

Adding your Unique Twist

Insist on yourself; never imitate. Your own gift you can offer with the cumulative force of a whole life's cultivation, but of the adopted talent of another, you have only an extemporaneous, half possession.”

- Ralph Waldo Emerson

In the “About” section of this blog, I describe the sources of the various ideas, notions and observations that make up the heart of content you will find on these pages. Part of the contribution of this blog is to include at least a couple of posts around ideas that I believe to be originally expressed by me in some way. There is “nothing new under the sun” will argue some, and they may be right, but not completely.

There are at least new versions, interpretations or applications of old ideas.

Anyway, this is One Big Idea which I believe to have some element of its origins in my personal and professional experience. Possible moment of delusion, but the important thing is, I believe this One Big Idea deserves its title and can prove very useful to you. It's notable though, that a one-time client, now a friend (thank you, Gordon), discerned this practice in my program management activities and named it after me. He has often asked “OK, let's have it, what is the ‘M**a**t Twist™’ on this issue?”

The idea is, to actively seek to add your own “twist” to the things you produce in this world.

This is not about the simplistic and sometimes transparent approach of taking a contrarian view to get attention or to artificially create distinctions that one does not believe in. This is about looking at a topic, perceiving a problem or entering a conversation with a unique perspective, lens or view, with the sincere intent of adding value by bringing something unique to the equation.

I don't recall where this started, but it has been a part of my approach to look for a unique vantage point since early school days.

OK, let's cut to the core of it: by “twist” and “unique vantage point”, am I really just saying that I'm massively strange?

Not intentionally, but it is just possible that there is some degree of weirdness at work here. Who can say?

Sorry, I digress. Let's get back to it.

This approach of looking for a unique window on things and attempting to bring a part of that otherwise unseen panorama to a topic is enjoyable, mind-expanding and, done successfully, generally well received. More importantly than well received, it is often effective, and a good way to break an impasse in discussion or a moment of paralysis in a process.

What does it Mean?

This One Big Idea is really about attempting, actively and intentionally, to look at something in an incrementally different way, to shift your view even in a very nuanced manner, to bring a new element to your understanding of it.

It can, but need not, involve a complete 180-degree change in your perspective; sometimes even the slightest of adjustments, like looking at something through your peripheral vision to better perceive it, can make the difference between identifying something transformative, and missing it completely. Discovering and adding your unique twist can mean the difference between an “A” paper and a mediocre submission, a breakthrough scientific discovery and the most damning of faint praises, “At least you tried”.

An important aspect of this One Big Idea for me, is that it be active and intentional. The power of this concept is in its conscious triggering and focused application, not in a general, disorganized chaos of too many “unique perspectives” that may, taken together, better prepare us for the life of a mountain hermit.

Let's Get Practical

I know, this sounds like it may have potential, but let's be realistic: can this One Big Idea really make a useful contribution, a meaningful difference, or is it just resonating with you somewhere in the background because it feels vaguely logical or interesting?

Here are a few potential applications:

- Find a differentiated “angle” to a paper, article or opinion piece you are writing, or podcast you are hosting and let it take you in unexpected directions
- Add an unanticipated “twist” to your next speech, presentation or panel contribution
- Actively identify potential solutions to business, project or non-profit challenges that are outside the common parameters of thought, and add “The Twist”. I know I had the ™ symbol earlier, but do feel free to use your own name, as in “The Your Name Here Twist”, as you apply this One Big Idea
- Think about ways to apply this concept to proposal writing, product, project or service pricing, issues management and resolution...one executive I knew years ago had a financial target to meet. Instead of negotiating with the anchor client in the common way, where key details are ‘sensitive’ and ‘secret’, he shared his

financial targets with this client (a large financial institution), they reciprocated by exposing certain aspects of their strategic objectives, and both were able, on a relationship basis, to achieve – and sustain – their respective (now shared) versions of success

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By the Way...

As with any of the One Big Idea posts, this one may be better applied in certain circumstances than others, and it may work well in combination with other observations, thoughts and suggestions in this blog. For instance, see the post titled Innovation at the Intersection of...Disciplines, Ideas, Cultures and More – try combining those two One Big Idea(s), (awkward phrase, but you get the idea!) and please share your experience with us.

The “Your Name Here Twist” may not work so well in certain contexts.

For example?

So glad you asked! For me, one instance relates to a political theory course taken just a few (OK, more than a few) short years ago. I attempted to apply the ‘M**a**t Twist™’ to the first paper in the course – a comparative analysis of the views of two leading political thinkers (one was John Locke – amazing the stuff that can be recalled one day, and the things, less esoteric but possibly more immediately relevant that get forgotten the next).

My submission did not do well, but it brought sharply into focus an important lesson that has served me well perhaps hundreds of times since. The point, said the professor, was not to try to demonstrate my own sadly lacking (then and now!) knowledge of the subject matter, unique perspective or not, but rather to demonstrate

that I had grasped the essence of the thought process of greater minds, and could argue both positions equally well.

It was this notion of learning to step out of your own perspectives, biases and presumed understandings to be able to bring to life the arguments of another, that has proven invaluable over and over again. It was that same learning objective that made it perhaps less appropriate to invest energy in applying the 'M**a**t Twist™' (an idea ahead of its time that had no name then!).

I hope this post lights a thousand candles, and that each one ignites a thousand more.

