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Meet the MasterMinds: An Exclusive Interview with Tony Buzan

What's the Brain Got To Do With Business?

Tony Buzan is a man on a mission.



His mission: to unlock the power of our brains, and show us how to tap and use our creative genius with ease. *The Times of London* predicts Buzan "will do for the brain what Stephen Hawking did for the universe."

Buzan, the author or co-author of more than 80 books published in 100 countries, invented a breakthrough thinking tool called the **Mind Map**®.

Based on extensive research on the brain and memory, Mind Mapping also reflects many of the note-taking techniques used by Leonard da Vinci, Einstein, Picasso and Beethoven, to name a few.

For more than 30 years, Buzan has been tireless in his quest to bring this powerful tool to the world. His techniques are taught and used in virtually every *Fortune* 500 company, and in countries throughout the world. As *Forbes* magazine says, Buzan "shows corporate executives how to hotwire their creative energies."

Buzan sat down with MCNews to provide some insights on Mind Mapping and how management consultants can take advantage of this simple, yet amazingly effective tool.

MCNews: Thanks for joining us today. Mind Mapping has been described as a "Swiss Army Knife for the brain," a tool for everything from managing change to note taking to brainstorming and problem solving. What's the underlying concept of the Mind Map?

Buzan: It's a pleasure to talk with you. If you look at all the research on human memory, it shows that the primary way we remember is by **imagination** and **association**. For example, if you imagine your best friend, or a computer, what happens in your mind? You don't see words, but an array of images.

The words **trigger** the images, **but the way we think is in those images and their associations**. All the great ancient memory systems were based on this imagistic view. The Greek system of mnemonics, for one, had this concept at its core.

If you want to remember a page of notes, for example, words will help to some extent, of course, but more important for fixing them in your memory will be images, pictures, symbols, codes, colors, associations and connections.

And the best way to connect images on a page is by using arrows, spacing, size, dimension or whatever symbols work for you. So, for your notes to be memorable, they need to be an **image-rich network**, and that's the essence of a Mind Map.

MCNews: If we remember most effectively using images and associations, why do so many people use standard outlining techniques?

Buzan: Most people are trained to think in a linear way, thinking of one thing, then the next thing, and then the next, in a series of singular associations in one direction.

The way our minds **really** work is in multiple thoughts and multiple directions at the same time. **The way the brain fundamentally thinks is radiant, meaning that it thinks primarily from image centers, and then radiates out.**

MCNews: So, our brains work by radiating out from image centers, but for many of us, that isn't the way we've trained our brains.

Buzan: Yes. We've been trained in two primary intelligences--verbal and numerical, which are wonderful. We've not been trained as much in the creative and innovative. To maximize function, the verbal, numerical, creative, and innovative skills must go together. If they don't, each one suffers.

The Mind Map allows you to use your verbal and numerical, plus adding the explosive power of your creative intelligence. People need to realize that, regardless of how they've been **taught** to think, inside their brains they've been training since birth to create Mind Maps!

When I first started this work, it was a real battle to get people to recognize their untapped power. I remember speaking at one company in particular about the brain and Mind Mapping.

I hadn't got to the subject of Mind Mapping yet, but I had finished the bit on the brain and memory. A very interested, serious man said, "**Look, this stuff on the brain is really interesting, but I don't quite yet see what the brain has got to do with business.**"

His comment is quite humorous, but I gave him a straight answer: by encouraging our Radiant Thinking and expressing it through Mind Maps, we can make maximum use of our creative abilities in a way that is both easy and natural, and which has great benefits for business and any other endeavor.

MCNews: So, are Radiant Thinking and Mind Mapping at odds with the current educational system?

Buzan: No: They actually give the greatest support possible to education, because the educational system is trying, especially in terms of business, to produce innovative and creative leaders.

If you have millions of young brains in your charge, and you want them to be creative, the way to do it is to have them use thinking tools which match the way their brains work. If you don't, it's like putting heavy boots on a young child and allowing it to walk only in one direction.

Obviously, the educational system must teach the vitally important subjects of reading, writing, arithmetic, science, religion, and physical education. Radiant Thinking and Mind Mapping are

tools that can help children think better in general, learn faster and remember more appropriately, which is "good housekeeping" for the brain.

MCNews: So how is Radiant Thinking actually reflected on a Mind Map?

Buzan: To mirror the way the brain thinks internally, you place an image in the center of a page and draw connectors extending out in all directions from that image. You use both sides of your brain, tapping the right side of the brain for images, dimension, size, and color, and the left side for words, numbers, analysis, and logic. Put all those on the page in an associated network, and you've got a Mind Map.

MCNews: Are they complicated to create?

Buzan: Mind Maps are, in fact, very *un*complicated to create. They are the natural expression of the way that everybody's brain has worked since they were born. So it's really easy.

MCNews: How would somebody get started with Mind Mapping?

Buzan: Obviously, I think reading my books or attending our seminars would be a pretty good way! An easy way to start is with a familiar subject, like a hobby. Put an image of your hobby in the center of a blank page.

