

# FLASH OF GENIUS

## When Genius Strikes, Success Can Follow

By Paul D. Alexander

### About the Author

Paul Alexander is a business consultant and the creator of many highly effective business improvement processes. He is a leader in the development of customer and employee engagement programs for businesses in the United States and Mexico, and is renowned for turnkey, proactive: marketing, sales, customer loyalty and employee satisfaction solutions. Paul is Chairman of Alexander Group, Inc. and brings more than 23 years of experience in the performance improvement industry to his clients and his writings.

*The U.S. Federal Courts held that an invention must begin in the mind of its creator with a Flash of Creative Genius and not through the act of tinkering.*

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All great inventions, innovations and business concepts begin with a Flash of Genius. When Henry Ford designed the assembly line, it was a Flash of Genius; when Thomas Edison first imagined the light bulb, it was a Flash of Genius; and when Bill Gates foresaw the future of Microsoft and the software business, it was a Flash of Genius. In retrospect, we know how important each one of these people and their inventions are to our society and to our world. However, in the moment of conception I assure you that even they did not know.

The reference “Flash of Genius” comes from the Flash of Genius Test or The Flash of Genius Doctrine which was used for about ten years, in the 1940’s, as a patentability test by the U.S. Federal Courts. They held that an invention must begin in the mind of its creator with a Flash of Creative Genius and not through the act of tinkering. Much of what we do in business is comprised of tinkering. New products are often presented to focus groups to assess their perceptions and receptiveness, they then move on to test market to a cross section of the buying public. All of this represents carefully coordinated tinkering.

In 2009, NBC announced that Jay Leno would be leaving the tonight show late in the year and would be on a new primetime show. After only four months of this new show it was announced that Leno would be again moved to a new late night time slot just before the Tonight Show. For decades, the Tonight Show has been very popular and incredibly successful. It has made careers for many guests and a lot of money for NBC, and I am sure that it was originally created in a Flash of Genius. However, the failed Jay Leno in primetime experiment can certainly be labeled nothing more than tinkering, and expensive tinkering at that.

This is not to say that tinkering is a bad thing. Very often it is the only way to find the solution to a problem. The difference is very much like the difference between plugging an appliance into an electrical outlet or having

that appliance struck by lightning. A Flash of Genius is: instantaneous, profound, startling and, under the right circumstances, life changing. A Flash of Genius does not necessarily become the next great invention. It can be a minor change to an existing product, a solution to a dilemma, an idea for a business, or simply a new way of understanding an old problem. It does have to be spontaneous and innovative.

There are three basic types of Flashes of Genius, they are:

1. Virgin- This is an idea or a concept that comes to you out of thin air with no immediate relevance to anything that is happening.
2. Relevant Catalyst- This happens when your attention is focused on a problem or a thought and something relevant to the problem happens to cause the flash. For example: If you were thinking about the design of an aircraft wing and perceived a totally new design for the wing which would increase lift and lessen drag.
3. Non-Relevant Catalyst- This is when something entirely unrelated happens which causes a flash. For example: If you were thinking about the coefficient of drag for an automobile and suddenly flashed for a totally new high performance aircraft wing.

Every day throughout the world people are having Flashes of Genius. However, the difference between a Flash of Genius that changes the world and one that you never hear about, is what happens after the Flash, what actions are taken, what plans are made, and what is the end result? Many people will say, and perhaps you too have said something like; "I just had the greatest idea, it could completely change the way we \_\_\_\_\_." Probability has it that the idea ends there with that statement, perhaps you tell ten people, but in the end no work is done, no invention produced and no impact on society made.

There are a few people, every day, who have a Flash of Genius and write it down, make a mechanical drawing/sketch, build a prototype or write a business plan. But then the excitement fades, the reality of the scope of the work and the potential start-up costs casts its dark shadow of paralysis over the plan and the idea dies without ever really seeing the light of day. Others tap into their resources, redouble their commitment and see their

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ideas through to implementation. Some of which end with incredible results, some have mediocre results and a great number fail.

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Many think that it has everything to do with being in the right place, at the right time and knowing the right people. Very often these are important factors, the question is, how do you take your idea, your Flash of Genius, and ensure that you are in the right place at the right time and in contact with the right people. I believe that this is accomplished through a **Flash of Recognition**.

*A Flash of Recognition will help you map out your plan of action in a step by step logical progression.*

Intellectually and creatively, a Flash of Recognition comes from the same place in your mind as a Flash of Genius. Both come from a combination of left and right brain thinking and mental construction. This composition is one part analytics and one part creativity combined in a very fine, delicate balance. A Flash of Recognition will help you map out your plan of action in a step by step logical progression. This process will take you to the next level which is comprised (in basic terms) of: development, implementation, marketing and profitability. In this process, the originator of the Flash has every advantage because he can choose to fulfill the necessary roles himself, with internal personnel, or from outside resources.

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Depending upon the scope and complexity of a Flash of Genius, it may be perceived by others very much like announcing that you are planning to write the next great novel. At the same time, when Leadership of an organization has a Flash and directs the organization to make it so, it can seem as though the process of change is just another day on the job.

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The bottom line is that irresistible of the quality and value of a Flash of Genius, if someone does not follow through and make it a reality in the marketplace, it has no value. If outside resources are necessary to help you make your Flash a reality, they must do so with a high degree of understanding, perception and through the development of a **Cognitive Recommendation**.

This Cognitive Recommendation represents a well developed doable plan of action that takes into account the challenges and the changes necessary to achieve the desired results. This recommendation will be

well reasoned, well balanced and must include an **Implementation Plan.**

If you employ a traditional consultant to help with the change in your organization, the service and interaction will usually end with a recommendation. Very often the analysis and recommendation are excellent, however, you are then faced with what to do next, who in your organization will actually do the work and how will it all get done?

A well developed Implementation Plan is the next logical step in the process of actually putting your ideas to work. It must take into account: the Flash of Genius, the analysis of the situation, any testing that has been done, the recommendation and balance it all with the planned objective(s). It will include what is to be done, by whom, when, and how. In many cases this organized approach is put into the form of a business plan or a project plan. The implementation plan only represents the rubber meeting the road if it includes and is followed by actual implementation which will drive **Measurable Results.**

Positive, beneficial, Measurable Results are what we all seek every day of our careers. After all, what good is a Flash of Genius or carefully planned tinkering if it does not result in organizational and personal benefits.

By now you may be asking yourself: “What does all this have to do with me and my business?” The answer is quite simple; if we small business people are to succeed, we must all find our niche or our “thing”. Whatever we do must appeal to our customers to the extent that they see value and desire to do business with us rather than someone else. Every single thing that we do that makes us more desirable or valuable than the next guy is dependant upon what we think and how we follow through and put our ideas into action.

We do not all have to be a Thomas Edison to be successful. We can succeed with a great idea, a Flash of Genius, or just a little tinkering, so long as we fully develop our ideas, create a plan and follow through. Whether you choose to do this on your own or with outside help is certainly up to you. My only advice is, if you are certain that you have a good idea, just find a way and get it done. If a tree falls in the forest and no one is there, it may make a huge crashing noise, but no one will hear it.

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