



Strategic Tale 14.1

(On generating strategic options: Brainstorming)

Time to move on, dear!

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Mondays mean our team meeting, and it's "sacrosanct". Nobody skips it because that's where the really important stuff happens. Last Monday was especially "delicate"; the atmosphere was not very festive. And not because of the Monday blues, but because the numbers didn't add up and were self-explanatory. It was not a good time to make my debut at those meetings.

"Guys, we're running out of customers!"

Juan, the intrepid boss who always came up with the best ideas and could sell ice to Eskimos had started shouting with a furious look on his face. Things looked ugly, although he then decided he did not want the meeting to degenerate.

"I'm remembering a joke that a friend from Jerez told me," Juan continued, with a reassuring smile, "and it is relevant here. The truth is that I don't know if it's a joke or an anecdote, but it's about the owner of a well-known funeral parlour in my friend's town. This good gentleman had a habit of "taking the air" on the main street and entertaining himself by watching the world go by. One day, a mean-spirited acquaintance snidely remarked: "Pepe, what a great life you have thanks to all your dead customers!" To which Pepe replied: "It must be thanks to yours, mine don't pay!"

There was a pregnant pause that seemed to last forever until Carmen, Juan's loyal assistant, saved the day by bursting out laughing:

"Hahaha, that's hilarious."

"Let's see, what worries me," Juan continued ignoring her as he helped himself to his third coffee of the morning—"is that no one wants to pay for a traditional funeral anymore. There's no shortage of corpses, but we lack customers. I mean, relatives willing to honour the deceased."

"That's because there are fewer and fewer believers," Carmen added. My cousins in Barcelona buried their mother without a church service! Not a thing! Poor thing, considering how religious my aunt was, may God bless her," she continued, crossing herself.





"True," Irene interjected, "and even considering that we have a captive audience, as we are the only business that has a guaranteed future! People are going to die, whatever happens."

"Go girl! You are always so optimistic, Irene," Carmen exclaimed raising her arms. "But can't you see that fewer and fewer people are asking us for religious services? Flowers and prayers have fallen out of fashion."

"Well, that's precisely what I mean," continued Irene, the team's creative force. "What I mean is that we have to reinvent ourselves. We have to think about new funeral services that we are not currently offering. Let's see, Pedro, check out the internet to see what other funeral parlours are doing."

"Ok, I'm on to it," I replied nervously as I googled on my laptop. The seconds seemed eternal to me with my colleagues staring at me. I finally found something to kick off with. "Here's one that says they provide a violinist, and then there's one that organises a choir..."

"That's all well and good, but it's just more of the same, maybe nicer, but a dirge all the same," Carmen replied, dismissing my hasty search. "But people don't want that anymore. When my poor aunt passed away, the one from Barcelona, my cousins just hopped on a boat and scattered her ashes at sea and that was that, time to move on, dear!"

"Well, that's not a bad idea," Irene replied. Not everyone knows how to organise something like that. What we have to do is offer new things like that. A catalogue of ideas that are not religious and that serve as a tribute to the deceased. Because in Spain, at least, we love to give people a good send-off, only now it's done in a different way."

"You're on the right track, Irene," Juan interjected, thoughtfully. "What we should do," he continued, trying to look smart by pretending it was his own idea, "is to look for business partners that can help us out. I love the idea of the sea, but it could also be in the snow, or in a forest."

"Yeah, right, even the Moon, that's where we're going to have to take the ashes if we continue like this," Carmen grumbled.

"The Moon or wherever, Carmen, you know the customer decides," Juan replied with an annoyed look on his face. "But it is not only a matter of where to scatter the ashes", he continued, "we need to organise a new ceremony to honour the deceased. Let's see, ideas, ideas..."

"I suggest writing a text especially dedicated to the deceased that can be read out at some point," I dared to say, if only to try and avoid being ignored.

"Hey, what if we make a video with family images of the deceased?" Irene proposed, making my idea look somewhat lame.

"Come on, isn't that a bit kitsch... and we send it online, right?" Carmen replied maliciously.





"Well, it's not a bad idea, Carmen, not at all bad," Irene commented, ignoring the sarcastic tone. "We can offer the option of streaming the event for those who cannot attend."

"Well talking of that," Carmen continued, " people are getting more and more involved with their pets. The other day, Pili, a friend from the village, told me they had organised a funeral for her dog, Linda and that the whole village had turned out. What's the world coming to..."

"Well, there we have another good idea," Juan reflected. "You're doing well, you're doing well, guys, I like it. Get to work on it. And, by the way, if I see Pepe, the one from my friend's town, I'll tell him: here I am with my new services... what a great life I'm living!"

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