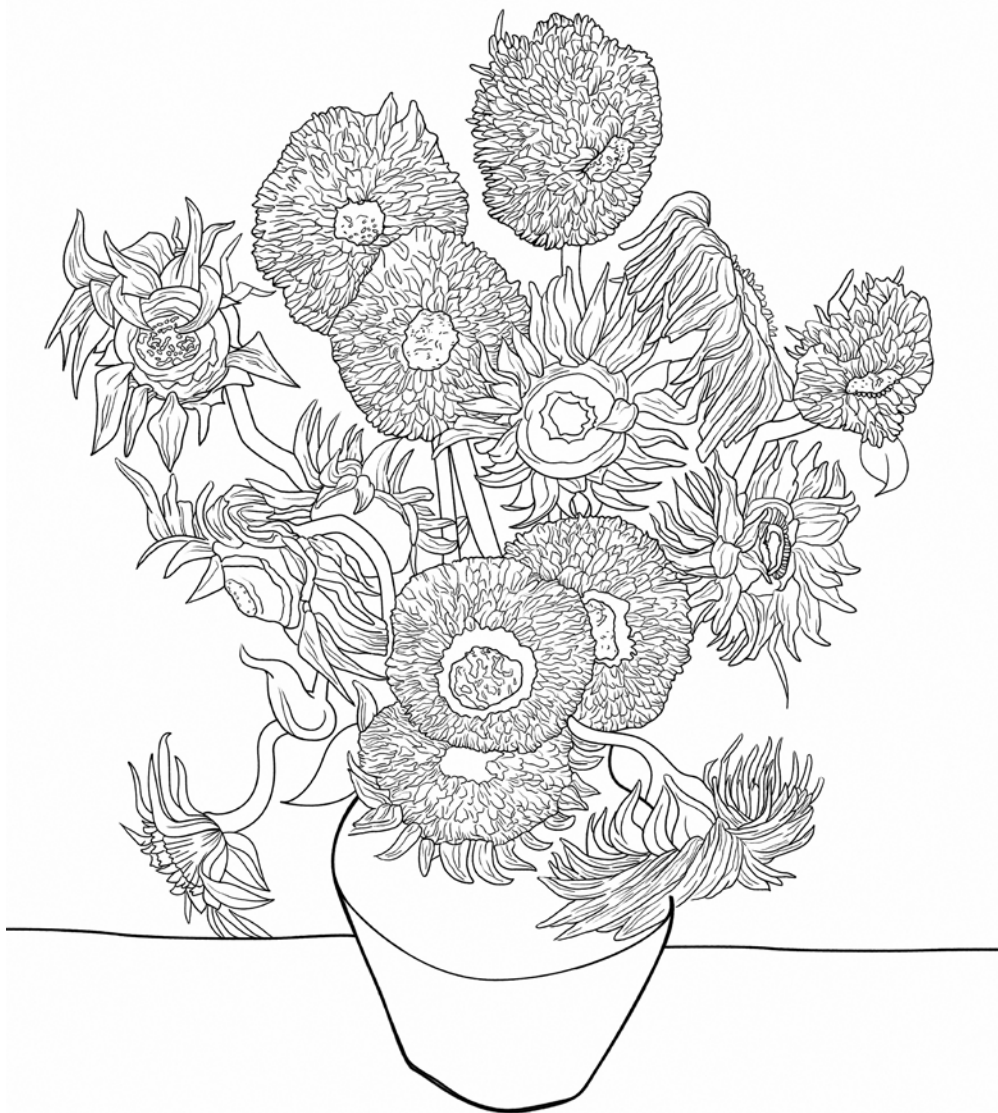


59

DON'T BRAINSTORM

Brainstorming: it's the most widely used technique for generating ideas as a group. By agreeing that everyone can say what they want, more suggestions are put forward. At least, that's the theory. But does it really work like that? No, not entirely. In fact, in this kind of process we tend to fall in line with the rest of the group. If we all came up with our own ideas separately, cumulatively that would probably produce more original and distinctive ones. This doesn't mean that brainstorming is never useful – for example, it can be a good way to get to know each other better, especially when you have to actually implement ideas that are already on the table. But consider it more as a social occasion that also produces ideas. ■

#70



SCARCITY IS A BLESSING

(abundance a curse)

"Need teaches us to pray," we were told as kids. In other words, in times of trouble you learn to ask for help. Or be inventive. Perhaps the same applies to scarcity. It, too, can encourage invention. Vincent van Gogh once complained to his brother that he was so poor that yellows were almost the only paints he had left. ■