

In our turbulent business climate, we all seek new pathways to growth and success. Yes winning can be elusive in these times of dizzying speed and ruthless competition. Companies like Tesla, Amazon, Netflix and JetBlue soar while their respective counterparts – Oldsmobile, Borders Books, Blockbuster, and PanAm – are merely tombstones in the business graveyard.

Too often, once great companies become intoxicated by their own success. They fail adapt, fail to innovate, and then simply fail. To avoid this trap in times of massive upheaval and change, we must exploit our most powerful weapon: human creativity. It is the one thing that can't be outsourced or automated and has become the currency of success. Cultivating creativity and innovation is leadership job #1 if we want to enjoy sustainable growth and progress. But how do innovators think and act? How can we build a culture that fosters innovation rather than restricts it?

As human beings, we are hard-wired to be creative, but many of us have lost our imagination over the years. The good news is that we can all tap into a giant reservoir of creativity, which can fuel our businesses and lives. Luckily, you don't have to be a mad scientist in a lab coat or an eccentric billionaire to embrace them. You just need an open mind and an open heart, a willingness to inject fresh approaches into everyday situations.

Having studied hundreds of the most innovative people in history, I've discovered five core beliefs that transcend industry, geography, and upbringing. These patterns are easy to understand and can be implemented directly into your daily work to drive growth and success:

1. **Get Curious.**

It turns out that curiosity is very much the building block of creativity. The more curious you are, the more creative you'll become. The best way to tap into your natural curious state is to ask a lot more questions instead of making fast decisions. Too often, we make decisions (big and small) based on what worked or what didn't work in the past. If we lived a static world, that would be great. But today we live in a rate of change like none other in history. As a result, your instincts based on previous results can be misleading. Instead, pause whenever possible and ask more questions about the problem at hand or your proposed solution. Try questions that begin with "why", "what if", or "why not?" When you ask these questions, it forces you to imagine the possibilities and explore fresh approaches.

2. Crave What's Next.

It's easy to think success is a permanent condition, yet that has been the downfall for far too many organizations. Instead, we must lean into change, embracing new approaches rather than clinging to old ones. Too often, we overestimate the risk of trying something new but underestimate the risk of standing still. Innovators have an insatiable appetite for new tech, products, trends, concepts, etc. They want to be first, on the bleeding edge of change. They also embrace a willingness to let go of what *was* in favor of what *can be*.

3. Defy Tradition.

Family traditions can be wonderful, but traditions in our professional lives can be deadly. Blindly doing things in a traditional way has been the downfall for far too many companies and careers. Instead, when you find yourself approaching your work in a traditional way, examine the tradition carefully and see if you can flip it upside down. What would the polar opposite move look like? Don't change just for the sake of it, but at least put your traditions under a microscope to explore if they are still relevant and optimized. Or, perhaps there's an oppositional approach that could yield a better outcome. This is the point where breakthroughs occur.

4. Get Scrappy.

We often believe our ability to innovate is tied to external resources such as money, headcount, or raw materials. The truth is the real DNA of innovation has nothing to do with outside resources and everything to do with Grit. Determination. Tenacity. Resilience. *Internal* resources fuel creative approaches, which is why startups are able to upend industry giants. Getting scrappy is about doing more with less; finding elegant and more creative ways to solve everyday problems. Instead of blindly throwing money at a problem, try throwing your imagination at it instead. You may enjoy a far better result.

5. Adapt Fast.

It's easy to believe that innovation occurs as a single lightning bolt of an inspiration, followed by mindless execution. In fact, initial ideas are usually flawed. Only through a series of setbacks and mistakes, failures and pivots, tweaks and micro-innovations, does an idea gain any real merit. Take the weight of the world off your shoulders... you don't have to invent some game-changing concept. Instead, apply your creative energy to small, fast, creative bursts. Rapid-fire creativity, practiced as a daily habit, can be far more important than the potency of an initial ideal. Experiment, learn, adapt. Rinse and repeat.

While many adults don't feel creative, the research shows otherwise. Creativity, in fact, is 85% *learned* behavior. In other words, it is a skill – a muscle- that each of us can build and use to drive our companies and careers to the next level. Embrace the five obsessions of innovators, and you'll be well on your way to unprecedented achievement. Push the boundaries, shake it up, explore what's possible. Inject innovative approaches into your everyday work, and the results will be stunning.

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