

On a creative mission to save



Legendary lateral thinker Edward de Bono never runs out of new ways to look at life and business, writes **Lyndall Crisp**.

Computers may be a wonderful tool, but when it comes to creative thinking they stymie the ability to develop ideas. Progress comes to a halt.

Edward de Bono has lectured the world on lateral thinking for 40 years and reckons that businesses are suffering because, while they use computers to collect information, they don't take the next step and interpret it from different angles.

"It's a bit like the Chinese, who 2000 years ago were way ahead of the West in science and technology. If they'd continued at the same rate today they'd be the most dominant power in the world," he says. "What happened? The scholars began to believe you could move from certainty to certainty to certainty. So they never developed the possibility system, hypothesis, speculation, imagination.

"The same thing's happening in the rest of the world. We're collecting all the data, the computer analyses it, then tells us what to do. That's very dangerous unless we develop creativity that means 'OK, that's the data, let's look at it differently'."

De Bono, who is in Australia for a series of lectures and to promote his latest book, *How to Have Creative Ideas*, says anyone can be creative but that some people are more creative than others. Imagination is the playground in which creativity can work.

While the formal techniques of lateral thinking can be powerful — he says a group of his workshops in South Africa generated 21,000 ideas for a steel company in one afternoon — the basic habits of creative thinking are the ability to extract concepts, to see connections, value and points of difference.

"I am interested in idea creativity which produces value," he says. "When I started writing in 1967, the business sector of society was the most interested and has continued to be the most interested in thinking. Other sectors, like the academic and political, it's enough to verbally convince people you're right, there's no real bottom line. In business you can prove you're right and go bankrupt next week."

the world

"As countries like China and India produce things at a fraction of the cost, creativity is becoming more and more important. Otherwise, Australia is going to become the herb garden of China."

Without creativity there is only repetition and routine. Merely being competent is the kiss of death in business. Creative thinking can produce simplicity, which in turn can save business time and money.

"Different ways of communicating, different marketing concepts, different products, new services — all need new thinking," de Bono says.

While the younger generation equates being different to being creative, he argues that if creativity doesn't deliver value there's no point.

"You have to believe it's possible and you have to have the motivation. And then gradually you find you're developing the habits of mind which underline creativity. It's a bit like an athlete who trains to be fit and then learns the techniques of the sport."

Born in Malta in 1933, the "pioneer in

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writing software for the brain" is still in demand around the world. So far this year he's lectured in Hong Kong, Singapore, Mexico City, New York, Los Angeles, Monterey, Budapest and Amsterdam. A Rhodes scholar, a graduate of Oxford and Cambridge universities, a doctor and psychologist, he has written more than 70 books translated into 40 languages.

His impact on the way we think is undeniable, but he tells awful blonde jokes — "How do you know a blonde's been using the computer? It has Wite-Out on the screen." — and regards sitting on a beach as "hard work".

He prefers to think. He never runs out of ideas.

Last year, he took full-page ads in the *Hollywood Reporter* and *Variety* announcing plans to set up a "happy film commission" that would rate films according to their happy content because "most films are nasty and violent". The industry was underwhelmed.

He can't look at anything without seeing potential. The humble omelet, filled with runny scrambled eggs, is one culinary concept. Cooking pasta by adding it to boiling water at three different times for texture is another.

He's also designed a new way of playing chess that, he says, is much quicker. And you thought it was a leisurely pursuit.

"In January I launched the World Council for New Thinking," he says. "Representative bodies like the United Nations can't easily have new ideas because they've got to represent current thinking, and new ideas are not current thinking, they're high risk. I've got six Nobel Prize winners working with me to provide a platform for putting forward new possibilities.

"For instance, in the Israel-Palestine situation, a way of allowing them to vote in each other's elections. The Israelis would never have elected Hamas and the Palestinians would never have elected Sharon. You elect more constructive people and you work together.

"China is short of 100 million women. My suggestion is instead of having a one child policy have a one-boy policy. Have as many children as you like till you have a boy, and then you stop."

The biggest audiences for de Bono, who earlier this year shared the stage with former US secretary of state Colin Powell in Dubai, are 8000 Mormons in Salt Lake City and 7400 children in Christchurch.

But it hasn't made him as wealthy as he thinks he should be.

Rock stars and footballers, he says, leave him for dead — but he can earn more in one hour than he did in a year when he started working all those years ago.