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**The Humble Safety Pin**

Walter Hunt had no trouble thinking up innovative ideas. First, he invented a machine to spin flax. Then he invented a fire engine gong, a forest saw, a stove that burned hard coal. His inventions worked, but he just did not have the knack for making money from them.

He sat in his workshop, worrying about how to pay off a $15 debt he owed to a friend, while playing with a length of wire. So, he decided to invent something new. As he was twisting it, he discovered that when coiled and then clasped to itself, the wire retained enough spring to be unclasped and clasped again. He completed a prototype and several design sketches in one evening, patented the device on April 10th, 1849, and subsequently sold the patent for $400 to W.R. Grace and Company to pay off the debt to his friend. For all their low-tech utilitarian nature, safety pins are clearly a successful product design.

So, what does this have to do with our chosen field of endeavor? We are clever and see lots of challenges; we even get inspired ideas. But sometimes we must sell our ideas, and that is where we fail. We see an injury and feel we owe a debt to the injured pa. for not having done something to intervene.

Having inspired solutions to yet unrecognized needs just does not fly. We need to sit back and ruminate and take some time to **reframe** the issue from our stakeholder’s perspective. If we understand what the client needs; just perhaps, we can twist some wire, our original idea, into a usable solution. Our solutions must penetrate to the heart of the problem. They need to be transferable and simple to apply.

I find it interesting that Walter Hunt called his invention a “*safety*” pin. Straight pins, (our time-worn pat answers), have been around for years and had done a satisfactory job of holding things together for the dressmaker. Yet the problem of injury persisted. A *twist* of fate allowed Walter to bend a readily available idea into a new shape that not only solved the problem, but others saw it as a viable solution too.

Can we follow Walter’s example, and use our expertise to address a here-to-fore stubborn problem? Can we use the tools at hand in a novel way to address an issue that others find important? We should stop spending time clarifying our description of a new or even existing problem and instead *twist wire* in solving an old problem in a new way.

Everyone has seen a safety pin and many of us have used one. They are made by the thousands and yet, I bet most of us never heard of Walter Hunt. Wouldn’t it be great if our new twist on an idea stuck? If it became the solution of choice and readily accepted!