

# Chocolate-Covered Cicadas

By Ronald M. Moen

The summer of 2007 in Chicago brought the return of the 17-year cicada, a variant of insect that incubates four feet below ground and surfaces to mate only once every 17 years. The last summer we had the 17-year cicada—1990—the Michael Jordan Bulls didn't have any championship rings and Barry Bonds reached the 100-homerun milestone.

I'm not sure if it was the quest for unusual cuisine, the search for publicity, or auditions for "Stupid Human Tricks," but some locals were shown on the television and in the newspaper eating these cicadas.

The summer of 2007 in Chicago also brought author Frans Johansson as the keynote speaker to the Association Forum Annual Meeting. His captivating visuals and curious anecdotes encouraged me to buy his book, *The Medici Effect*. The book is a captivating journey about fostering innovation through unusual combinations of ideas and expertise.

For my Scandinavian-influenced, Chicago-trained taste buds, the cicada is not on my snack list—even if this cage-free insect is coated in organic chocolate. However, my team-oriented, new-approaches-always-welcome attitude does have an appetite for unusual ideas and intentional brainstorming. *The Medici Effect* provides a smorgas-

bord of stimulating thinking, and I encourage you to read it.

So what do cicada snacks and *The Medici Effect* have to do with outsourcing? Everything.

If you have a process puzzle that does not seem to fit together or if you have a service area that is consistently inconsistent, outsource the resolution. Give yourself permission to solve the problem with new combinations. Explore possible venues beyond your existing horizon. Experiment with counterintuitive solutions. Allow yourself to tap into skill sets outside your current team. If you approach the partnership in a collaborative mindset, outsourcing can provide the catalyst for combining the unique ingredients necessary to produce a breakthrough resolution.

Once you decide to outsource, force yourself to set expectations, accountability, and measurements beyond what you do for internal staff projects. Too often, the status quo and the tenure of existing staff create a glass ceiling on reaching for high goals. The exercise of redefined expectations, accountability, and measurements will be good for you, your outsource partner, and your organization. When outsourcing, the benefits of clear problem definition and a concise desired end result will far outweigh the effort required.

In *The Medici Effect* on page 53, one of the simulations for stimulating innovation is called “Reverse Your Assumptions.” The premise of this approach is to allow you to see new opportunities by turning over commonly held assumptions. Thorough investigation of the identified “reversed assumptions” spurs creative conversations and considerations. I do not have space in this article to create an entire simulation, so I will leave you with a few closing assertions, framed in the construct of Johansson’s reversal technique:

1. Outsourcing is affordable and less expensive than hiring full-time staff.
2. Outsourcing gives you more control of the work being performed.
3. Outsourcing gives existing internal staff more opportunity for affirmation.
4. Outsourcing partners are invested in your long term success.



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