

E Book



DR KEN HUDSON

Unleash ideas, innovation & growth - Now!

36 INNOVATION TIPS THAT WORK!

By Dr Ken Hudson

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Welcome to my eBook on innovation tips that work.

In the past 15 years I have researched and worked with numerous leaders to help them build a more innovative capability and improve results.

During that time I have learned what works and what does not.

These tips are a result of our collective efforts.

The tips are short, practical and effective.

Most of all these tips can be implemented quickly.

I hope you find these valuable.

If I can help you in your innovation journey then please email or call me.

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The Idea Accelerator (Allen & Unwin, 2008) and
Speed Thinking (allen & Unwin, 20120).



Tip 1.

WHAT DOES INNOVATION MEAN AT YOUR ORGANIZATION?

Before embarking on any innovation journey spend time actually defining what innovation is. In my experience if you ask 10 different managers you will get 10 different responses. Is innovation only to do with new products or something else?

Defining what innovation is and is not will make it easier to understand and garner greater engagement.

Tip 2.

THERE IS NO ONE CORRECT DEFINITION

There is no one best or perfect innovation definition. Whatever makes sense in your organisation given your culture and heritage is right for you. For example at a government agency I worked with, their definition was: Innovation means challenging the status quo.

Tip 3.

HOW WILL YOU MEASURE INNOVATION SUCCESS?

This is largely a function of what innovation is in your organisation. If innovation means new products the a key goal might be for example, 30% of revenue should come from new products that are less than 3 years old (3M goal).

Tip 4.

EVERY LEADERSHIP TEAM NEEDS A WHY INNOVATE STORY.

This is a believable, compelling and urgent case for innovation e.g. packaged goods companies have to innovate to offset the threat of house brands.

Innovation involves change and risks so you need to give people a reason why they should start or continue on an innovation journey.

Tip 5.

EVERY LEADER SHOULD HAVE AN INNOVATION GOAL.

If you want leaders to take innovation seriously you need to make innovation as part of their KPI's otherwise it will always remain a nice to do.

Tip 6.

INNOVATION HAS TO BE TALKED ABOUT – CONSTANTLY!

Innovation should be a line item on every manager's and leaders weekly or monthly staff meeting. In this way it remains top of mind for all staff and encourages the discussion and sharing of new ideas and behaviours.

Tip 7.

WHAT'S IN IT FOR ME?

For any innovation initiative to take hold and to be sustained it needs to be both good for the business and appeal to individuals self-interest. You need to be able to answer the question, what's in it for me?

Tip 8.

INNOVATION IS NOT SOMETHING EXTRA TO DO!

There are many different types of innovation e.g. process, product, people, business -model etc. Innovation is a faster, better way of working and competing. It can apply to everything an organisation does.

Innovation will not work when it is positioned as something extra someone has to do. This becomes a chore after a while particularly if a person or group does not get credit for any innovation work they do.

Tip. 9

THE GOAL

The aim of every leader should be to have more people, being more innovative, more often.

Tip 10.

IT'S WHAT YOU DO THAT COUNTS

Making innovation part of a set of corporate values or principles is a valuable start. But what really matters is what people do.

Behaviour trumps intentions every time.

Tip 11.

LEADERS HAVE TO SET AN EXAMPLE

Innovation behaviour has to be role-modelled. Leaders can only expect others to be innovative when they themselves can demonstrate they have tried something differently.

Tip 12.

FOCUS

The innovation process starts with a focused challenge. It could be a new consumer trend, customer problem, competitive threat or market opportunity. With limited resources it is important to focus your efforts on a tight challenge.

Tip 13.

INNOVATION CAN BE APPLIED TO ANY ACTIVITY.

In my workshops I ask every manager or leader what is one activity they have done last week or month that was innovative (i.e. new, different and potentially valuable)?

Then I ask, what were the results and what did you learn? Next share these learning's across the management team.

Tip 14.

TEST, PILOT, PROTOTYPE

What is one new thing that you are testing this week or month?

It does not have to be big e.g. it could be a new time to hold a staff meeting.

Tip 15.

WHAT CAN YOU BORROW, ADAPT OR LEARN?

What are the innovative brands or companies that you most admire? What can you borrow, adapt or learn from what they do? For example, Samsung has borrowed from Apple and in some areas has overtaken them.

Tip 16.

INNOVATION IS BOTH FORMAL AND INFORMAL.

Innovation can be planned through stage gate and new product development processes, and formal brainstorming sessions. You can set goals, targets and encourage innovation. All these are important but there is another form of innovation.

Innovation often emerges from spontaneous interactions that emerge from people bumping into one another, or at the cafe or over lunch.

Both of these innovation styles should be respected and nurtured.

