

VIEWPOINT

Right-brain risks keep us creative

There is never a shortage of naysayers. Want to think boldly, try something new, use a different process to create a novel product? Chances are you'll have no problem finding a host of people eager to tell you why it can't be done.



Grace

That's one reason I enjoy attending Industrial Designers Society of America conferences. Designers — those black-shirted, earring-wearing, right-brained folks — are trained not to ask "why?" but "why not?" We could use a little more right-brain thinking in plastics manufacturing.

Witness Gaylon White, who heads design industry programs for typically conservative, century-old Eastman Chemical Co. in Kingsport, Tenn. Eastman staged a luncheon gathering for several hundred at last October's IDSA conference in San Francisco. The event was designed to help inventor Thomas Arndt unveil his new line of Y Water, organic, low-calorie, mineral-infused drinks aimed at kids and packaged in a radical new, Y-shaped bottle made from an Eastman copolyester resin.

White recited a half-dozen quotes from manufacturers they had approached along the way, all explaining why the bottle couldn't be made. But collaboration by Eastman and Arndt with Bekum America Inc. and bottle designer, fuseproject of San Francisco, yielded the product rolling out on shelves at Whole Foods groceries.

At that same congress, British author Ken Robinson brought the house down with a PowerPoint-free presentation that explored some myths and challenges of creativity. In his latest

book, *Out of Our Minds: Learning to be Creative*, Robinson notes that companies and organizations urgently need creative, innovative and flexible people and, too often, can't find them. He suggests that organizations everywhere are trying to fix problems that originate in schools and universities, and he argues for radical changes in how we should think about our own intelligence and creativity.

Business consultants McKinsey Group suggests: "Innovation has become a primary force in determining company growth, performance, and valuation. Unfortunately, a wide gap exists between executives' aspirations to innovate and their ability to execute."

These challenges are a reason why I, as conference director, like to inject some free-wheeling, right-brain spirit into *Plastics News'* annual Executive Forum. We all benefit from a hefty dose of fresh thinking from a perspective not often found within our office and factory walls. Our next Forum — March 9-12 in Tampa, Fla. — will feature Robinson as a keynote speaker, as well as a design and innovation panel with White, Bekum's Gary Carr, plus IDSA Executive Director Frank Tyneski and British structural packaging designer Martin Bunce. Professor Robert Malloy, head of plastics engineering at the University of Massachusetts at Lowell, will explore the disconnect between education and the manufacturing industry.

To prosper, the plastics industry needs skilled workers who also are creative risk takers. Let's start the discussion — using both sides of our brains.

Robert Grace is editor, associate publisher and conference director of Plastics News.