Why place it in the center? If you start, instead, at the top left-hand side, you've already massively restricted your ability to radiate ideas out in all directions. Start in the center because that gives you freedom to expand your ideas in any direction, which is a perfect example of Radiant Thinking in action.

Now, imagine you've been asked to write a book on your hobby. Think of the main chapters in your book, and from your central image, radiate out organically, like the branches of a tree or the tentacles of an octopus, the number of branches or chapters. On each branch, print, in fairly large letters, the key words of the chapters.

From each of those branches, draw sub-branches, just like the branches of a tree, and on those sub-branches, put the second-level ideas, which might be the subheadings for the chapters. Always use the branches to underline the words to emphasize their importance, and connect the branches to each other like a tree.

MCNews: The concept is much easier to understand through illustration than explanation, which I guess makes your point!

Buzan: That's true. If you show someone a Mind Map, they get it instantly, especially if you include images, because a picture really is worth a thousand words.

MCNews: For readers who want to see an illustration of a Mind Map, [click here](#).

Buzan: At first glance to the untrained eye, a Mind Map does not look logical. However, it is pure logic, because ***logic is not sequence and order, logic is correct connection.***

When you have all the images, or nodes, and you make the links between them, what you're creating is like a reflection of your own internal web site. And, ***the web site inside your brain makes the World Wide Web look like a pea compared to a planet.***

MCNews: Let's say you create the Mind Map of the book about your hobby, and then you put it away for six months. When you pull it out again, will it be hard to understand?

Buzan: It'll be ten times easier than if you'd done it in linear notes, because a Mind Map is like a picture of your thoughts. Think of going through an album of photographs you've not seen for 15 years. The photos take you back in time instantly, and you say, oh, I remember when we were walking down that street, or that fantastic sunset we saw.

You have that experience because of the memory principles we discussed earlier. A Mind Map works the same way, like a time traveler.

MCNews: So, for example, if you're conducting multiple sets of interviews, Mind Maps could help you internalize and recall what you learned from each person.

Buzan: Interviews are a wonderful arena for Mind Maps, because they help you remember who said the important things, rather than the person with the flashy tie you liked or didn't like, or the first or last person you interviewed. It's as if you've got all the interviews in front of you at the same time for instantaneous reference.

MCNews: When creating a Mind Map, with all its colors, symbols and connectors, do people give you sidelong glances and raised eyebrows?

Buzan: Yes! People trained in the normal way think that you are doodling or coloring, that you are a childish and messy thinker, or might be going senile. But, what you are doing has actually attracted their attention, because the person's brain naturally recognizes something good.

So, it's a great opportunity to explain that the Mind Map is a new tool, which is really helpful for thinking, analyzing and remembering complex subjects, and to show them how it works.

For business people and consultants, I point out that it's a note-taking technique being used by most of the **Fortune** 500 companies, including IBM, Microsoft, General Motors, General Electric, Oracle and HSBC. ***In virtually every Fortune 500 company, there are a number of people who are either doing Mind Mapping or helping others do it.***

I add that ***Mind Mapping is based on note-taking techniques used by Leonardo da Vinci, Einstein, Goethe, Beethoven, and Picasso***, and that I find it rather useful myself! By the latest estimate, ***about 250 million people around the world are now using Mind Maps***, so it's just a matter of time before Mind Mapping becomes a universally used technique.

Singapore and Scotland, for example, have committed significant resources to teaching everybody how to think, learn and Mind Map. Also, next January in London, we're having a giant party for thousands of children and their Mind Maps. Your readers and their children are invited to join us!

MCNews: One last question—what books are you currently reading?

Buzan: I have a publishing contract for twelve books, so I am on a massive writing, editing, and proofreading schedule. ***Head First***, which has just been released, is subtitled ***10 Ways to Tap into Your Natural Genius***. I'm just finishing a basic pocket guide called ***How to Mind Map***, which is coming out in America in January 2003. I'm also writing a Mind Map book for children.

I find re-reading Shakespeare a constant source of inspiration. For rest and relaxation and to catch up on what the world's kids are reading, I'm reading ***Lord of the Rings*** and ***Harry Potter***, which are full of wit and lovely images.

MCNews: To wrap up, I'd like to add that, since reading your book about seven years ago, Mind Maps have become an indispensable creative thinking tool for me. Mind Mapping is a natural, fast and reliable method for generating the insightful and influential ideas that consulting clients demand.

So, when someone gives me one of those are-you-nuts looks on catching sight of one of my Mind Maps, I just say, "You should try this--it will change forever the way you think and work. Plus, you get to use all these great colored markers."

Thanks for your time and thought-provoking comments.

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Tony Buzan's classic, ***The Mind Map Book***, and his most recent book, ***Head First: 10 Ways to Tap into Your Natural Genius***, can be found on www.BuzanCentres.com. For more information on Tony Buzan, his research, books and other interesting tidbits, also visit thorsons.com.