

## The Idea Squirrel



*"The only difference between a problem and a solution is that people understand the solution"*

We all read Dilbert frequently and unless you are different than most others, the topics and behavior mimic what we see in the real world--that's what makes the comic strip so amusing. Last Sunday, we were introduced to the "Idea Squirrel". What's an Idea Squirrel? It "steals your ideas and treats you like a nut for saying they were yours."

Why is this so funny? Because when it comes to innovation, we are afraid of idea squirrels! We don't want anyone to know what we are doing. We frequently don't want to share. And even worse, when an idea squirrel comes to us with an idea, we aren't interested because an outside squirrel couldn't possibly know anything about OUR problem, so we throw it a peanut in the hopes it will go away.

We need to welcome the idea squirrel. TRIZ teaches us that there are really no problems at the basic level. We all think our problem is unique and as we have said to workshop attendees for 9 years now, there is not a problem we have seen that hasn't already been solved in a general sense. The challenge is not only to welcome the idea squirrel, but actively seek him out. We also want, at least within our own organizations, to get the idea squirrel's help in sharing our problem solutions with others. And the idea squirrel can be used to license our technology to others.

How do find an idea squirrel? First of all, let the squirrels know you are interested. Leave some nuts out for them to find. Go to different meetings. Talk to licensing groups. Second, generalize your problem, stop using special industry and special jargon and ask yourself who else, in the most general sense, is dealing with this problem. Read some different journals. Visit some web sites that are parallel universes. When we review web hits from "parallel" universe technologies, we normally find at least an order of magnitude more hits and ideas. Then go do some homework and find out what's going on in these parallel industries and technologies.

Go find and be an idea squirrel!

Upcoming Event:

Three day "Introduction to TRIZ/Inventive Problem Solving", sponsored by the American Society of Mechanical Engineers new European training office

November 10-12 Brussels, Belgium

[http://www.asme.org/Education/Europe/Courses/Theory\\_Inventive\\_Problem.cfm](http://www.asme.org/Education/Europe/Courses/Theory_Inventive_Problem.cfm)