

Focus Fuels Innovation

Thomas Edison once said, “I have not failed. I’ve just found 10,000 ways that won’t work.” One could look at this statement and think that those 10,000 ideas were a waste of time and money or one could look more closely and realize that out of those 10,000 came not only the light bulb but the phonograph, film projectors, motion pictures, the quadruplex telegraph; a total of 1093 patents. Just to make the light bulb consumer-friendly and useable for electric distribution Edison also had to innovate the following:

- The parallel circuit
- A durable light bulb
- An improved dynamo
- The underground conductor network
- The devices for maintaining constant voltage
- Safety fuses and insulating materials, and
- Light sockets with on-off switches.

Thomas Edison, with little formal education, was the Michael Phelps (most decorated Olympian of all time with 22 medals) of his era in his field. One could argue that as an innovator, Steve Jobs, past CEO of Apple, was the Thomas Edison of this generation. Jobs learned how to tap into the innovative flow and create products consumers did not even know they wanted.

Create Innovative Flow

Innovation is all about you. Once you open the tap and allow innovation and problem solving to flow, you will become a role model for your workforce and in your personal life. Innovation is an acquired technique that once mastered can be taught to others. While not everyone will achieve perfection like a Michael Phelps, you do want them to get into the pool of ideas and innovate or expand upon the existing.

Innovation is a learned skill much like riding a bike or swimming. When you are a four-year-old learning to ride a bike you are incredibly focused and determined. The only thing you want to do at that moment in time is ride that bike. But as life moves on and gets more complex it is very easy to forget how to focus that intensely and have such a strong desire to succeed. Innovation requires that same intensity, determination and focus.

Laser-Sharp Focus – Innovation begins with you – not your workforce, your boss or the chairman of the board. It takes laser-sharp focus, determination and control of what

flows into your mind. Innovation requires you to remove all trivial and negative thinking to allow new ideas to flow in. You need an empty mind, so to speak, in order to tap into the universe of new ideas. Eliminate the “We’ve always done it this way” mentality as it will stand in the way of innovation. Get rid of the “I can’t do this” or “I’ve never been creative” mindset because it blocks the flow of innovation. Negative thinking and mental clutter is constipation to the mind and prevents new thoughts and creative ideas from entering.

To control negative and outdated thinking, use a simple pad of paper or a tablet to write down the thoughts standing in your way. Dump those negative thoughts onto your blank sheet of paper – then shred or delete them and do not let them re-enter. Move on to a creative process like mind-mapping to lead you to the flow of innovation.

Flow of Focus Environment – Create a flow of focus environment that is conducive to innovation. For some that may mean a totally empty room void of distractions, for others it may mean a room filled with inspiring artwork or a retreat into a totally different pastoral environment. This space should be quiet and feel like an empty canvas ready for you to create your newest masterpiece.

Your mind needs to be equally quiet, void of “business as usual” thoughts and focused on new ideas. Whether you create Edison’s light bulb the first time out is much less important than learning the process and getting into quiet the creative space in your mind. You may also discover that you innovate better when surrounded by others who are committed to the brainstorming process. Instead of bouncing ideas off a mind map or sheets of paper on a wall, do it verbally in person or through electronic communications. The only word of caution here is you not get sidetracked into tangents that stop the overall flow of innovation. Be expansive not restrictive.

Follow up – Innovation is not a one size fits all or a one-time experience. Ideas need focused follow up to bring them into reality as a problem solved or new product. It is often the follow up which leads to a new universe of innovation. For example, once Edison finally created the incandescent light bulb he also created the seven items noted above to make it available for public consumption.

The old saying, “A great idea not acted upon has less value than a mediocre idea acted upon,” is the foundation for following up. You can’t innovate without follow up. When employing innovation to solve problems and create new ideas and products you need to follow up.

Innovation may not have been the magic bullet that made Edison or Jobs great but it certainly played a pivotal role in the process. The results of their follow up on innovation are an indelible part of history. Laser focus, determination and a mental and physical environment that are void of distractions are your keys to successful innovation.

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