

# How to use Forced Focus Thinking to get Better Results.



essence.<sup>1</sup>

## Have you ever...

**engaged a  
consultant?**

**spent lots of money  
and an indecent  
amount of time?**

**sat through a  
lengthy  
presentation?**

**only to get to the end  
and wonder what  
exactly you're  
supposed to do  
next?**

Have you been to one of those full-day off-site meetings that was really just a jabberfest that raised more questions than answers, delivered no true team unity and no actionable outcomes were achieved?



Some consultants  
(not just marketing  
ones, mind you!)  
like to prove their  
value through the  
weight test.

Lots of paper,  
lots of words,  
lots of  
recommendations.

You know the ones of which I speak - they like to plan the approach, conduct situation analyses, stakeholder interviews and map out the project timeline. They hold a few workshops,

allow key players to explore their concerns and summarise the findings in detail.



Now, all of those  
steps are  
**absolutely right**  
**and correct** in  
certain  
circumstances.

Some clients **DO**  
require the rigour of  
structured formats  
and processes.

But I have witnessed  
firsthand the growing  
disease of  
**information**  
**overload** leading to  
the fatal outcome of  
**analysis paralysis.**



Whilst people are immersed in  
analysis, the market steadily  
**changes and evolves.** One day you  
wake up, the world has irrevocably  
changed and you suddenly have a  
battle on your hands to maintain  
your position, let alone advance.

General  
George Patton  
once said,

“A good plan,  
violently executed  
now, is better  
than a perfect  
plan next week.”

**Darn right!**

Don't get me wrong,

I am not advocating

a **crash** and **burn**

strategy where no

regard is paid to

common sense and

sound analysis of

the key statistics

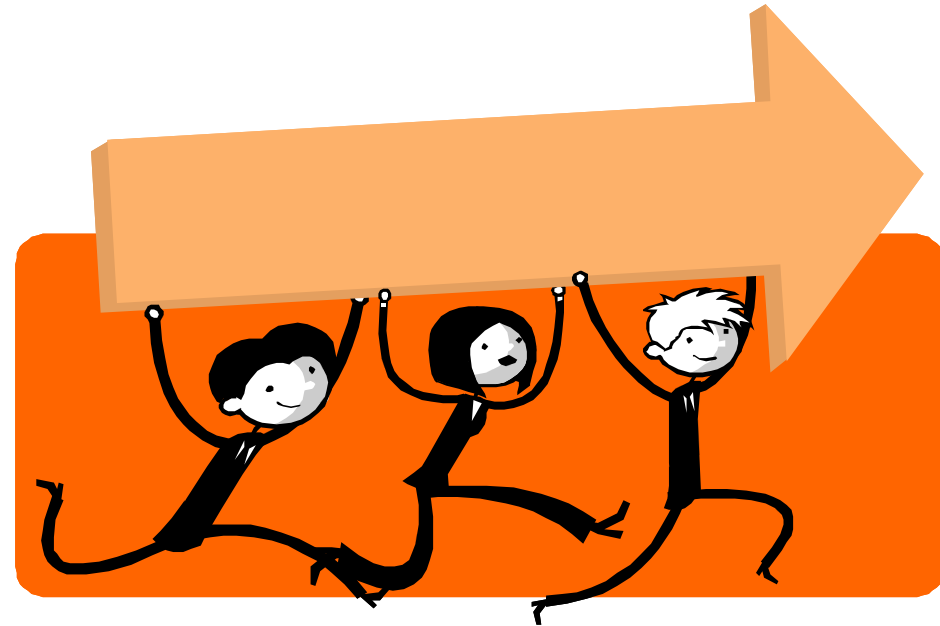
that really count.

But there is too  
much talk and not  
enough action  
going on in  
corporate Australia  
these days.

**It is this type of  
action oriented  
approach that led  
me to the  
development of  
Forced Focus  
Thinking.**

**Forced Focus Thinking** helps guide actionable outcomes for a variety of issues and problems. It applies to any type of problem that requires a rethink because circumstances have changed.

Quite simply, **Forced Focus Thinking** applies pressure to a group of people or a process to ensure a focused result. Not threatening or invasive pressure – but pressure that focuses the team on actionable outcomes.



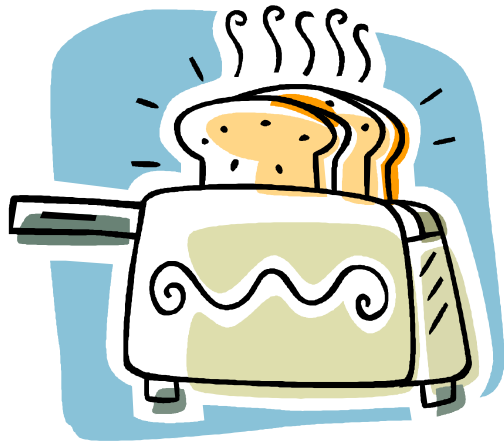
There are four  
key steps;

# 1. QUESTION

A key part of **Forced Focus Thinking** is about asking the right questions of the right people to get the answers you really need.

