Innovate or evaporate – The time to act is NOW!

By Bob 'Idea Man' Hooey

When would be the best time to start some serious work on innovation in your organization? Now! is the short answer.

The gap between imagination and achievement or actualization has never been shorter. Beginning '*somewhere*' is always preferable to waiting while your team weighs the options and while the organization goes bust or gets left in the dust by those competitors who are being innovative and creative in this volatile market.

Author of "*Leading the Revolution,*" Gary Hamel advocates that *"radical innovation is the competitive advantage of the new millennium."* With the aftermath of the past 18 – 24 months since 911, the Enron fallout, and a general shake up in our economy, a wake up call is in order.

But that can be a challenge to productive change with some organizations mental constraints and stuck in the mud mindsets. J.K. Galbraith, noted economist once shared, *"Faced with the choice of changing one's mind and proving there is no need to – almost everyone gets busy on the proof."*

Everyone needs to be involved. Partial commitment to innovation is commitment to failure. There needs to be a willingness to listen to, and act on, the change plan that comes from this innovation process.

Creative Partners' Andy Radka shares the results of a survey of 500 top American CEO's. They were asked what their organization needed to survive in the 21 st Century. Their top answer was **"*to practice creativity and innovation.*"** However, *"only 6% of them believed they were tackling this effectively."*

Quite a gap between needs and application. Obviously blending in a spirit of innovation takes time vs a quick fix or special seminar.

If innovation and creativity are so important, even critical in business survival, why the gap in application and implementation? While each organization is distinct and different, there needs to be a more holistic, integrated approach to innovation and creativity as a culture. We need to get *'buy in'* on all levels.

Further, we need to consider some important points to increase the possibility of idea generation, which in turn drives innovation and creativity in an organization.

What can you do to facilitate this process? Here are some areas of concern in building a foundation for success under this creative and innovative initiative:

- **Innovation strategy:** Innovation needs to be an '*integral part*' of all strategies and policies in your organization, not just '*tacked*' on as a quick fix up. It needs to permeate every department, and every section. Every employee must make it a focus in part as they do their respective roles. For example, how much time is spent in the boardroom discussing ongoing innovation strategy? This is where the *'rubber hits the road'* and your employees see just how much you are committed to this path of action.

- **Support from top management:** In too many organizations ideas and innovation steps are already at risk at their inception. Poor leadership can look the other way or take the courageous step and stretch out a helping hand to buoy them until they can be worked out and tried in the real world.

Ask yourself, *'Do my managers see themselves as leaders whose role is to 'clear the way' for creativity or are they simply status quo oriented?'* Your employees and colleagues are watching for your leadership in this arena.

What will your employees see when they observe your leadership?

- **Collective mindsets:** Whether we acknowledge it or not we each have mindsets comprised of beliefs, attitudes, and values that drive or motivate our behaviour. These collective mindsets (eg 'can't teach old dogs new tricks or 'my people aren't creative') frequently form barriers to the creative process.

  They need to be unlocked and unblocked. Business guru Peter Drucker once said, "*defending yesterday – i.e., not innovating – is far more risky than making tomorrow."*

  Make sure your organizational mindset is not creating an '*immune system*' or anti-virus system that automatically rejects or attacks new ideas, processes or challenges to the status quo business model. This can be your largest obstacle in embedding creative approaches and applied innovation within your organization.

- **Employees get tools and training:** Are your staff given the tools and the on-going training they need to support a creative climate and innovation? People and training are crucial to your success, and the training needs to be ongoing and reinforced.

  Creativity will not magically flourish with the advent of a few courses or the provision of a '*few*' creative tools to a *'few select'* people. Everyone needs to be trained and supported in his or her evolution of understanding and applied learning.

- **Knowledge management tools:** Does your organization have an intranet that capitalizes on the strides information technology has brought to the battle for business survival? **I.T.** often acts as an enabler, which allows us to break the traditional barriers of function, geography and even hierarchy.

  This allows for internet-based sparking of ideas and a chance to engage and bring '*all*' the minds or your various teams into the game. This is how you win! (*For example*: *This year the Titleist people used 5 of my articles on a new intranet site being set up for their sales staff.*)

- **What gets measured gets done – metrics for innovation:** Creativity and innovation can be measured and if so, are done on a more consistent basis. If creativity is rewarded, even more! Intellectual assets can impact heavily on your market value. Consider the differential and costs between hardware and software values?

- **Creation of an idea pipeline:** Is there an effective innovation process or pipeline or some form of tracking system for converting ideas into innovative services or new products? Is everyone on your team committed to feeding this process or pipeline? Only systematic processes, which incorporate a blend of logical and lateral, thinking tools, can bring creativity an innovation. What are you doing to ensure you prime the pump and keep this pipeline full and flowing?

- **Supplier and customer mindsets:** Organizations create a demand for innovative suppliers to be able to serve their clients who are demanding innovative products and services. Ask yourself, 'are your current (and potential) clients able to support a dialogue about inventing your *shared* future?'

How about your suppliers and allied professionals? They may not even recognize the future until they see it or are made aware of its possibilities. That in part, is your job in the connection and education process of business.

Just a few thoughts to consider as you follow your quest to increased creativity and applied innovation in your organization. The time to act is now! Innovate or evaporate in the dust of those competitors who saw the need, made the investment and took the lead. **It's your choice!**

About the author:

Bob 'Idea Man' Hooey is a sought after productivity strategist, creativity catalyst and idea farmer, who regularly writes for North American consumer, association and trade journals, on-line magazines and company intranets. He is the author of ten success books, a mini-book series, four success systems and an e-book series. Bob was the 48th person in the history of Toastmasters International to earn their coveted professional level Accredited Speaker designation. Bob is a motivational, business and association keynote conference speaker and executive leadership trainer and coach. He is a professional member of the Canadian Association of Professional Speakers and the International Federation for Professional Speakers. **Visit his website for additional leadership, business and career development articles like this one: www.ebusinesssuccess.biz**