
Your Bottom Line

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Is mind-set inevitable?

Resistance to change is not new to photography; the history of the medium is strewn with practitioners who fought progress. Have you ever wondered why, despite shrinking business, so many photographers resisted using color materials, photographing outdoor wedding candid, or incorporating other profitable innovations?

The answer is mind-set! Often called narrow mindedness or tunnel vision, mind-set reduces one's perception of alternative options, and is probably the greatest hindrance to innovation and advancement in the field.

Mind-set is a process whereby a person rigidly adopts thought patterns successfully used in the past, while ignoring or condemning new concepts and techniques.

Mind-set compels a person to vigorously defend his or her opinions, whether or not the beliefs are based on fact or fiction, and even in the face of incontrovertible evidence to the contrary.

For some photographers, the effects of mind-set are gradual; for others, swift and fatal. The New York commercial photographer who can't continue to generate new ideas will soon be out of work. Portrait photographers may experience more subtle symptoms, but the effects will prove just as deadly.

Technology, attitudes, and customer tastes continue to change in every area of professional photography. One thing is certain—remain static and the world eventually will pass you by!

Mind-set, however, is not peculiar to photography; it afflicts every area of creative human endeavor. A classic example involved the 20th Century search for a remedy against deadly infections.

For years, mold contamination plagued researchers, destroying their carefully prepared bacterial cultures. Although primitive societies recognized the medicinal properties of mold, modern science didn't and most researchers locked themselves into this dogma. Mind-set prevented their examination of mold as an anti-bacterial agent.

Fortunately, scientist Alexander Fleming remained open-minded and grasped the connection between the dead bacteria on his petrie dish and the infections he sought to heal. The result was the discovery of penicillin.

Typically, mind-set is associated with aging. In fact, one high-tech Japanese company recently announced plans to retire most of its employees over the age of 35, indicating these workers no longer were as free thinking, inventive, or productive as younger employees.

Although mind-set tends to increase with age, everyone is afflicted to some degree. Certainly it's common to find a 35-year old who thinks like a 70-year old, or the other way around.

Mindset however, is related to creativity—it's a limiting factor. Everyone is born with a certain degree of creativity. Some people are lucky enough to inherit a predisposition to creativity and be raised in an environment conducive to its development.

Creativity can be permanently squashed, however, if a person is criticized for exhibiting imaginative behavior.

Mind-set is a self-perpetuating behavior. As your view of the world becomes more limited, so does your perception of your work, which in turn further narrows your outlook on life. The cycle must be broken!

Is there a cure for mind-set? No, but there is a treatment that minimizes its debilitating effects. The remedy isn't a bitter pill to swallow either, but simply involves developing new ways to think.

The first giant step is to admit you are afflicted with mind-set or that you most likely will be in the future. Now you are ready to take preventative or corrective measures to avoid permitting mind-set to chart the future course of your life and business.

To adopt an open thinking style, reach out to others for new ideas and pay attention to what they have to say. Listen carefully to those around you, including customers, friends, and family. They may

offer valuable insights you failed to recognize on your own.

Make every effort to determine why some potential customers went elsewhere for their portraits and others opted to spend their disposable income on luxury goods or services other than photography. You'll be surprised to learn that price isn't always the customer's primary concern.

Read everything you can get your hands on, especially publications your customers read. Study magazines featuring photographic styles that differ from your own tastes; these styles may represent the preferences of future clients.

Finally, continue your photographic education. Force yourself to attend provocative lectures and workshops demonstrating unorthodox techniques. Then give those new methods a fair try, before you decide they are not for you.

Try attending seminars by photography experts who encourage you to reach beyond your current methodology. For example, Seattle photographer Wah Lui begins his Winona courses by asking his students to experiment with their cameras. Lui finds testing daring and even "crazy" ideas an effective method for fighting mind-set.

The world changes at an ever quickening pace. To stay alive in business requires concentrated efforts to continually battle complacency and mind-set. Your bottom line, both today and tomorrow, will be your measure of success. ■