

## Reigniting Your Inner Innovator

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Eureka... It worked.

There was that giddy moment when you discovered a breakthrough idea for a great new product or service, or invented a new way to run a business. You became an entrepreneur. Investors bought into your vision. You moved into a real workspace. You hired people. Your profitability is actually looking good for this quarter.

But increasingly, you find you're running on empty, you have no time for eureka moments. Too many jobs to do; not enough time to do them; too many fires to put out; not enough time to think, let alone dream. You've taken to waking up nights in a cold sweat, thinking "Ohmigod!, How do I sustain this thing I have created?".

When you began your entrepreneurial journey, whether you thought about it at the time or not, you were an innovator. And, according to management guru Peter Drucker, your role still is to be an innovator. You sustain or grow your venture in a world of increasingly ferocious competition by continuing to innovate i.e. solve the problems of your business.

The dictionary defines innovation broadly as "a new idea, method or device". Business academics define it as transforming new ideas into something that did not exist before and which has value. Essentially then, innovation is a process where you use your, and your people's, creative (problem-solving) abilities to add value for the customer.

But how do you reignite the inner innovator in yourself and your leadership team? "I love learning through experimentation, and problem solving through the synergy of collaboration," describes one BC innovator, Matthew Janes, of Resonance Technology International. Other innovators prefer different tactics, but generally there is a commonality of philosophies involved.

Harnessing Creativity has interviewed many successful innovators and discovered they share common principles that keep their organizations innovative. Some are small, some are much larger, but they demonstrate five key ways to foster creativity, leading to innovation and business success.

1. Articulate and communicate your vision. Your people, your suppliers and your customers need to know what your reason was for creating this product, service or method. It takes courage to dream, and humans are inspired by the dreams of the others. Your dream, if clearly understood, will inspire others. Also, creativity doesn't flourish in a vacuum, so an articulated vision will give others a framework for creative thought.
  
2. Create an innovation team in your organization. Blend perspectives: Think about the gender, cultural and age diversity of your workforce. An engineer who is a political refugee from China or a sales person from the Philippines can add interesting new dynamics to the organization's problem-solving capability. Look for diversity when hiring your people. Mix up mathematicians with visual artists; communications people with accountants; software engineers with call centre folk.
  
3. Create a climate of teamwork and collaboration. This doesn't mean that everyone has to hold hands and sing 60s peace songs. It does mean that dissenting viewpoints are encouraged and that teams truly get to know, and therefore respect, one another. It means that leaders encourage and celebrate the idea that the best work comes from teams and not just the individual.
  
4. Create a physical and cognitive environment that fosters creativity. This means good work stations and equipment, play areas, rejuvenation areas (yoga to foosball), building trust that allows for mistakes, providing flexibility to deal with other aspects of life, valuing input from everyone and celebrating and rewarding success.
  
5. Give people time and space to revitalize. Individually and collectively. Legislate vacations, support employees' volunteer activities, play and laugh a lot and welcome kids, dogs and partners to your workspace. Ask people what they need to rejuvenate on a regular basis and then deliver it. Artists and scientists understand the value of giving your conscious brain a rest. Why do you think we wake up at 4:00 a.m. with the solution to yesterday's dilemma?