

“Greatness” Lives On
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“You can’t shrink your way to greatness!” shouted Tom Peters from the cover of his 1997 book, The Circle of Innovation. But that was ’97 – that was way back when greatness was indeed the goal. The time for such “greatness” has come and gone, has it not?

NO!!! The time for greatness is today! Innovation lives! But not if you follow the crowd, the pack, the herd, as they rush off the cliff toward mediocrity, chasing after the (safe) harbors filled with yesterday’s (temporary) heroes and (crowd-pleasing) “risk-takers.” Rather, now is the time for true innovators to come to the forefront, to stand out from the crowd, to champion their cause while the stadium seats sit empty.

Innovation is a perplexing matter. It is an absolute necessity for the long term success of any organization, yet it tends to be squelched at the very time we need most to give it our undivided attention, a commitment that is much more easily said than done. In order to truly turn your eyes to the ultimate future requires a new vision, a new outlook, a new mindset, and a commitment to go beyond the ordinary, to leap out of the bell curve and shout “I refuse to fit in that box!”

Do you think you’re ready to pursue innovation? Let’s find out by answering a few simple questions:

1. Do you always drive the same route to work?
2. Do you eat lunch at the same place? (and with the same people?)
3. What did you eat for lunch? Any resemblance to what you had yesterday? and the day before? How about the day before that?
4. What are your plans for the weekend? Sound familiar?

The point is, greatness requires a change in habits. Michael Jordan didn’t simply wake up one morning and say “You know what? I think I’ll become the greatest basketball player in the history of the game” and have it come to fruition. Rather, while he was certainly blessed with an amazing natural talent, he also chose to do things differently, from his personal training program and diet, to his high intensity practice sessions. Only then did his dream become a reality.

Change a habit or two – just for the fun of it. Break out of the patterns, and innovation will begin to flow from the inside. Your new route to work may reveal a billboard you’d never seen, which reminds you of an idea you’d considered previously but never pursued. The new person from the department upstairs that you took to lunch mentions knowing the person involved with a related program that would supplement your idea. And your drive up through the mountains with the windows down may just inspire you in a way that another couple of hours in front of the television set never could have done. I promise you – you’ll be very pleasantly surprised with the results to any or all of the above minor modifications, even if just done on a temporary or occasional basis.

Another early step to innovation is to step aside. A good friend once passed on sage advice that success as a manager required working ON your business, not IN your business (at least not all the time). The point was that when you’re constantly involved in the daily aspects of running the business, you are unable to identify those features that must be adjusted or eliminated.

One effective method for achieving this is to blow it up! No – I'm not promoting violence toward your employer or organization, nor am I an advocate of insurance fraud on the part of business owners. Rather, I'm encouraging you to mentally step outside your organization, see everything you know literally disappear before your (mind's) eyes. Then start over. Rebuild it from the ground up, filled with innovative programs, ideas and services. What would you do differently? What programs would be revived? And which ones would be left smoldering? And most importantly, what innovative programs would you bring to life with the resources now available that would supplement or enhance your current offerings? Now what do you need to do about it? (Hint – if you ended up with no changes, please start over with the questions earlier in this article!)

It's been said a fool is someone who does the same thing over and over, expecting different results. Innovators, on the other hand, are those who try different things, new things, crazy things, everyday. They know that there are no guarantees, except the guarantee that those who neglect this critical pursuit will be left behind.

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