

HOW TO BE AN INNOVATOR

This issue focuses on innovation and its benefits and we share stories from innovators and organisations within the LIS sector that are leading the way. But innovation starts with you, as INCITE reports.

Without innovation, everything would stay the same – or get worse. Innovation – which means making changes and introducing new ways of doing things – is the lifeblood of improvement. But how can we foster more innovation in our work environments and help people who are more naturally inclined to stick with the status quo become more innovative? *Harvard Business Review (HBR)* conducted a six-year study to get to the nub of what makes innovative entrepreneurs tick. They came up with six skills that help drive innovators:

ASSOCIATING

Associating is the ability to successfully connect seemingly unrelated questions, problems, or ideas from different fields. Pierre Omidyar, the founder of eBay, for example, linked three previously unconnected dots when he thought about (1) his fiancé’s desire to locate hard-to-find Pez dispensers, (2) the ineffectiveness of local classified ads in locating such items and (3) using the internet as a marketplace.

QUESTIONING

Ask ‘Why?’ and ‘Why not?’ and ‘What if?’ Rather than working on how to make existing processes work a little better, challenge assumptions. Think about how things could be done a completely different way. For example, Michael Dell, founder of the Dell computer company, took a computer apart and noticed that it cost five times the price of its component parts. By asking why computers were made so expensively he eventually hit upon the idea of making them much more cheaply.

OBSERVING

Innovators like to watch and get an understanding of people’s behaviour. Watching how people work and live can help create ideas and also solve problems. Indian businessman Ratan Tata was inspired to create the world’s cheapest car after observing the predicament of a family of four packed onto a tiny motorised scooter. And Akio Toyoda, president of Toyota Motor Corporation, regularly practises the Toyota philosophy of ‘going to the spot and seeing for yourself’.

EXPERIMENTING

Try out new ideas. Test your ideas to see how they work. This will lead to new discoveries. Jeff Bezos, founder of Amazon, didn’t just rest on his laurels after creating the world’s biggest bookstore. He also decided to try selling other products, from toys to home appliances and clothing. ‘I encourage our employees to go down blind alleys and experiment,’ Bezos says.

NETWORKING

This is probably the most obvious of the five points. If you get out and meet and talk to more people, it’s much more likely that your brain will start generating new ideas. The *HBR* study found that innovators attend idea conferences such as TED, Davos and the Aspen Ideas Festival, where they get to talk to politicians, academics, artists, adventurers and thinkers from all over the world. So if you devote time and energy to talking with all kinds of people that you wouldn’t normally encounter, you’ll be more likely to obtain a radically different perspective on problems that you need to solve.

PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE

Innovative thinking may be an innate state of mind for some, but it can also be developed and strengthened by regularly attempting to do it. The most important sub-skill in innovative thinking to get started on is questioning. Spend 10–15 minutes each day writing down questions that challenge the status quo of the way your library does things. Try reading books or attending seminars outside your areas of expertise. Infuse your mind with new ideas from new people by mixing with non-LIS problem-solvers.

The old Apple tagline – ‘Think Different’ – was great. But keep in mind that in order to think differently you first need to act differently.

Read the full article at <http://bit.ly/13XWBaD>



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