Tip 17.

FIND OUT WHO YOUR MOST CREATIVE PEOPLE ARE.

I believe that whilst creativity can be learned and improved up there are some people that are better at it (or more confident) than others. These people can make new connections and often see opportunities where other do not.

Hence it makes sense that a smart innovation manager would try and leverage the strengths of these people. The first step is to try and identify these creative types. One way to do this is to have them peer nominated e.g. you can ask employees — who in your team or group consistently comes up with left-field ideas?

Peer nominated means that these people feel special, they feel less of an outsider and by putting them together you could give them a special innovation project to work on. Membership of this group might last for 3-6 months and a new batch of people can be nominated.

Tip 18.

TEACH BRAINSTORMING AS A SKILL

How to run a successful Brainstorming session should be taught as part of any innovation journey. The most popular and widely used group creativity tool is brainstorming so it makes sense to help people improve the quality and quantity of their ideas.

In addition because most people spend most of their time in meetings any attempt to improve and shorten meetings would also be considered a major innovation result.

Tip 19.

LINK INNOVATION WITH IMPLEMENTATION

I recently met a senior leader at a financial services company and his title was head of innovation & implementation. Love this, for too long we have separated the front end from the back end. You can and need to be creative in both areas.

Tip 20.

HAVE AN INNOVATION DAY EVERY QUARTER.

Place this in the diary and it cannot be moved. This is a day completely dedicated to innovation. The aim is to celebrate the past, where we are at the moment and what is to come.

Tip 21.

BE MORE INNOVATIVE AROUND IDEA SCHEMES

Employee idea schemes are a good idea must often run out of steam. Here's how to overcome this.

Ask a leader to pose a tough challenge which anyone (or group or team) can attempt to solve. This problem can be open for a week or month.

People can send or present their ideas to the leader who posed the challenge. Then ask another leader for a new challenge for the next week or month.

In this way employees are encouraged to contribute their ideas but these are aligned to the priorities of the business. It also broadens younger employees to think more broadly about the business and they might get valuable exposure to a leader when they present their ideas. Because the program rotates, leaders do not get stale nor do people become bored with the same old challenges.

Tip 22.

LEARN HOW TO BLITZ

Just like you should train everyone in brainstorming you should also give them the opportunity to learn how to Blitz. This is a fast and energising creativity tool for individuals and groups. Imagine the innovative power you could release if you could enhance the creative thinking skills and confidence of every employee.

Blitz also has a built in points system so you can measure the engagement around innovation and recognize high achievers.

Tip 23.

IF YOU FORM AN INNOVATION TEAM GIVE THEM SOME REAL ACCOUNTABILITY.

Many leaders form innovation teams but do not give them any real responsibility, goals or a budget. Surely if you have people that want to join such a team they can be stretched and given a real challenge to work on. They can then be given say 3 – 6 months to deliver on this challenge. This becomes an exciting opportunity to make a real difference as well as learn new skills and tools.

Tip 24.

HOW TO FUND INNOVATION

Some leaders complain that they never have enough money for innovation. My solution is simple. Take 5-10% off every leaders budget and place it in an innovation fund. In this way you create a pile of money and then leaders can compete for these funds depending on the strength of their idea rather than their position.

In addition because you have taken funds from them they will be keen to get these back so they will automatically have an interest in innovation.

Also if innovation is truly among your top 3 strategic priorities shouldn't it receive at least one third of your budget?

Tip 25.

SELECT THE MOST STRUCTURED AREA TO START INNOVATING

Some managers say they work in an area where they cannot be innovative due to the nature of their role etc. This may or may not be the case but I have often found that the biggest barrier is not the role but people's limited imagination.

Select an area, role, function or process and try to reinvent it. You will obtain a better outcome and prove to everyone that innovation can apply everywhere. For example Air New Zealand have made the safety notices fun and engaging. Who would have thought that was possible to travel-weary business people?

Tip 26.

SET YOURSELF A GOAL OF BEING ABLE TO THINK DIFFERENTLY – ON DEMAND

A basic requirement of leadership is the ability to think through the problems facing the business: if you are not thinking about your business, market, customers or the competition, someone else is. Thinking is a skill so the more you practice it the better you will become.

Most leaders are goal-motivated, in my experience. So, to become a better thinker who is able to generate new ideas, solutions and possibilities at will, set a goal. It could be a subjective measure, such as 'Am I better able to think differently than this time last year?' It could be an objective measure such as asking your peers to rate your ability to thinking differently on a 10-point scale.

Tip 27.

