

**GOOD  
IDEA.**

HOW  
TO  
MOVE  
IDEAS

TO  
EXECUTION

**NOW  
WHAT?**

**C H A R L E S T. L E E**  
CEO, IDEATION

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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**G**ood Idea. Now What? was a team effort. It would not have been possible to complete without the help of many great friends and family members. First and foremost, my beautiful wife, Tina, who never ceased to believe in me and supported me throughout the entire process. My kids, Jonathan and Alexis, who allowed Daddy to take some time away from family to write. Bill Denzel, my longtime friend and now agent, who gave me great advice about writing and took the time to walk me into this new world of publishing. The cultural influencers who agreed to be interviewed by me for the book—in the midst of their busy lives—for their friendship and shared passion to help ideas come to life. Sarah Schick, for organizing my life and making sure I had time to work on this book. The team at Ideation who covered me and allowed me to pursue this project in the midst of all of our client work. Dan Ambrosio and the team at John Wiley & Sons, Inc., who saw potential and approached me about the book project. My family of friends (you know who you are!) who have invested in my life with much needed love, encouragement, and perspective. Last, the countless people I have been privileged to interact with over the years about idea making via blogs, projects, and conferences. I'll forever be grateful for all of your input in my life!



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# INTRODUCTION

## Idea Lovers versus Idea Makers

Ideas are sexy.

They are attractive, unbridled, and full of inspired passion.

We want to platform them, tell their story, and introduce them to as many people as possible.

Most of us *love* ideas and fall for them quickly and regularly. We are idea lovers! This is probably the reason you picked up this book.

There's no need to apologize here.

Ideas are great. I love ideas. Ideas are what move our world into its future.

Unfortunately, many who have good ideas will never see their ideas come to life. They will actually end up taking their ideas to the grave (literally!). Whether it was a brilliant idea for a business, organization, or personal fulfillment, their ideas will never see the light of day. Tragic.

These individuals are lovers of ideas, not makers of ideas. You see, all idea makers love ideas, but not all idea lovers make ideas come to life. Unlike idea lovers, idea makers are not satisfied with just having a great idea. They are committed to seeing their concepts actualized in the real world. In addition, they are willing to reframe their lives so that their ideas can be implemented well.

### Who Is This Book For?

I wrote this book for two kinds of people:

1. The idea lover who is sick of just sitting on great ideas: These are individuals who recognize that their ideas may never come to pass without a strategic process and a developed skill set.

2. The idea maker who needs to refresh and reaffirm his or her understanding of the elements for implementing ideas well: No matter how experienced you may be, this book will be a good resource for sparking meaningful conversations about your ideas.

Whether you are starting a new venture or recalibrating an established work, *Good Idea. Now What?* is designed to be extremely practical. In addition, this book will serve as a springboard for further idea exploration and refinement. You will find numerous recommendations of other resources that will be of great help to your endeavors as an idea maker.

## How Does This Book Work?

The format of this book was designed to be engaging at multiple levels and provide ample opportunities for productivity:

- **Parts:** These are the large sections of the book that contain chapters focused around a common theme. I recommend that you do a quick skim of these parts in the Contents each time you pick up the book. This will give you a bird's-eye view of the overall direction and provide context for each collection of chapters.
- **Chapters:** Each of the chapters was designed to stand alone. In other words, you can open up to any chapter and dive right in, without having to go back and read the content prior to that specific point. Although it would be best to start from the beginning to get the full experience, I recognize that some, given their context, may jump straight to a section they perceive to be the most helpful and needed. You'll notice the chapters are brief as well. I wanted this book to be flexible and bite-sized enough for busy individuals and busy teams. Thus, the chapters are purposely short and distinct enough for you to read on the go or together as a group during a staff meeting. (I told you it was practical!)
- **Good Idea. Now What?** At the end of each chapter, I've provided some space for you to work through your ideas about the topics covered in the reading. Under "Good Idea," you'll notice that I've highlighted some key thoughts from the chapter to refresh your memory and stir new ideas. You're encouraged to add your own notes for takeaway. The "Now What?" section provides space for you to jot down your next action steps. Always try to be as specific as possible

when you work on this section. I encourage you to include details such as dates for follow-up, names of people to connect with, visualization of an idea or process, and so forth. It's your space. Use it!

- **“Taking It Further”**: This is a section at the end of each major part created to provide some practical ideas and suggestions to help you take your concepts further. I think you'll enjoy pausing after each large section to process the ideas by yourself or with a group.

This book was not designed for you to simply read and pass along. I'm hoping that some of your thoughts will end up on the pages of this book (or at least on the pages of a corresponding Moleskine journal). I want this book to be functional—something you carry around as you seek to implement your ideas. View it as an idea journal. May it document the evolution of your next great concept!

