



Seeing tomorrow's ideas...Today

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Vol. 6, No. 1, January 2009

Focus on Innovation

Focus on Innovation is a monthly electronic newsletter designed to provoke thoughts and ideas on how to bring innovation to life within the organizations in which we work.

For Those on the Run

This month's newsletter offers ideas on how to remain innovative during turbulent times.

Innovation Key in Turbulent Times

"The definition of insanity is continuing to do the same thing over and over again and expecting different results. We have a choice to make, either be paralyzed by 24/7 bad news or stop the insanity! I know this is one vote for me that is easy to cast. I vote for stopping for the insanity! How do we do it? We stop stagnating and we start innovating!"

*- Kathleen Wood, business strategist,
motivational speaker and author*

Innovation is key in turbulent times. Even with the markets swinging wildly, savings is evaporating, consumer spending going down and unemployment going up, there are still opportunities for growth and continuous improvement. In such turbulent times, many of us might understandably be focused on getting through the crisis of the week rather than growing for the future. But for those of us looking at long-term sustainability, perhaps the most important question is: What do you do now to ensure that you remain innovative, competitive, and forward-oriented?

How to Remain Innovative During Turbulent Times

Keep focused on the longer term. Think with a long-term perspective taking into account some of the certainties over the next 10 years:

- Scientific discovery will continue to advance at an ever increasing pace, opening new markets, evolving existing markets, and establishing countless new opportunities
- Global collaborative knowledge communities will continue to lead to faster innovation in every industry and market
- New products, methodologies, skills, ideas, organizational structures will continue to evolve at a fast pace; agile organizations will continue to come out on top
- The transition of economies in the Mid-East and Asia will continue despite regional economic challenges
- Rapidly aging economies in North America and Europe will drive rapid spending, innovation and knowledge discovery in the world of health care
- Global energy consciousness will continue to lead to ever more rapid evolution of "green"

solutions

- 1/2 of the global population is under the age of 25. They're change aggressive, and will continue to lead to the rapid adoption of new ideas.
- Growth in markets is a simple reality: in agriculture, global food production still has to double in the next 25 years to keep up with population trends. Sub-prime has no impact on this reality.

Remain positive and optimistic. Focus your efforts at least 3 - 5 years out.

Don't let aggressive indecision take over your thinking. Don't let a short-term versus long-term trend disconnect take over your strategic thinking. Already, we have seen signs of some organizations heading into an innovation rut, their staff and executives encumbered by a dangerous state of complacency, while other organizations innovate, change, and adapt to the "new normal" that is now our reality. In the last recession, "aggressive indecision" became a driving cultural and leadership trait. Organizations that fell into this funk fell behind. Innovative companies didn't permit that to happen then, and you shouldn't let this happen now. Innovate for the upturn!

Focus on the 4 C's of creativity. To get more innovative products you must focus on improving 1) your processes - the tools and techniques that can be used to spark creative ideas; 2) your people - how creative is your team/employees, are you leveraging the creative styles within your team/organization and; 3) your environment - both the physical and the psychological environment in which your team/employees create in. These are the things that are training related, the elements that can be regularly improved and developed to increase the likelihood of regular creative production.

Pay more attention to your competitors. Ask yourself:

- How are they innovating, i.e. Do they have new products? Do they have new offers? How are they improving on their fundamentals?
- How is their business doing? Are you seeing your customers at their businesses?
- Do you have new competitors in your marketplace that offer something bigger, better and of more value than what you are offering?
- Can you offer something that your competitors do not offer?

Use Creativity to build sales and offset rising costs. Bring in customers to find out what they want and/or generate solutions towards the "things that keep them up at night" that you can help them with. Use the Internet to:

- Find ways to cut costs, i.e. use expedia.ca to find reduced travel rates, discount websites for products or services
- Sell to or solicit input from customers, i.e. through social networking websites (think of what Obama did during his political campaign), blogs, etc.

Create support systems. Create systems in your team/organization to make sure that the things you want to have happen, related to innovation, actually do take place. Consider:

- Displaying important information to the public
- Scheduling regular meetings or lunches to advance the cause
- setting up "coaching" relationships with employees/team members
- Celebrating successes
- Using e-mail to remind people,, announcements of accomplishments
- Holding Friday afternoon check-ins to find out what people did this week and what they'll do next week to advance the organization's innovation efforts.

What's the Bottom line

Turbulent times require innovation not aggressive indecision.

Source: Parts of this newsletter was adapted from Jim Carroll's blog <http://www.jimcarroll.com/blog/2008/03/leading-in-turbulent-times-how.html> and Bob Eckert and Jonathan Vehar's book, *More Lightning Less Thunder: How to Energize Innovative Teams, New & Improved*, 2000.



Please feel free to pass this newsletter on to others.

If you would like more information about the ideas and topics listed in this issue, contact Judy Laws, Ph.D. at jlaws@foursightconsulting.com.

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