GO AGAINST THE CROWD

It is very tempting to follow the crowd, the consensus or the mainstream. As the former Labor Prime Minister Paul Keating once said, leadership takes imagination and courage. As a thought exercise, (at the very least) I would encourage every current and potential leader to adopt the least popular position from time-to-time.

This forces you to look at situation from a different angle and can sharpen up the reasons why you may consider an alternative action. I sometimes watch Fox News in the US for this reason. I am politically opposed to most of what the network's commentators say but I enjoy thinking about the way they see the world.

Tip 28.

PUT YOURSELF IN ANOTHER LEADER'S POSITION AND ASK WHAT WOULD YOU DO?

I once heard that to improve your golf game it is a useful idea to imagine how you might play the next shot of your playing partners. I believe that you can apply a similar logic to leadership. Often leaders become obsessed with their areas of responsibility.

One way to expand your mindset is to consider the decisions that others make. Ask yourself would I have answered that question in that tone of voice, for example? If marketing is your responsibility, ask yourself what big initiative you might consider if you were given the financial portfolio.

Tip 29.

THE POWER OF THREE

This is one of my favourite tools. In any situation, leaders think of three solutions: the usual one, a different one, and a radical one. It's amazing how powerful it can be to consider a broader range of options and give yourself and others permission to express a left-field or radical idea.

Tip 30.

SEEK DIVERSE PERSPECTIVES

It is hard to think differently if you are surrounded by people who see the world the same as you. You may like them, but you will rarely receive a truly different suggestion. Talk to people outside of your industry or category. Talk to partners, suppliers or employees who have just joined your business. These people may challenge and stretch your mindset, giving you greater scope to think differently. My two PhD supervisors, for example, were a chaos mathematician and an environmentalist – they constantly challenged my traditional MBA frame of reference.

Tip 31.

BE OPEN TO DIFFERENT POINTS OF VIEW

If you want to think differently, be open to this ability in others. Encourage it. Recognise and highlight examples of people thinking differently in your team, even if you do not always agree with them.

I once worked with a senior partner of a legal firm who confided in me that his worst fear was that a client might ask him a question that he could not answer; after all, he was the expert. My reaction was the complete opposite. I love receiving questions that challenge me, presenting me with an opportunity to learn and grow so that I am better prepared next time.

Tip 32.

ASK ORIGINAL QUESTIONS

You cannot think differently if you ask the same questions, or questions to which you already know. To create and innovate is to ask fresh, insightful questions that open up new areas of opportunity.

Tip 33.

FOCUS

I love the story in Steve Jobs' biography (written by Walter Isaacson) of how in the Apple annual planning conference he would ask the leaders for their top 10 priorities. After much wrangling the various leaders agreed upon the list – the answer only for Jobs to dramatically cross out the bottom seven items and declare the company would only concentrate on the top three for the next year.

This is the opposite of most strategic planning sessions that I attend. These usually end with a shopping list of things to do. But if you want a breakthrough, it's much better to do a few things really well and let go of the idea of trying to do lots of things, but none of them very well.

Tip 34.

BE COURAGEOUS ENOUGH TO CHALLENGE YOUR EXISTING ASSUMPTIONS AND BELIEFS

One of the hardest things for any leadership group is to challenge what has worked in the past – particularly if it has been successful. It is much easier if sales are in decline or targets are missed because what have you got to lose?

It takes courage to abandon a successful product, service or business model and explore a new growth possibility. In these times of rapid change success in the past is no guarantee of success in the future. Take your eye off the ball and you will get passed.

One of the best ways to do this is to try and make your beliefs, assumptions, expectations and experiences explicit. By making these explicit you can then develop strategies or products that shatter or overturn them.

Tip 35.

HAVE ANOTHER LOOK AT THE “NEVER-EVERS”

Another creativity tool I use with leadership groups is to ask them to look with fresh eyes at the “never-evers” – the people who never ever buy your product. For example, who would have thought 10 years ago that teenagers, and in some cases kids, would be the single biggest target group for mobile phones?

Opening up your thinking to the “never-evers” means that your market opportunity could be so much larger than you ever imagined.

Tip 36.

CONNECT CONSUMER TRENDS WITH YOUR STRENGTHS

One of my favourite innovation tools is to connect a range of consumer trends (or insights) with the 3-5 things that you are really good at.

I love to create a matrix where the macro trends are placed at the top (e.g. aging population) and the company strengths are listed vertically (e.g. customer service or branding or channel coverage).

This creates a wonderful map of potential opportunities. The task then becomes to explore, evaluate and prioritise these areas.

IN SUMMARY:

Innovation is fun, challenging and exciting.

It is at the same time difficult, risky and disruptive.

But most of all, innovation can be learned.

I hope you enjoy these innovation tips and they help you to create a better future for your brand, business, people and society.

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