## The Business of Good Ideas

Every good idea needs strong business philosophy and strategy in order to take flight and scale. Although not every idea becomes a business, there are still timeless business principles that can bring much-needed infrastructure, strategy, and perspective for anyone desiring to implement well. This is why I've integrated several business development insights throughout the book to help the idea maker implement his or her idea with good business sense. Creative ideas and the best practices of business should go hand in hand. (You can thank me later!)

## A Conversation over Coffee

This book is written to carry the tone and feel of two friends talking about ideas over coffee. It is intentionally informal, uninhibited, and filled with dry humor (or attempts at humor, at least). I wrote in this manner because I think it allows us to be more honest in engaging these important and sometimes complex topics without faking expertise. The truth is that we're all learning and refining along the way.

So sit down with this book and a cup of coffee and enjoy some insights from a friend. And since we're now in conversation, please send any thoughts or questions you may have about the content directly to my personal e-mail: [charles@TheIdeation.com](mailto:charles@TheIdeation.com) (yes, it's real) or use the book's hashtag on Twitter: #GoodIdeaBook. I'll do my best to promptly respond

whenever possible. Just don't add me to any e-mail lists that I have not subscribed to, especially since I'm your friend now!

I'm grateful that you've picked up this book, and I look forward to chatting with you in the chapters to come.

—**Charles T. Lee**  
[www.CharlesTLee.com](http://www.CharlesTLee.com)  
@CharlesTLee  
#GoodIdeaBook

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PART

1

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# Where Do Good Ideas Come From?



# Strategy or Chance?

“It’s about strategy! Be intentional.”  
“It’s about timing and chance! Pray for luck.”  
How does a good idea come to life? Strategy? Timing? Luck?  
Yes.

A good idea is often a thought conceived at the intersection of strategy and chance.

Louis Pasteur, a nineteenth-century French scientist and the inventor of the process of pasteurization, said it this way: “Chance favors the prepared mind.” In other words, a mind that is trained to engage new ideas is far more likely to recognize important idea connections than the casual observer.

Want to stack the odds in your favor? Here’s a little secret that the most effective idea makers use to their advantage: a good grasp of the former—intentional strategy—can actually increase your odds when it comes to the latter—the favor of chance.

Although none of us can control or predict these chance opportunities, we can work toward developing a mind-set and process that allows us to be more proactive toward making our ideas come to life. Our eyes should be focused on the hard work of executing ideas rather than being distracted by the flash of chance. Unfortunately, far too many people over-exert themselves in finding the right opportunity to gain exposure for their idea without giving enough attention to the core business of what they hope to produce. This often comes back to bite them.

History has shown us repeatedly that it takes intentional time and effort to develop a good idea. Even in our age of instant access to information

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and resources, ideas of significance (even digital ones) are rarely formulated in a quick moment. Although it's true that technology allows us to speed up production, technology still lacks the ability to make intuitive decisions that are often needed to create viable connections between concepts. That's good news! The world still needs creative idea people like you.

But should you rely on chance? I suppose that you could just go for it and hope for the best. Maybe you'll win the lottery as well! (Or not.)

Keep reading.

We all need guiding principles and processes for idea making that allow us to have a prepared mind when chance shows up at the door.

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Good Idea (key thoughts from this section)

Now What? (your ideas and next steps for execution)

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“Chance favors the prepared mind.”

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Our eyes should be focused on the hard work of executing ideas rather than being distracted by the flash of chance.

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It takes intentional time and effort to develop a good idea.

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# Ideas in the Midst

**W**hy do we feel more connected to some ideas than to others? In a culture that longs for real connectivity, ideas aren't just impersonal concepts that end up as products on a shelf. We consume in hopes of satisfying our intangible desires for fulfillment and joy in life. A good idea is something people want to connect with at a deep level.

Without getting into a debate about what constitutes a good idea, I'd like to share why physical environment and close proximity are significant to the idea-making process, especially as it relates to connecting with the hearts of people.

To their loss, many undermine the importance of *where* an idea is formed. The physical space that surrounds us fuels our creativity and enhances our ability to see and feel what it is we are trying to form. This doesn't mean that we have to be in the coolest space to create, but rather, we must be mindful of pursuing the kind of space that will position our physical bodies toward receiving the best and most relevant experiences related to our passions.

For example, if your passion is to serve the economically poor of your city, developing ideas in a corporate boardroom is probably not the best place to start. Being and living in the environment of those you hope to serve must be the first step of developing an idea. The most creative concepts can be found right in the environments where they will provide the greatest benefit. Who are the stakeholders and main beneficiaries of your passion? Go to them. Listen, learn, love, and take notes.

Most great ideas are rooted in people—not in idealistic theories.

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The closer you can get to moving the pendulum of language from *them* to *us* through spatial presence and proximity, the better chance you'll have of actually coming up with ideas that work.

