

Instilling initiative

Singing the praises of sticky ideas

While singing in his church choir, back in the 1970s, Art Fry got annoyed that the pieces of paper he used as bookmarks in his hymnal kept falling out when the book was opened. That got the wheels turning. Fry set about creating a bookmark that would stick to the paper without tearing when it was removed. After months of trial and error – and using the low-stick adhesive that his colleague Spencer Silver invented – the 3M employee created the now ubiquitous Post-It® Note.

More power to intrapreneurs

Intrapreneurship, or acting like an entrepreneur within an organization, is within everyone's reach. An intrapreneurial outlook, one that boosts flexibility and initiative [one of the four universal competencies for University personnel], is beneficial for both the employee and the organization.

Employees, for one, tend to feel motivated when their brains are picked for new ideas. They also appreciate the recognition that rewards their efforts. And since employees often work closely with the product or service, or with the customer, their ideas are likely to be practical, a plus for organizations. Indeed, innovation is the lifeblood of organizations. It is the only way to stay ahead of the competition, or at least stay afloat. As they say, organizations that follow the herd get left in the dust. Their role, then, and every supervisor's role, is to provide employees with the space and resources to develop new ideas.

The human face of innovation

In his book *The Ten Faces of Innovation*, author Tom Kelley describes the various personality types that keep creativity thriving. The Experimenter, for instance, likes to try out new ideas, learning by a process of trial and error. Art Fry, of Post-It® Note fame, could be called an Experimenter. The Anthropologist observes human behaviour and how people interact with products and services. An Anthropologist approach led the Hannaford supermarket chain in the U.S. to launch the Guiding Stars® food rating system, which is now used at Loblaws stores in Ontario. It helps reduce shoppers' confusion by showing healthy choices at a glance. The Cross-Pollinator creates something new by linking seemingly unrelated ideas. As Alexander Graham Bell said, "Leave the beaten track occasionally and dive into the woods." Employees at Procter & Gamble did just that by combining the knowledge of whitening agents from their laundry product group with the expertise of the oral hygiene group to create Crest Whitestrips, the blockbuster teeth whitening product.

Keeping the devil's advocate at bay

The ten personas of innovation help keep ideas rolling... and the devil's advocate at bay. Though it pays to be practical about implementing ideas, devil's advocates tend to nip any idea in the bud by assuming a negative stance from the outset.

Good ideas don't stand a chance. So, faced with "Let me just play devil's advocate for a minute," a colleague may have the courage to speak up and say, "Let me be an Anthropologist for a moment..."

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The five-step process of creativity

Josh Linkner's *Disciplined Dreaming* outlines a road map to unleash creativity. The five steps of the process are Ask, Prepare, Discover, Ignite and Launch. In the Prepare step, Linkner proposes seven rules to keep the creative juices flowing. One rule is to "fail forward" – to view something that doesn't work immediately as an experiment rather than as a failure. That's how the WD-40 lubricant got its name after the first 39 experiments failed. WD-40 literally stands for "Water Displacement, 40th formula." The next step of the process, Discover, aims at breaking out of the "We've always done it this way" mindset by looking at a problem from a new angle.

Drawing analogies

One possible angle to explore is to draw analogies. The goal is to find a similar problem that has already been solved and then adapt that solution to the current problem. An example of this is the design of exercise weights that can be packed for a workout during travel.

The air mattress used for camping resolved a comparable problem in that it can be easily packed and then filled with air later. Likewise, water-filled weights can be easily packed when empty and filled with water on-site to provide the equipment for an effective workout. What's crucial, according to the researchers who signed an article in *Rotman Magazine*, is to define the problem explicitly from multiple perspectives and contexts, emphasizing the goal and the obstacles involved. Analogies, in other words, are mental leaps.

By the same token, interests can morph into breakthrough ideas. Ben Silbermann, the cofounder and CEO of Pinterest, points to his boyhood hobby of collecting bugs as the inspiration for launching the hugely popular pin board website.

Stand up and be counted

Josh Linkner sums it up well in a recent webinar by Soundview Executive Book Summaries: "The world doesn't need another 'Me too' player... The world needs people who are standing up, not sitting in."



AN INSIDER'S OUTLOOK

Initiative in action

"The initiative shown by the Accounts Payable team has allowed us to improve customer service in the area of refund claims to individuals. Together, we've developed information sessions that have been offered by the team to more than a hundred people responsible for various budgets. The result was immediate and was remarked upon."

Luc Albert
Financial Services,
Faculty of Medicine

Read all about it!



Tom Kelley with Jonathan Littman, ***The Ten Faces of Innovation: IDEO's Strategies for Defeating the Devil's Advocate and Driving Creativity Throughout Your Organization***, New York, Doubleday, 2005.

Josh Linkner, ***Disciplined Dreaming: A Proven System to Drive Breakthrough Creativity***, San Francisco, Jossey-Bass, 2011.

Muriel Garcia and Nadège de Peganow, ***Innovation participative***, Paris, Éditions Scrineo, 2012.

"Supporting Innovation by Promoting Analogical Reasoning," Arthur Markman et al., ***Rotman Magazine***, Winter 2011.

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