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# Tips, Tools, and Techniques for Generating Innovative Ideas

Professor M.S. Rao, Ph.D.

## Abstract

*The purpose of this paper is to offer innovative tools and techniques to develop inspiring ideas. It explains the power of the subconscious mind to acquire creative and inventive ideas and unlock hidden potential. It differentiates between creativity and innovation and draws a blueprint to achieve creativity and innovation. It explains and elaborates on innovative leadership. It outlines the characteristics of innovative leaders and illustrates inspiring examples of innovative international leaders including Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Edison, Albert Einstein, Bill Gates, Larry Ellison, Elon Musk, and Mark Zuckerberg. It explains that failure is an integral part of innovation. It directs the reader to acquire as much information as possible in the innovation process. It emphasizes the importance of synthesis to generate more ideas. It reminds us that all seeds that you sow will not germinate and bear fruits. It concludes to strive from a theoretical and practical perspective to acquire innovative and inspiring ideas to achieve extraordinary success in your life.*

## Introduction

"Nearly every man who develops an idea works it up to the point where it looks impossible, and then he gets discouraged. That's not the place to become discouraged." —Thomas Edison

During my leadership development training programs, participants ask about idea-generation, how to fast-track their careers, and how to help resolve their problems creatively. In this regard, we will discuss innovation, innovative leadership, and how to acquire inspiring ideas to resolve personal, professional, and social problems to achieve peace, happiness, and success in life.

## The Miracle of the Subconscious Mind

When you want to acquire innovative and inspiring ideas, you must develop a positive mindset that creativity can be cultivated and innovation can be nurtured. You must take the support of your subconscious mind to achieve creativity. Most people don't realize the significance of the subconscious mind. Joseph Murphy unveiled the importance of the subconscious mind as follows: "All you have to do is unite, mentally and emotionally with the good you wish to embody. The creative powers of your subconscious will respond accordingly." Napoleon Hill remarked, "The possibilities of creative effort connected with the subconscious mind are stupendous and imponderable. They inspire one with awe."

## **Creativity Versus Innovation**

People often confuse creativity and innovation. There is a huge difference between them. Creativity is to create something new while innovation is to add value to the existing one. Creativity is to create new ideas which are mostly intellectual and theoretical while innovation is the practical application of ideas to resolve problems or to add value to the existing ones.

## **How to Spark Innovation?**

Henry Ford had an uncanny creative ability for the problem-solving. He was successful in bringing innovation to automobiles. When people fight, creativity sparks. The research has shown that conflict over ideas is good, especially for groups and organizations that do creative work. However, it should be constructive and intellectual rather than personal. Constructive conflict is referred to as a task or intellectual conflict. It happens when people argue over ideas rather than individuals. If the conflict gets personal, it is essential to use humor and get the discussion back to the intellectual mode.

In hierarchical establishments, there is less chance for innovation because there will be people who block innovation. Hence, innovative leaders encourage lean and flat organizations to promote innovation within their workforces. People working in an organization have a pre-conceived mindset. To enhance innovation, it is essential to include people outside the organization to generate fresh ideas. Sometimes the scarcity of resources forces people to adopt the innovation. Telling people “what to do” rather than “how to do it” promotes creativity among people. It is essential to spend regularly at least 20 minutes a day building innovation skills. Over time, the insight capacity increases, and new ideas evolve.

## **What is Innovative Leadership?**

Benjamin Franklin was a profound innovator who championed creativity. His accomplishments included pictorial advertisements in newspapers, championing entertainment through ballads, the lightning rod, bifocal lenses, and gas stoves. Others including Albert Einstein, Bill Gates, Larry Ellison, Elon Musk, and Mark Zuckerberg can be called innovative leaders who stand out from the pack with their unconventional ideas and approaches. In this context, let us discuss innovative leadership.

There are three kinds of people – the first focuses on individuals, the second on issues, and the third on ideas. The third kind encompasses innovative leaders who emphasize ideas rather than brood over issues and quibble unnecessarily over individuals. These leaders can also be called “eureka leaders.”

Innovative leadership is all about encouraging people to develop new ideas and insights and helping them to experiment and explore their creations to minimize failures. It also involves respecting their failures and handholding them to try and test their ideas. It calls for generating that extraordinary gut feeling and intuition experienced by these leaders. Innovative leadership should not be confused with creative leadership as creative leadership involves generating new ideas and insights. However, innovative leadership involves the implementation and commercialization of ideas.

Innovation is like a “eureka moment.” In addition to adding value by implementing and commercialization, it also places all capabilities and competencies in unconventional ways. It brings either radical or incremental improvements in products, processes, or services. Innovation replaces the existing outdated tools and techniques, and methods and strategies

with unconventional approaches and ideas. It could be in the area of any activity. For instance, innovation could be about human resources or marketing or operations, or outsmarting the competition. As everyone aspires to outsmart others, companies endeavor to outsmart other companies, and it calls for innovative leadership.

