

This month's theme is "Innovation". Some business experts have called innovation the "life-force" of truly successful enterprises. Others identify it as indispensably important in achieving growth and lasting differentiation. In this issue, we'll introduce you to the "Ten Faces of Innovation", show you how the words, "let me play devil's advocate" instantly block innovative thinking and tell you about three innovative ideas that changed the world.

Comets in the Sky

Innovative business ideas are like comets in the sky. Even if you've never seen one, you'll instantly recognize it as special and unique. It doesn't take much talent or education to know if an idea is workable. All it takes is a little gusto, common sense and a bit of adventurism to try out things that have never been done.

- ▶ **eBay** started as a small website, whose first sold item was a broken laser pointer. Now it's the 20th most visited website in the world.
- ▶ **iTunes** changed the way people listen to music. Who would have guessed that selling songs for 99¢ a piece would help make Apple the 2nd-biggest computer company (in market capitalization) to Microsoft?
- ▶ Similarly, the **iPhone** turned the mobile phone business on its head. In just two years, 25 million iPhones have been sold and over 1 billion iPhone "apps" have been downloaded. Even folks who had nothing to do with the invention have profited: with a clever new idea, third-party "app" developers can earn millions.

Source: "20 Innovative Business Ideas" (www.bookfresh.com)

"Innovation is the ability to see change not as a threat, but as an opportunity."

- Anonymous

The People of Innovation

During a time when profits are steadily decreasing, companies worldwide are encouraging its leaders to develop innovative ideas in order to boost revenues. But the concept of "all ideas are welcome", doesn't always play out. Those who advocate new ideas are often confronted by the fateful words of a fellow colleague: "Let me just play devil's advocate for a minute..."

When someone assumes the role of the devil's advocate, the person has removed himself from the equation and sidestepped individual responsibility for the verbal attack. But before they're done, they've torched the idea and left the innovator wondering why they tried so hard to propose a new idea in the first place. Playing devil's advocate may seem like a prudent way to avoid risk, but every day, thousands of new ideas, fresh concepts and "out of the box" plans are nipped in the bud by these self-proclaimed "devil's advocates".



Fostering an environment that actively promotes original thinking and creativity requires:

- a meritocracy (where ideas are evaluated fairly)
- the freedom to express original thinking (without criticism)
- a top-down commitment (to actively support innovation and imagination)

3M, one of the first companies to embrace innovation as the essence of its corporate brand, defines it as "new ideas – placed into action or implemented – which produce an improvement, a gain or a profit." To improve its new idea success rate, 3M insists each idea has three sponsors: one from manufacturing, one from research and one from marketing. Because the team reflects three different disciplines, the venture is given instant credibility as it makes its way through the evaluation and approval process.

Innovation isn't self-starting or self-perpetuating. It takes people – and their imagination, willpower and perseverance. Like other innovative companies, 3M knows that creativity can come from anyone and anywhere. And frequently, it's the unsung heroes – the mid-level employees – who have the richest insights, the most unexpected ideas. They're the ones who make innovation happen, day in and day out.



Tom Kelley's book, *The Ten Faces of Innovation*, serves as an extraordinary guide to nurturing and sustaining a culture of continuous innovation and renewal. He goes on to describe his observations of a number of roles that people can play in an organization to foster innovation and new ideas while offering an effective counter to naysayers. Among these roles, are the "Anthropologist", the person who goes into the field to see how customers use and respond to products and services, the "Cross Pollinator", who mixes and matches ideas and the "Hurdler" who instantly looks for ways to overcome the limits and challenges to any situation. To learn about all ten personas of innovation, visit Tom Kelley's website www.tenfacesofinnovation.com.

Source: "The 10 Faces of Innovation", Tom Kelley, Currency Books, 2009