



Discussion about innovation and creativity -- new products, strategy, open innovation, commercialization of technologies, patents, idea generation, customer input in the NPD process, more.

Book review: Innovation as magic in 'Follow The Other Hand'

A good metaphor is hard to resist, but a bad one is hard to forgive. We've all read those metaphor-based business books before and been burned when the metaphor breaks down after three chapters. So I did not want to like Andy Cohen's "Follow The Other Hand" – the "innovation as magic" metaphor seemed just too good to hold up. Fortunately, the "innovation as magic" metaphor underlying "Follow the Other Hand: A Remarkable Fable That Will Energize Your Business, Profits, and Life," turned out to be of the irresistible sort. The metaphor comes directly out of Cohen's experience as a young boy hanging around his magician great-uncle and the uncle's circle of magician friends. Yet when I spoke with him recently, Cohen recalled that he was uncertain that the "magic as innovation" metaphor would hold up if he tried to apply it in a book. "I was concerned that people would have to get over the obstacle of negative connotations...[of] magic as something that misrepresents, that shifts." He worked on the metaphor for a year before writing the book, and it "kept surprising me along the way....because the metaphor is different and unique in its own way, and I make it pay out." The way it pays out is that Cohen equates "follow the other hand" with the not-uncommon innovation advice that one should challenge assumptions. And he offers magic as a concrete way readers can test the value of challenging assumptions. The irresistible part of the metaphor is the part where he also talks about both magic and innovation as processes that make possible something that is seemingly impossible. In showing the reader a little of how magic makes possible the seemingly impossible, Cohen lays out a structure for not just doing magic, but figuring out how to do it. There's an important distinction there. Think of it as accepting that innovation doesn't just happen, but is a process. That's what Cohen is saying about magic -- it doesn't just happen, it's a deliberate process. He goes one step further and lays out exactly what that process is: 1. The first thing to do in creating an illusion is to identify an effect that you want to achieve. 2. Next, challenge assumptions – the main assumption being challenged, of course, is that the effect can't be done. In the process of challenging that assumption, you are forced to look at the possibilities. 3. Then you figure out a method. 4. And then, at the very last, you figure out the performance – that's the part where it *looks* like magic. Cohen said his next project involves "exploring a straitjacket routine" which of course leads to an exploration of how we restrain ourselves. Now that I know Andy Cohen knows his

way around a metaphor, I can't wait for that one! "Follow The Other Hand" by Andy Cohen: <http://www.followtheotherhand.com/>

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