Information should be categorised into 'nice to know' and 'need to know'.

I once worked for a client who made bread and decided to conduct an enormous evaluation of the bread market. This client wanted to use the research to ask everything he had ever wanted to know about bread.



My favourite question I tried repeatedly to delete was the percentage of people who cut their sandwich bread on the diagonal versus the vertical. Now, this is a clear example of a **'nice to know'**. How could anyone possibly use that information to make any difference whatsoever? The fact we discover what percentage of Australians cut their sandwiches into squares versus triangles was what was occupying this client – whilst the bread market was slowly heading into a revolutionary par-baked model in retail, and the growth of GI, added fibres and other nutritional innovations threatened to change the bread market irrevocably.

It is harder to ask  
five great questions  
than ask twenty  
average ones.



**Adopt Forced  
Focus Thinking,  
limit yourself to five  
great questions  
that will truly set  
your future course  
and ask the right  
people.**

## 2. DISENGAGE

I think it is fantastic when clients are excited and passionate about their product.

But sometimes knowing too much and having a predetermined and strongly held view of the world can be a bad thing.

This is when

some **serious**

**disengagement**

is required.

## *Think of how a relationship evolves.*

The start is the honeymoon phase – wine and roses, mad passionate love, no limit to spontaneity, no boundaries, together we can achieve anything! It's not until you have been married for years that you get bogged down in the grievances of who leaves the toilet seat up and the soggy teabag on the bench. That you decide you know 'exactly what he'll say to THAT idea!' Once the shine of romance wears off and the daily grind sets in, it can be hard to see the positive aspects of the relationship without being weighed down by the baggage.



Yet the view  
from a  
distance is  
exactly what  
Forced Focus  
Thinking  
requires.

Good distance  
allows you to  
objectively  
determine three key  
issues;

1) What exactly the problem is (harder than it sounds),

2) Why you have the problem, and

3) What outcome you want.

Use **'force'** to **focus** and disengage, to see enough to fall in love all over again – but not enough to pre-determine the course of the future.

Only a disengaged  
eye can articulate  
those three key  
questions that are  
paramount to  
**effective problem  
solving.**

### 3. GENERATE

This is my favourite and  
most creative part of  
**Forced Focus Thinking.**

The group needs to  
brainstorm a list of  
alternative ideas to  
solve the problem you  
have identified. But no  
blue sky brainstorming  
– it has to be structured.

For example, if you want ideas, each team must deliver **three in fifteen minutes** and provide a rationale for their choice.

If you are concerned about what your competitors will do, then 'install' all participants as **Board Members of that very competitor**, and sketch out a plan of what the competitor would do if their sole objective was to ruin your company.

If you want to solve a difficult staff issue, force the same team members to role play both sides of a planned interaction.

**My personal view is that generation of ideas works best under a time pressure, so force focus and get on with it.**

## 4. EVALUATE

Evaluation of programs and ideas is obviously of critical importance.

But **Forced Focus**

**Thinking** ensures the right focus is applied in evaluating the right outcome to move forward.

No plan is complete without some form of benchmarking and evaluation to keep you honest.



Focus on the  
desired  
outcome,  
force yourself  
to monitor it  
and  
most  
importantly, act  
accordingly!

**WHO HAS  
BENEFITED  
FROM FORCED  
FOCUS  
THINKING?**

The four steps  
above that help  
develop **Forced  
Focus Thinking** can  
be used in  
conjunction with a  
range of tools.

These tools have been  
developed by **Essence  
Communications** to  
translate  
complexity to simplicity,  
confusion to clarity,  
distraction to focus and  
activity to results.

Essence

Communications

is obsessed with

one thing –

making

marketing

simple for clients.

**Forced Focus**

**Thinking** helps

ensure outcomes

that are usable and

actionable for

clients.

There are 4 main  
competencies to the

Essence

Communications

model, and Forced

Focus Thinking is

inbred in all of

them:-

## 1. Consultancy

The Essence Communications Marketing Consultancy has helped a range of clients large & small design strategic marketing projects to suit their needs. The most recent example includes a project for the Victorian Department of Human Services.

The project was to improve Victorian confidence in the health system. It involved a significant communications budget and required a strategic plan to be developed and

communicated within department and ministerial offices, facilitated and agreed by key stakeholders, implemented and monitored over a two year period.

In addition, **Essence** managed significant change management components for this project involving the introduction of new business processes, organisational restructuring and redesigning of job descriptions. This was particularly successful and has now created many other areas for continuous improvement.

