



Seeing tomorrow's ideas...Today

foursight  
consulting

Vol. 1, No. 13, December 2004

## 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

Organizations that stay ahead of the curve rely on both innovation and luck. Find out what luck has to do with innovation and how to make your own luck.

### What Does Luck Have to Do With Innovation?

Many of you may believe that success owes a lot to luck, and that luck owes a lot to getting in the way of unexpected opportunities. So how is it that luck and innovation relate? Luck can be defined as "an unknown and unpredictable phenomenon that causes an event to result one way rather than another (Hyperdictionary.com)." Innovation is often described as a process that transforms ideas into commercial value; it includes invention and exploitation. Innovation is said to be fostered "by information gathered from new connections; from insights gained by journeys into other disciplines or places; from active, collegial networks and fluid, open boundaries. Innovation arises from ongoing circles of exchange, where information is not just accumulated or stored, but created. Knowledge is generated anew from connections that weren't there before (Margaret J. Wheatley. 1992. Leadership and the New Science. San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers. p.113)." Innovative organizations, and the people who work for them, are open to possibilities - unknown and unpredictable phenomenon - and what can be gained from them.

No one understands better than Apple's CEO, Steve Jobs, how to use timing, luck, and innovation to his advantage. He retooled his failed NeXtStep operating system into OS X, which has become a hit with Mac users. His engineers redesigned the slumping iMac, morphing it from a fruity colored gumdrop into a ghostly white night-light with a floating screen. While Jobs realized he missed the boat on CD burners, he was able to see the possibility in this idea by installing drives on Macs that could not only play DVDs but store data on them, too. This was a big innovation and a huge success for Apple. Steve Jobs is a living example of someone who is innovative and creates his own luck.

Richard Wiseman, head of a psychology research department at the University of Hertfordshire in England and author of "The Luck Factor" and "Did you Spot the Gorilla? How to Recognize Hidden Opportunities" believes that it is our inability to see the obvious that can prevent us from thinking more innovatively. He says that we are all guilty of missing the obvious, of failing to see the bigger picture

because we tend to focus on narrower tasks at hand. Basically, he is saying that we don't look to create our own luck. Much of business is about drive - setting a goal, single-mindedly pursuing it, and ploughing past obstacles - and rational analysis. Wiseman believes that the real problem in organizations is that no one is brave enough to step back from his or her day-to-day responsibilities and let their minds foam free. If they did, he or she might spot that killer idea that could transform their company fortunes and put them ahead of the curve.

Dr. Wiseman's central thesis is that luck can be predicted and therefore controlled. The key to creating luck and innovation is to be open to what's around you. He offers four principles that can help:

1. **Maximize chance opportunities.** Become skilful at creating, noticing, and acting upon chance opportunities. Do this by building and maintaining a strong network, adopting a relaxed attitude towards life, and being open to new experiences.
2. **Listen to your lucky hunches.** Make effective decisions by listening to your intuition and gut feelings. Take steps to actively boost your intuitive abilities - for example, by meditating and clearing your mind of other thoughts.
3. **Expect good fortune.** Remain certain that the future will be bright. Over time, this expectation will become a self-fulfilling prophecy that helps you persist in the face of failure and will positively shape your interactions with other people.
4. **Turn bad luck into good.** Employ various psychological techniques to cope with, and even thrive upon, the ill fortune that comes your way, i.e. imagine how things could have been worse, don't dwell on the ill fortune, and take control of what is controllable.

Other strategies to help on both the innovation and luck front include:

- Read odd stuff - look anywhere for ideas
- Ask dumb questions. The computer mouse came as a result of someone asking, "How come computer commands all come from keyboards?"
- Empower employees to run their own show
- Train without limits - pick up the tab for training unrelated to work which helps keep everyone engaged
- Take anti-NIH (not invented here) pills
- Listen to everyone; ideas come from anywhere
- Don't back away from passion - "dispassionate innovator" is an oxymoron
- Nurture intuition and peripheral vision
- Stir curiosity - Sony chairman, Akio Morita, said that igniting youthful, dormant curiosity in followers is the lead dog's top task
- Spread confusion in your wake - keep people off balance, don't let the ruts go deeper than they already are

(Adapted from: The Pursuit of Luck, Tom Peters, available on [www.ideafarm.co.za](http://www.ideafarm.co.za)).

## What's the Bottom line

What's luck got to do with innovation? - Lots! Start creating your own luck and become more innovative. Begin by being open to what's around you.



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](mailto:jlaws@foursightconsulting.com).

For more ideas on creativity, innovation, to join or be removed from the newsletter distribution list, visit [www.foursightconsulting.com](http://www.foursightconsulting.com).