

## Don't Force It: Roam Before You Pave

BY PAUL WILLIAMS

Sometimes it's best to let natural progression take precedence over conventional wisdom.

**I HAVE A STORY FOR YOU.** An architect built a cluster of office buildings around a central green. When construction was completed, the landscape crew asked him where he wanted the sidewalks.

"Just plant the grass solidly between the buildings," was his reply.

By late summer, the new lawn was laced with paths of trodden grass between the buildings. These paths turned in easy curves and were sized according to traffic flow.

In the fall, the architect simply paved the paths. Not only were the paths beautiful, they responded directly to user needs.

I love this story.

I am certain this unconventional approach caused the building owners to think the architect was crazy. Nevertheless, with patience they came to see the brilliance of his approach.

### Take it Easy

Think about it: are there things you are forcing? Places where you should ease up?

The lesson for me is "roam before you pave." If sidewalks were immediately installed, they would have had sharp, rigid angles and uniform width similar to every other sidewalk. However, by allowing them to form organically, it put the right-sized path in the right place.

Applying these lessons to business, why not let customers test your prototype product, service, or program before it is fully baked? See how they use it, and then modify to best meet their needs.

How about allowing employees to pick the shifts they want to work? Define their job responsibilities? Or create the scope of their benefits plan? Instead of forcing, ask how they would roam—*then* pave.

As a parent, instead of pushing your kids into a certain career, couldn't you let them first find their own interests? Then, once they've made "tracks in the grass," pave it with support where it is most needed?

### A Healthy Whack

This article is based on an idea from Roger von Oech's *Creative Whack Pack*, a deck of creative strategy cards meant to "provoke and inspire your thinking."

The cards are actually chunks Roger has extracted from his book, *A Whack on the Side of the Head: How You Can be More Creative*. I highly recommend the Whack Pack and the book!

Finally, for those of you with iPhones, Roger has just released his *Creative Whack Pack* in iPhone format (you can search for it at iTunes) When you need creative inspiration, power-up your iPhone (or iPod) and let the ideas flow. It's an excellent application!

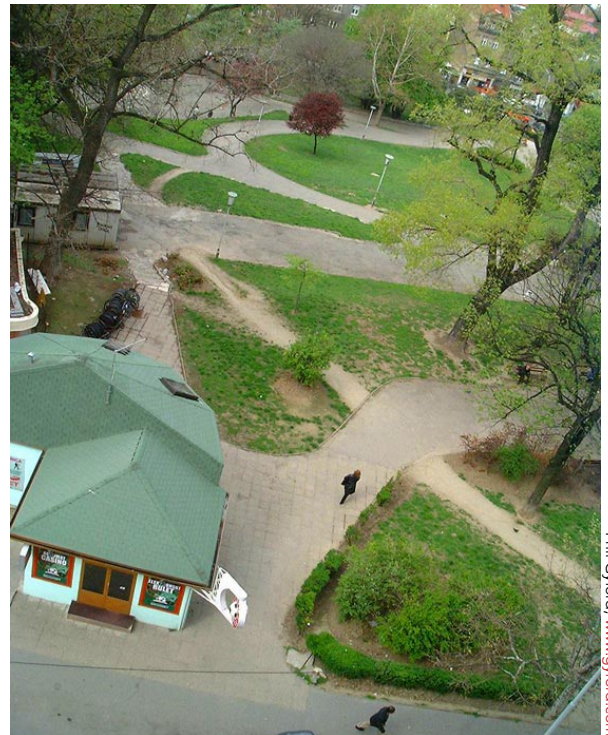
I'm sure there are many more ways to apply this lesson. Be aware of when you may be forcing, and see if you can ease up and see what develops.

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This article is posted at [www.mpdailyfix.com](http://www.mpdailyfix.com).



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