## 2. Research

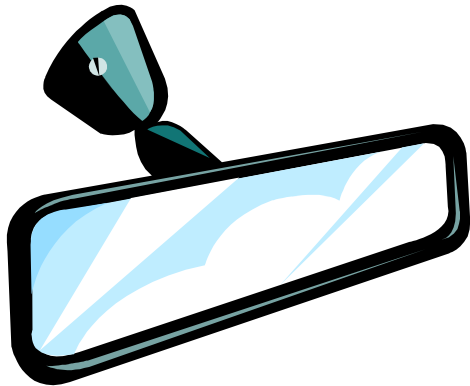
**Essence Communications** has extensive experience with research.

Our philosophy on Research is that it must assist in guiding future decision making. Too often research is just a rear vision mirror – it tells us what has already happened in the market and explains how you got to where you are.

**Which is valuable, and good to know.** But all too often, researchers are too timid to

make the most valuable recommendation of all.

That is, on the basis of where you've been and where you want to go, *this is what you should do.*



## 3. Facilitation

Penny Burke is an experienced facilitator who specialises in getting actionable results from group workshops. She uses the four steps of **Forced Focus Thinking** extensively as a moderation technique which greatly improves workshop outcomes. Her second book in the Forced Focus series, **Forced Focus – The Essence of Facilitation**, is due out in November 2007, and outlines the four steps of **Forced Focus Thinking** in detail.

## 4. Training

**Essence Communications** conducts a range of training programs across a number of topics including **Forced Focus Thinking**. We are experienced trainers and can design and tailor a communications training program specifically for a particular need.

## Conclusion

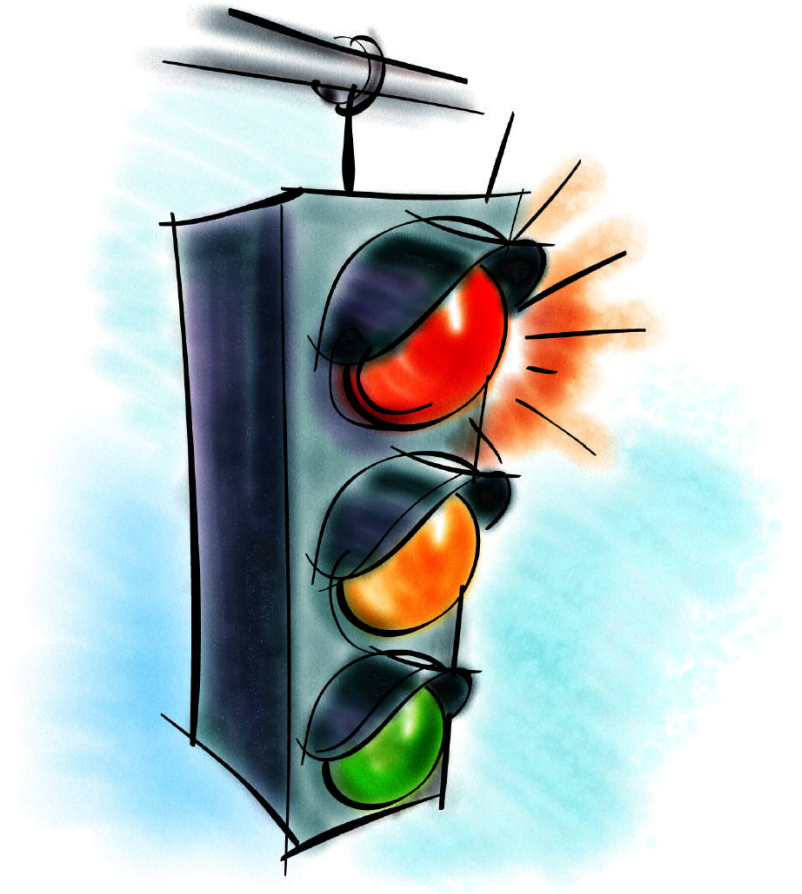
**Forced Focus Thinking** is the heart of a range of services that **Essence Communications** delivers.

**The four step  
process of  
Question,  
Disengage,  
Generate and  
Evaluate is a  
valuable  
framework for  
delivering  
marketing and**

**communications  
outcomes. If you  
follow these 4  
steps together  
with putting  
yourself under  
some pressure,  
you will see a  
more focused  
result.**

In closing, if you have ever visited Rome, recall the art of crossing the road.

If you wait for the traffic to stop, and for drivers to obey red stop lights you will be there forever.



**Instead success  
lies with the  
people who  
amass  
themselves into  
groups and as  
one, surge  
forward.**

**They force their  
way across the  
road, force the  
traffic to stop and  
allow them to  
pass.**

**They force focus  
on the outcome,  
gather a willing  
team around  
them, get on with  
the task at hand  
and they get a  
result!**

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