

Succeeding with Your Bright Ideas

Use these seven techniques to bring your good ideas to life.

BY ROBERT B. TUCKER

Most articles on creativity discuss how to come up with better ideas. But that's only part of the process. Success means bringing your ideas alive. To do so, apply these seven techniques:

1

Assault Your Assumptions

Think about the last time you ran across a situation that was so frustrating, so in need of improvement, that you found yourself muttering, "There's got to be a better way." The minute you had that thought, you assaulted your assumptions. You saw the issue in a new light. You redefined it as a "problem" rather than "the way things are."

Assumptions are biases about the "way we do it" in this organization, this industry, this profession, this sector. When you tackle your assumptions, you begin the process that leads to innovation. This flash of impatience with the status quo leads you to challenge not only your own assumptions but those of others as well.

Next time you're faced with options you don't like, ask the parties involved, "What can you think of that might be better?" Then pause and wait for them to rise to the challenge. The first assumption to assault is that people won't be creative if you give them the chance.

2

Pursue The Possibilities

The most important trait of successful innovators is that they're opportunity-oriented. They don't just hatch ideas; they run with them. They understand the critical role of timing in selling their ventures. They consider obstacles and setbacks as part of the journey.

Remember, ideas are a dime a dozen. Unless you pursue them with passion, that's all they are: ideas.

3

Track The Trends

One universal characteristic among change-masters is that they're voracious readers. Rinaldo Brutoco, co-founder with his wife Shanna of Red Rose Gallery,

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The Innovator's Creed

Until one is committed, there is hesitancy, the chance to draw back, always ineffectiveness. But the moment one definitely commits, providence moves too. All sorts of things occur to assist that would never otherwise have occurred. Whatever you can do or dream you can, begin it. Boldness has genius, power and magic in it. Begin it now.

—Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

If the rate of change inside an organization is less than the rate of change outside, the end is in sight.

—Jack Welch, chair of GE Corporation

a successful catalog company in Burlingame, California, “reads everything from the Wall Street Journal to matchbook covers looking for ideas, looking to learn, looking for what people are going to want next, for what’s happening.”

Innovators also have a knack for gleaning insights from people. Akio Morita, founder of Sony Corporation, wanted to design products that would sell in the United States. So he moved his family to New York in the 1960s to develop a deeper understanding of the American consumer. It would have been easy to socialize with other Japanese expatriates in the U.S. Instead, Morita and his family reached out to make new friends among the natives. Result: Sony America became a phenomenal success, introducing one successful product after another.

Feed your mind on different points of view, talk to people from different walks of life, and look for patterns of change in your conversations and travels. If you’re a Republican, hang out with Democrats. If you’re a young person, walk a mile in the shoes of an octogenarian. Invite that family from Bombay to dinner. Doing so will increase your ability to come up with ideas that are in step with the times.

4

Fortify Your Idea Factory

Innovators are super-conscious of how they invite ideas into their lives and what they do with those ideas. They inspect and fortify their idea factories the way accomplished golfers work to improve their drive, chipping, and putting.

Your idea factory is manifested in your to-do list, the goals you’ve written out, the plans you’re currently implementing. Fortifying your idea factory involves cultivating simple habits: paying attention to when you get your best ideas, making the effort to “download” your ideas onto paper or tape recorder, and knowing what to do when you get creatively stuck. The more you notice what works best for you, the more ideas you’ll be able to pursue.

5

Go With Your Gut

Entrepreneurs often talk about how they “went with their intuition” when everyone thought they were crazy. Everybody told Bill McGowan

he was nuts to compete with AT&T. And everybody thought Ted Turner was whacko when he started CNN. Dr. Jonas Salk, who developed a way to prevent polio using a then-controversial live vaccine, said that intuition was his partner. He described how, after tedious experiments seeking a way to immunize against polio, he woke up one morning with an intuitive leap that led him to the solution that saved millions of lives.

Doug Greene, chair of New Hope Communications, a consortium of health-and-fitness magazines based in Boulder, Colorado, once said, “If I don’t feel good in my stomach about a decision, I don’t care if the numbers say we’re going to make a billion dollars. That’s how important intuition is to me. It’s an actual feeling either way. When it doesn’t feel good, it’s just like a stomachache or a nervous stomach. and when a decision feels right, it’s like a great meal.”

When you innovate, you’re doing something that’s never been done before. There are no step-by-step recipes. But going with your gut can become a kind of sixth sense that can help you read people’s intentions, detect trouble spots, think of novel solutions to problems, and alert you when something’s not working. The only time intuition won’t work is when you tune it out.

6

Face The Feedback

People who make ideas come alive are eager for advice and constructive criticism. They’re constantly polling customers and potential customers (and everyone else) to understand how their ideas can be improved.

As a struggling young designer working at Macy’s, Liz Claiborne would follow women into fitting rooms, asking what they liked and didn’t like and why. She discovered that women wanted “more feminine,

more expressive attire for the workplace.” Responding to this insight led to Liz Claiborne, Inc, one of the fastest-growing apparel manufacturers in history.

Innovation-minded people harvest more ideas because they ask for them. In their eagerness to succeed, they develop the ego-strength to face the feedback, and they use it to guide their decisions and avoid false assumptions and blind spots.

learn to persuade others, to gain trust, to keep the momentum going. They win cooperation from key players—the boss and the board, lenders and vendors, citizens and colleagues. They articulate the benefits of their idea to an often indifferent and hostile world, sweeping others up with their enthusiasm and commitment, and orchestrating them to do what’s necessary to turn a dream into reality. ■

7

Build The Buy-In

Ideas, no matter how compelling, don’t sell themselves. Innovators

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An Innovative Way to Heal Families

It was a great idea—a camp not just for kids but for their moms. Together, these families, shattered by drug addiction and domestic violence, would rebuild their lives.

Like all good ideas, the Rowdy Ridge Gang Camp took time and dedication to develop. Begun in 1994 with just two summer sessions and 60 campers, it has grown to eight one-week sessions and over 500 campers. It was founded by the Scott Newman Center, whose original mission was to develop innovative drug prevention programs.

The Rowdy Ridge Gang Camp does more than help moms recover from drug addiction and domestic violence. It builds healthy family relationships. Moms and kids share activities that teach self-expression and teamwork, challenging their perceptions of what they can do. They learn to appreciate each other, express themselves, and solve problems together.

The Camp has become a reality through the passion and perseverance of the Center’s leaders. Their success came from their commitment to the Camp’s life-changing potential and their willingness to act. They took a wonderful idea and made sure it happened. Because they were willing to marshal resources, take action, and get feedback, they created possibility where none existed before.

For more information, contact the Scott Newman Center, 6255 W. Sunset Boulevard, Suite 714, Los Angeles, California 90028, 800-783-6396, www.scottnewmancenter.org.