Innovation is the engine for growth and expansion for any enterprise. It is the ideas and insights that fuel innovation. Innovation does not come on a platter. You must dig deep within and explore and experiment immensely with passion and perseverance. Innovation is also about reinvention as per the changing times and technologies. Innovation happens with mistakes. You must display a “never say die attitude” and you must persevere with a passion to make innovation happen. Innovation does not happen overnight. It needs continuous effort and energy. Warren Bennis explained that: *Innovation — any new idea — by definition will not be accepted at first. It takes repeated attempts, endless demonstrations, and monotonous rehearsals before innovation can be accepted and internalized by an organization. This requires courageous patience.*

Innovators believe in observation and experimentation. They are basically thinkers with a tendency to question, associate, and imagine. They learn a lot by networking, sharing, and listening to others. Innovative leaders care for their people for *what* they know rather than *how much* they know. They care for people, foster knowledge, and share their experiences with others.

Innovative leadership is essential irrespective of the verticals and sectors because it helps either cut down costs or promote new products, features, and activities.

## **Hallmarks of Innovative Leaders**

Innovative leaders are of a different breed. They are rarely found. They are knowledge workers who go by the road less traveled. These leaders constantly search for new ideas and encourage people to come up with new ideas and insights, and new business proposals that improve the performance and image of the organization. These leaders explore and experiment. They have curiosity and are passionate about delivering something different and unique. They enjoy adding value to existing products and services.

The following are some hallmarks of innovative leaders:

- ✚ They are mentally flexible and passionate about their work.
- ✚ They are highly focused and always aim to hit the bullseye.
- ✚ They treat failure as an integral part of the learning process.
- ✚ They move forward with renewed energy and enthusiasm as every failure is a learning experience.
- ✚ They are future-oriented and forward-looking and are unmindful of short-term setbacks.
- ✚ They shed inhibitions and web technology.
- ✚ They have a “never say die” attitude like was displayed by Thomas Edison and Colonel Sanders.
- ✚ They are agents of change.
- ✚ They don’t innovate for the sake of innovation.
- ✚ They have an insatiable appetite for discovery and learning.

- ✚ They acquire firms that believe in innovation since it offers synergy. Besides, it helps in minimizing the failure rates in innovations.
- ✚ They follow their hearts rather than their heads.
- ✚ They believe in substance rather than style.
- ✚ They roll up their sleeves.
- ✚ They have a strong vision and can articulate that vision through pictures to their followers. For instance, Steve Jobs presented his ideas and inventions through his presentations effectively.
- ✚ They respect failures and empathize with those who fail.
- ✚ They collaborate rather than compete with others.
- ✚ They keep their communication channels open for all.
- ✚ They reward innovative people.
- ✚ They see the invisible.
- ✚ They are out-of-the-box thinkers. Innovative leaders appear to be quirks or jerks. However, they are people with a unique mindset.
- ✚ They build effective teams that have a passion for excellence and innovation. Above all, they constantly probe for unconventional ways of doing things.

## **The Role of Innovative Leaders to Encouraging Innovation**

Innovative leaders must adopt the following strategies and techniques to encourage innovation in their organizations.

- Create a conducive organizational culture and climate for creativity and innovation.
- Tolerate ambiguity and uncertainty.
- Support and empathize. Provide all necessary inputs and resources for people.
- Tolerate the actions of jerks and eccentrics.
- Promote team spirit and provide an intellectual challenge. Ask people to work in teams as teams provide more food for thought and discussion.
- Encourage people to be innovative both by words and deeds.
- Don't tell them what to do. Just tell them to do it. They will evolve their own methodologies to execute the tasks.
- Respect failures, but don't encourage failure.
- Promote job rotation. Job rotation is all about the rotation of existing talent across business units, verticals, and departments to know what is really happening in other places. It helps in developing cross-functional knowledge and gets to know the root of challenges and furthers innovation. It helps in widening the mental horizons of the people. It is especially essential for the people who aspire and intend to assume leadership roles and responsibilities within the organizations.
- Encourage upward communication and down-to-top leadership in getting ideas from people. Talk to the lower cadre people who are the source of ideas.
- Encourage discussion and sharing of knowledge and information. It is essential to respect failures as sometimes "fear of failure" may be a stumbling block to innovation.
- Provide motivational incentives for innovation depending on the needs of the people.
- Make things transparent as far as possible to encourage innovation.
- Encourage mavericks who enjoy innovation.
- Promote research and development.

