

Innovation: A Word You Love or a Way of Life?

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At recent workshops I held on innovation, I was fascinated by the answer to my question: “Are you for innovation?” Everyone said “Yes!” But, when I asked, “What are you actually doing to do innovation?” The answers: “Not much!”

In fact, out of almost sixty CEOs not too many were doing much of anything other than embracing the concept. It was as if they had fallen in love with the word “innovation” but hadn’t figured out how to do things in their organizations that could generate new ideas, establish creative processes, encourage risk-taking and learning from these risks, reward new ways to do things and empower their teams.

They are not alone. In May, 2012, the [Wall Street Journal](#)’s Leslie Kwoh wrote that the use of the word innovation has become such a buzzword that it is hard to separate incremental business improvement changes from really dramatic transformative innovations. According to Kwoh, “A search of annual and

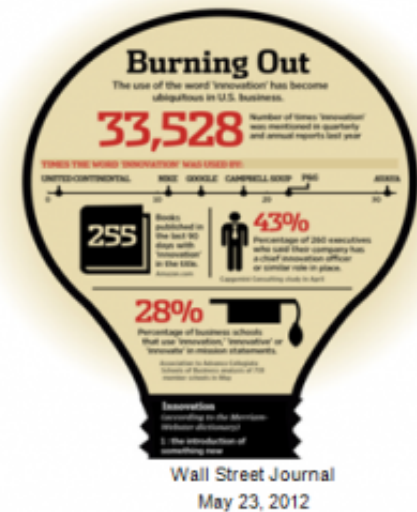
quarterly reports filed with the Securities and Exchange Commission shows companies mentioned some form of the word ‘innovation’ 33,528 times last year, which was a 64% increase from five years before that. More than 250 books with ‘innovation’ in the title have been published in the last three months, most of them dealing with business, according to a search of Amazon.” Innovation has become a cliché.

What about you? Are you simply playing around with a trendy word or ready to put innovation into practice? If you’re the former, you may find your business shrinking backwards as you try to build new products, services and solutions for the changing economic environment we are in today. But how do you **do** innovation and not just say it? Most importantly—are you going to be **smart** or just hope you are **lucky**? Maybe something innovative will come to you in the shower?

For this blog I would like to offer **Six Ideas**, tried and true in other companies, that you could at least take a look at for your own company and maybe even apply to your organization to help turn the idea of innovation into an actuality.

Six Ideas on Living Innovation

1. **Build an Idea Gym:** Take a look at P&G and what they have done to change their culture from a very hierarchical company where everything was invented there to a very innovative organization that could bring in ideas from everywhere. One idea I like a lot is their Idea Gym. Do you have one? It’s a place set up specifically for people to come together to take an idea and blow it up, take it apart, build business plans around it and emerge after a day or a week with a new business concept. Whether it is a way to fix a problem or a new product that is worth developing, the Idea Gym provides a setting in which ideas can become innovations. To know more, take a look at “[The Game-Changer](#)” on how to grow profits as well as your business through innovation.
2. **Get out of your office, often, and go explore how people are using your products.** I suggested in an earlier blog for you to go exploring, like an anthropologist. P&G requires their brand managers to get out of their offices and spend time with customers who are actually using their products. What does this do? Try spending a “Day in the Life of Your Customer” and see what you could learn about their pain points, challenges and opportunities where you could play a role in helping their business grow.
3. **Don’t think you have to build it all inside your company.** What if you have an idea that is great but you cannot do it alone. Rather than duplicate products, partner with others and license your technology. One of our clients is doing just that: partnering with former competitors to bring a better product to market. One has distribution and the other the technology.
4. **Create an Idea Bank.** Look at what CEMEX did and is still doing in the cement business. They create a theme for the



year and build their strategy around that theme. They also have an Idea Bank, a room set up with paper on the walls in which staff can come in and put up ideas that are reviewed weekly. [Jesus Gilberto Garcia](#), Chief Innovation Officer at CEMEX, wrote in October 2012 about how “CEMEX is fostering innovation by changing the way employees work. It is encouraging a change in practices towards more collaboration, transparency, and openness, and enabling these changes through a Social Networking platform with a business sense, called Shift.”

5. **Host an Idea Jam.** How about IBM’s annual online [Idea Jam](#)? Do you have a day a year where ideas can flow and you can begin to listen to your staff? Why not? What ideas do they have that could help you do a better job in your overall business?
6. **Go Crowdsourcing.** Hold an online contest and see what people outside your organization can create for you. Offer the winner a real prize or a piece of the solution itself.

Whatever you do, please don’t say you are all for innovation without doing some innovating. The research is very clear that the more ideas you have, the more likely you will have good ones. You just don’t know which they are. So let the ideas flow and see how they intersect. There may be a big idea just waiting for you—or maybe this is how you become *lucky*.