



Innovate to Generate

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“Only the insecure strive for security”

-Dr. Wayne Dyer

The year was 1948 and the place was Commugny, Switzerland. Georges de Mestral had just returned from a hunting trip with his dog in the Alps. He took a close look at the burrs (seeds) that kept sticking to his clothes and his dog's fur. He examined them under a microscope, and noted there were hundreds of “hooks” that caught on anything with a loop, such as clothing, animal fur, or hair. Velcro was born, and as a result, it is easier and quicker to fasten and attached things. Georges found a better way.

A similar story is behind the invention of post-it notes. Art Fry was in search of a bookmark for his church hymnal. He thought of the idea, and partnered with a fellow 3M teammate to develop the special adhesive. Post-it notes save us time and help us organize, and most of us use them every day.

Change is constant, and if we are in business, we must embrace it and do everything we can to leverage change towards future profitability. Yesterday's methods yields yesterday results.

We've talked about planning (effective planning). What do we do when we need to plan, and we need to design a better way? It is time to innovate. The

good news is, we don't have to wait until a lightning bolt strikes. We can innovate intentionally and purposely if we make sure we follow the right steps.

Step #1 Define Desired Results

If Walt Disney can do it, so can we. Go ahead and take that trip to fantasyland. See it, taste it, touch it. As a friend of mind would say, “Play the movie”. This is possibility thinking to the utmost.

Step #2 Define the reality

In January of 1961, President Kennedy proclaimed we would have a “man on the moon by the end of the decade”. That was the end result. Here was the reality: We only had about 35% of the technology to realize that result at that time. How did we get the other 35%? Right. Innovation.

Step #3: Play Jeopardy

In the game of Jeopardy, every answer must be in the form of a question. It is time to come up with the right question and “Put it in a can” (rather than a “can't”) For example, in sales, you may ask, “In what ways can we increase the number of qualified leads?” In operations, you could ask, “In what ways can we increase our on-time delivery percentage”? This question is important, and the remainder of the innovation process depends on it.

Step #4: Turn on the Green Light

Psychologist talk about the right side and the left side of the brain. The right side is the creative

side, and the left judicial. In this step, we turn off our judicial side, and activate the creative side. Then we take the “In what ways can we” (IWWCW) question and begin writing down every possible idea we can think of. No idea is too silly. The focus here is on quantity. If you are a facilitator, it is important that you make no judgment on any idea. Just write it down. You will also need to squelch any “can’t” ideas or responses, like “Yea but we can’t...” Stop. The question is, “In what ways can we...”

Since the judgmental side of the brain tends to be the most dominant, we must be diligent in keeping our responses in the non-judgmental form. To the right are some “red-light” phrases that would be a threat to fulfilling this step.

Step #5: Solution Finding (Turn on the Red Light)

OK. We had fun with the green-light step. Now it is time to turn off the green light and turn on the red light. I may have made these red-light phrases sound negative. In the final analysis, judgment is vital in evaluating our options, bringing things into focus, and creating a concrete plan of action with everyone involved. Here are some questions we can ask that will help:

1. What are the absolutes? Is there a budget or time limit? Are there other parameters? What is the “field of play” we need to work in.
2. What are the desirables: These factors are important, but not vital. For example, “ideally, this would be in _____ geographical area.
3. What are the rules? Look at your working agreement and policy manual. We don’t want to create more problems that we are solving.

4. What are the performance standards? Ask a question like, “This project will be successfully completed when...”

As a result of this discussion, you now have options. Now, it is time to plan.

Red-Light Phrases

- We tried that once
- We’re different
- You can’t...
- It won’t...
- What if...
- We have never...
- We don’t do things that way
- It’s not practical
- It’s against tradition
- That is not our responsibility
- It’s too...
- We don’t have time
- We’re not ready for that
- Let’s give it more thought
- They would never go for it
- Not THAT again!
- Where did you dig that one up?
- We’re doing alright
- That’s not us

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