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INSIDER: A Beautiful Constraint – Turning Obstacles into Opportunities
Anand Vamsee Jonnabhotla, MBA/MSIS Candidate
Do your best Jagger is a famous internet meme today. Sir Michael Phillip Jagger, the man behind this meme, shot to fame overnight for his performance in a space about the size of a table. Jagger’s success stems from a combination of desire and restriction, which helped him develop the unique Jagger moves. Mick Jagger saw an opportunity in an obstacle and realized the power of leveraging a beautiful constraint!

In the book, *A Beautiful Constraint*, the authors, Adam Morgan and Mark Barden, take us through a series of real-world examples that show how constraints can positively impact a project and, in turn, help develop successful sustainable solutions. We are no longer living in a world with abundant resources. The rate at which we are depleting our resources surely poses challenges. From the budget constraints that drove Google to start with a simple and easy-to-use user interface to the challenges of integrating industries in the world market to support the Unilever’s sustainability initiative, constraints help people understand how beautifully they can aid in progress.

A world of too much data, too many choices, too many possibilities and too little time is forcing us to decide what we value. This is true even in the real estate industry. Increased competition, diverse customer preferences, and dependence of technology challenge agents to look for new customer attraction methods. To push through such times, we need challengers who have ambitions larger than their resources. That is when constraints appear beautiful.

Morgan and Barden begin by defining a constraint, which is a limitation, imposed by outside circumstances or by ourselves, that materially affects our ability to do something. The three fundamental factors that help turn constraints into resources are Mindset, Method and Motivation.

The following think points put these learnings into practice in the real estate industry:
THINK POINT #1: The Victim, Neutralizer and Transformer

Keeping one’s ambition high in the face of a succession of constraints is very important for the real estate agent. Based on the way a person looks at ambitions and constraints, there are three categories of people:

1. **Victims**: Those who lower their ambition when faced with a constraint
2. **Neutralizers**: Those who refuse to lower their ambition but find a different way to deliver the ambition instead
3. **Transformers**: Those who find a way to use a constraint as an opportunity, even increasing their ambition along the way

Many people fall into the victim category in certain situations. However, for agents to be successful, they should learn to progress toward becoming transformers. It is always good to identify a specific goal or task and then impose a new constraint on the task. For example, if the specific goal is adding new clients, the additional constraint that the agent could impose is acquiring these clients in six months when others look at accomplishing this task in twelve months. Increasing one’s constraints will be possible through greater self-awareness as it yields valuable insights into where you might need the most help to progress from one stage to the next.

THINK POINT #2: Break Path Dependence

Often, real estate agents follow habitual business practices that prevent them from seeing opportunity in a constraint. This path dependence leads into significant and disabling constraints determined by how open-minded and flexible an agent is. The solution to this problem is to identify the key steps needed to reach a goal. Then, the agent should name his/her natural tendencies and biases. The next step is to look at the processes and routines that one habitually uses. Once these habits are identified, the agent can move on to expected sources of solutions. Finally, the process ends at having key performance indicators (KPIs) and measures of success.

As an example, consider the time agents must wait for feedback after a prospective customer visits a property. Instead of waiting for the customer to give feedback, a smart real estate agent can save time by having a mobile app handy, allowing the customer to give immediate feedback. A tacit advantage of such a process is that the immediate opinion of a customer usually reflects his/her purchasing style and thought process, both of which are helpful for the agent’s future communication.

THINK POINT #3: Ask Propelling Questions Followed by Can-If

Propelling questions help in building solutions that address more than just the problem at hand. For example, a real estate company that wishes to address environmental concerns should not...
look solely at investments that help them save energy. It should look at those initiatives that are “bigger” such as building a completely green and sustainable eco-system. Such a thought process, as the authors believe, will produce amazing results. Propelling questions prompt you toward a bold ambition linked together with a significant constraint.

After posing a propelling question, an agent will need to have both the right tools and the right attitude to find breakthrough. To do so, the real estate agent’s key challenge is not simply: How do we answer this question? Rather, How do we create the controversial climate that gives us the best possible chance to answer this question? The next step is to brainstorm for solutions. Begin with We can if … rather than with is this possible? This change in approach helps an agent focus on how it might be possible, keeping the oxygen of optimism alive in the process.

THINK POINT #4: Creating Abundance

Resourceful agents see that if they lack something (time, money, people, ideas) and that scarcity is one of their apparent constraints, it is an opportunity to create abundance elsewhere. One place to start the search for abundance is by tapping relationships with invested stakeholders. An agent could utilize the loyalty of existing customers to gain insights into spending habits and preferences to know the ways to attract new customers. On a larger scale, a real estate agent or even a company should consider ways of partnering with other industries. For example, a real estate company that wishes to identify new buyers in an area might partner with another organization for leads. In return, the company could offer a discount to the organization’s employees for any new home purchases or leases.

THINK POINT #5: Activating Emotions

A personal commitment to remaining ambitious is very important to ensure that projects see successful closure. As a sales leader, a real estate professional’s role is to communicate a clear sense of ambition and to elevate the emotional commitment to it within the team. As an agent, you must empathize with the customer’s need. This empathy will be possible only by actuating emotions. When a propelling question meets a strong emotion, breakthrough results and that is exactly what is needed in this hour of increased competition in the real estate industry. One way to activate the emotions of the buyer is by adopting the method of storytelling (See Keller Center Research Report article, “The Power of Storytelling”).
The authors emphasize that, in this world of increasing scarcity, constraints can lead to a success or a downfall depending on how an agent looks at them. Promoting a constraint-driven culture is as important as the constraint itself. Once an agent identifies which resources are scarce and which ones are abundant, the next strategic move will be to analyze the possible economic value of any partnerships. Finally, the emotional connection that an agent develops coupled with the tools and techniques mentioned above should aid faster, successful deal closures.

**Recommended Reading**


**About the Author**

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AV is a first-year graduate student from India. He holds a B.Tech in Electronics and Instrumentation Engineering. Prior to starting his dual-degree program at Baylor, he worked for 4 ½ years with SAP. He also co-founded and managed the startup, DietOnClick in India.