### Wisdom from the Streets

Ventura is a beautiful beach city just north of Los Angeles. It is an eclectic community with beautiful, historic architecture and unbelievable weather. It was also the long-time home of one of my closest friends, Greg Russinger, who I met back in the 1990s while playing music in Southern California. We eventually formed a band together with some mutual friends and had an amazing time traveling and performing. For us as twenty-somethings, the sky was the limit and adventure was preferred over any kind of compensation or stability. With Greg as our leader, all of us in the band lived out his spirit of adventure and love of life.

One of the things I admire most about Greg, outside of his incredible love for music, is his genuine care for humanity. Way before it was cool to have a cause, Greg regularly engaged people in his city to bring relief to those in need. It was not uncommon to see him go out of his way to extend hospitality and care for people who were regularly overlooked or ignored by many of us in society. He has an uncanny ability to see people beyond their exterior. One's physical or mental condition was never an obstacle to Greg's engagement. Greg authentically values human life. No strings attached.

One day, while talking with T-Bone, one of his friends who lived on the streets of Ventura, Greg asked him a simple question: "Is there anything I can do to help you with your day-to-day needs?" T-Bone looked at him and responded with two simple words: "Clean clothes." He continued to explain to Greg that the simple reality of clean clothes not only would provide hygienic benefits but would also change the way others would view and interact with him. Clean clothes would remove barriers to human interaction as well as strengthen self-esteem for someone who many considered hopeless.

This insight inspired Greg to create something called Laundry Love. He asked his community of friends to join him in getting clean clothes to the poor or working poor. Greg approached a local Laundromat and asked them for permission to allow him and a group of his friends to come in and sponsor washes for those living under the poverty line. This simple idea allowed for natural relationships to build between people coming to the Laundromat. While in conversations during these free laundry nights,

Greg and his team began to identify the actual needs of their neighborhood and then proceeded to find ways to serve the people accordingly.

Laundry Love soon gained momentum in Ventura, as well as surrounding cities in Southern California. Greg soon invited me to help him establish a nonprofit organization that would help create these kinds of practical ideas to better our world. I gladly joined his efforts and we formed an organization called JustOne ([www.Just4One.org](http://www.Just4One.org)). Our goal was—and still is—to create these kinds of everyday ideas for human care.

Initiatives like Laundry Love have continued to grow in these past five years of our organization's existence. Laundry Love now exists in more than 120 locations and serves more than 30,000 people every month via various contextualized services, including basic medical care, job placement, tutoring, haircuts, holiday parties, and food giveaways. And it all started with T-Bone's two-word answer.

I'm a firm believer that the best ideas come from the streets (i.e., the people who will most benefit from the concept). There's something powerful about spending time in the actual environment of the people you hope to reach with your product or service. Unfortunately, many are developing products or services behind closed doors in artificial environments that are disconnected from reality. Start in the space you want to have an impact on. Listen to the very ones you hope to serve.

If you are creating a product for small companies, it is well worth your time to regularly interact with small-business owners. You can attend network meetings, do one-on-one interviews, facilitate focus groups, research pertinent data, and so forth. If you're creating a nonprofit organization that serves orphans in China, you may want to spend some significant time overseas developing the business plan while meeting with orphanages in existence, state officials, potential sponsors, and people who are knowledgeable in this area. I know this sounds basic and is just common sense, but I can't tell you how many times start-ups have overlooked this truth for developing a viable idea. If you don't start on the so-called streets, you may end up developing things for people who don't even exist.

## **Spatial Distance?**

Are there times to move away to reflect upon the environment you hope to serve? Absolutely! Spatial distance can actually bring clarity to concepts and produce a lot of good. I'm simply making the case that you should, if possible,

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start in the same space as the people you hope will benefit from your concepts. I've found this to be true for businesses, organizations, and movements.

Spatial interaction is also cyclical. We need regular times on the inside as well as on the outside of the world we are trying to serve. Proximity and distance are both your greatest assets and your greatest hindrances to idea formation. I read a book a few years back by Larry Bossidy and Ram Charan called *Execution: The Discipline of Getting Things Done* that followed the stories of several chief executive officers (CEOs) of major Fortune 500 companies who were getting laid off in the 1980s and 1990s. Surprisingly, their dismissals were often rooted in their disconnection with lower-tier employees. Many of them were so used to interacting with only C-level executives that they lost touch with the very people who ultimately produced the day-to-day success of their respective companies. This relational distance created ideas and processes that just didn't work.

One of my favorite TV shows, *Undercover Boss*, further highlights this truth. In this show, CEOs of significant companies go undercover, disguising themselves as entry-level employees, in hopes of discovering what really goes on at the ground level. CEOs who participate usually walk away with a new perspective and a deeper appreciation for how hard their employees work—at all levels of their companies.

If you want to create or develop an idea, stay close to the people who will benefit the most and live in the environment in which the innovation will take place.

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Good Idea (key thoughts from this section)

Now What? (your ideas and next steps for execution)

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Who are the stakeholders and main beneficiaries of your passion? Go to them. Listen, learn, love, and take notes.

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