## **A Blueprint to Acquire Innovative and Inspiring Ideas**

When you want to grow in a specific career in your life or area or industry, you must build a team of like-minded people and discuss with them regularly. For instance, Einstein discussed with his friends and colleagues to help generate innovative ideas. In this way, you acquire new triggers to explore and experiment. Jot down the different approaches and ideas in a journal. Go to an isolated place and reflect on them. Discuss those ideas in public forums, meetings, and associations to generate more ideas. When you speak, you often acquire more ideas. When you discuss, you often acquire more ideas. When you write things down, you often generate more ideas. Usually, people ask you questions at the end of a seminar or a meeting. Show your enthusiasm in responding to them and research the questions raised by them. The best thing is to write in a journal and reflect on them during your leisure time. Feed those ideas into your subconscious mind. Before you go to sleep, throw the complicated ideas and issues into your subconscious mind by giving clear and constructive instructions that you are getting resolved effortlessly. You will be amazed to find solutions the following morning. You will find the complicated issues getting simpler and clearer progressively.

Believe in the art of synthesis. When you want to innovate new things, interconnect your existing knowledge and integrate mentally with new ones; explore by using the trial-and-error method. It leads to further breakthroughs. Here are some tools and techniques to acquire innovative and inspiring ideas:

- Be curious. Have an open mind to explore and experiment. Albert Einstein remarked, "I know quite certainly that I have no special talent. Curiosity, obsession, and dogged endurance, combined with self-criticism, have brought me to my ideas."
- Create a document by name, "Ideas Box," to write down your ideas whenever they pop up in your mind. Read them during your leisure time to explore.
- Do meditation to keep your mind free from clutter and think from a fresh perspective.
- Follow the road less traveled to avoid getting caught in the rat race. Don't do what others do. Think differently and act differently to stand out from others.
- Get out of your comfort zone. Break the routines that obstruct your creativity. If you are not failing in your life means you are not doing anything worthwhile in your life.
- Avoid preconceived notions. Break the rules and enjoy the playfulness of your mind. Remember, your mind is a child at heart.
- Find out your biological clock to capture your ideas. Some people are morning people, some people are afternoon people, and some people are evening people. That means some people can leverage their hidden potential during the morning while some in the afternoon or evening depending on their biological clocks. Identifying such an appropriate time is essential to create your ideas and leverage your potential fully.
- Capture your dreams, if possible. It leads to expanding your creativity. Unfortunately, most people fail to remember their dreams.
- Read books in your area of interest. Reading helps widen your mental horizons. It provides peace of mind. It helps broaden your thinking and generate more ideas.
- Don't imitate others because what worked for others may not work for you. Draw your own blueprint to explore regularly. Be a trendsetter, not a trend follower.
- Use your time judiciously before you sleep and after you wake up to execute your tasks effectively.
- Stop dreaming and start daydreaming because most inventors are daydreamers.

- Take a break. Go traveling to see different places. Traveling teaches tolerance and enhances exploration. When you go to different places, you encounter new experiences culminating with new ideas.

Albert Einstein rightly said, *Imagination is more important than knowledge. For knowledge is limited to all we know and understand, while imagination embraces the entire world, and all there ever will be to know and understand.* When you have imagination, you can create more knowledge. Imagination is infinite while knowledge is finite. Hence, strive to increase your imagination to create more ideas.

Observe your surroundings and the people around you to acquire ideas. At times, it is difficult to assert when and how you get your ideas. For instance, I acquire ideas when I go for a walk. Whenever I go outside, I have the habit of carrying a book and journal to capture the ideas that pop up in my mind. Hence, it is obvious that ideas may flash at any time but you must be prepared to capture them immediately. Mere thinking doesn't help. It is essential to ink your ideas. Remember, a short pencil is always better than a long memory.

### **Acquire Every Piece of Related Information**

When you want to create or invent new things, every piece of information may not be useful to you. But don't start with a negative approach that the entire information traunche will go to waste. Keep certain topics at the forefront of your mind and feed them into your subconscious mind before you go to sleep. They give tremendous results the next day morning.

### **Innovation in Global Organizations**

Organizations including Apple and Google are the top innovators globally. They emphasize innovation and leave deep imprints through innovative leadership. The turbulent times of today call for innovation. Hence, it is the responsibility of the CEOs to drive innovation by donning the hat of innovative leaders. Innovation is the key to survival and success. It is the mantra for success in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It calls for innovative leadership to beat competition and complexity arising out of rapidly changing technologies. Hence, innovative leadership is essential cutting across the sectors to achieve all-around progress and prosperity.

### **Summary**

To summarize, collect as much appropriate information as possible and write what you think about in your journal regularly. Encourage your brain to make new connections in your area of interest. Remember, when you sow seeds, all seeds will not germinate and bear fruit. Some bear fruit while some don't bear fruit. It is not possible to achieve success completely. Hence, absorb more ideas to enable you to achieve the desired success.

Failures are an integral part of innovation. But learn from failures by taking feedback to improve your success rate. To conclude, strive from a theoretical and practical perspective to acquire innovative and inspiring ideas to achieve extraordinary success in your life.

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