



Are You an Innovator?

by Mitchell Ditkoff

The word "innovate" can be traced all the way back to 1440. It comes from the Middle French word "innovacyon," meaning "renewal" or "new way of doing things". Exactly *what* innovations actually *happened* in 1440 (rounder oxcart wheels?) is anybody's guess, but whatever they were, it's likely they improved the quality of life for more than a few people.

These days, the "innovation thing" is something of a no-brainer. Indeed, it seems that any company worth its low-salt lunch has identified innovation as a core competency worth developing. Who in their right mind (or is it right brain?) can deny the value of improving things? Isn't this what human beings – those grand inventors of the microchip *and* the chocolate chip – are *supposed* to do? True. But who has time? *And so begins the search for the so-called magic pill – systems, formulas and blueprints*

Unfortunately, **INNOVATION**, unlike audits or reengineering, is not given to systems, formulas and blueprints. It is given to *people* – restless, inspired, fascinated individuals with an almost cellular need to change. And while it can be *supported* by systems, it can never be *reduced* to systems. "Innovation," as Tom Peters so aptly put it, "is a messy business."



If you want to spark innovation, forget about slick formulas for a minute and pay attention to what's happening on the *inside*. Because that's where it starts. With the innovator – the inspired individual who sees a better way and goes for it. And the key to the innovator – the special blend of inner qualities that allows him or

her to succeed when others have long since gone home? Is it tools? Techniques? Experience? Sure, they're useful. But without the user of them having the right stuff, they're merely decoration – not unlike having a new set of jumper cables, but no car.

And so, if you are one of the self-chosen few willing to stop blaming your organization and start taking personal responsibility for innovating now's your chance to get an insight into the DNA of what it takes to be an innovator on-the-job. To get started, all you need to do is rate yourself, on a scale of 1-10, for each on the following qualities. Notes which ones are your strengths and how can you build on them. Notes which ones are your weaknesses and how can you strengthen them. And don't forget to floss.

20 Qualities of an Innovator

- Challenges the Status Quo
- Curious
- Self-Motivated
- Visionary
- Entertains the Fantastic
- Takes Risks
- Peripatetic
- Playful/Humorous
- Self-Accepting
- Flexible/Adaptive
- Makes New Connections
- Reflective
- Recognizes Patterns
- Tolerates Ambiguity
- Committed to Learning
- Balances Intuition and Analysis
- Situationally Collaborative
- Formally Articulate
- Resilient
- Persevering

*This article is excerpted from **It's AHAPPENING!**, a series of five, 16-page creative thinking guidebooks – a fun way to get out the box and spark innovation. Log onto www.ideachampions.com for more info. Or eat lunch. Or call your mother.*

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