

Innovation: How Disruption produces Progress

By: Manny Gonzalez

What produces social and economic progress for an individual, community, company, or country? Simply put: Innovation.

Innovation is imagination combined with implementation. One has to imagine what can be, not what is – then must implement that vision to make it a reality. By its very nature innovation is disruptive because it is purposefully moving away from what is, to what can be, to what will be.

Innovation can be classified in two types; sustaining and transformative. Sustaining innovation builds from and extends what you already do and how you do it (think repainting a room in your house with a new paint color). Transformative innovation leverages a totally new way of thinking making what exists today seem old (think Apple's introduction of the iPhone: a phone, web browser, and an iPod). These innovations start off with a small group of "early adopters" creating niche markets but, when successful, the niche grows becoming a big part of the mainstream market.

The imagination that innovation requires is fostered by connectivity. Each one of us touches and is touched by those around us. The need for and desire to participate, to "be connected," is a major driver of the reason for, and popularity in, social media tools. Being connected is what enables us to better understand the wants and needs of others, which helps us to innovate successfully fulfilling those wants and needs.

How to produce connectivity for innovation

The buyer is, of course, the ultimate judge of what his/her wants and needs are and what value he/she assigns to it: the price they are willing to pay for it. Everything's value is what people are willing to pay for it. As human beings, however, we do not necessarily know, or can even verbalize, our wants and needs. It often requires innovators who go beyond the obvious to produce transformative innovations. Innovators not only supply buyer wants and needs, but sometimes even create them.

Change, however, is uncomfortable. It's the enemy of the status quo as Marcus Aurelius recognized 2,000 years ago. That is why the status quo is the default mode and why many major innovations are produced by people and companies outside of the impacted industries. We must purposefully ignore the 'old' ways and innovate as if we are doing so for the very first time.

Innovation Methodology

- 1) Imagination Session: Have an imagination session where you and your team define the breakthrough you want to produce or problem you want to solve. Encourage a culture

within your team that values constant innovation and don't be afraid to create and discover from other industries.

- 2) Overcome Status Quo Hurdles: It's human nature to care more about losses than we do about gains. People must fight against their own comfort zone to realize that the status quo is not sustainable. The only constant is change, which means that the status quo will eventually change – and it is always best to drive that change rather than being driven by it.
- 3) Develop a Process for Innovation: Remember that people closest to the customers are ones that need to drive innovation, both in the labs and in the field. There needs to be a systemic review of innovation being produced by product line, geography, channel, etc. as they all should be connected to the buyer. An innovation process means innovation with objectives, strategies, owners, and measures that helps to transform imagination into implementation.
- 4) Streamline new products and structures with existing products and structures: The easiest but more dangerous approach to innovation is to layer new products and structures on top of existing ones. A reconciliation effort therefore must occur simultaneous to the launching of new products and structures to avoid increasing complexity and duplicity of efforts.
- 5) Listen to the feedback from buyers and employees: Establish a systemic feedback system with both consumers and employees where they can communicate the value they obtain from the innovations. These regular feedback sessions should include both those in the specific department that produced the innovation and outside advisors.

Summary

Each one of us can and should innovate. We as people do not fear change, we fear loss. Knowing that the only constant is change, we must innovate and replace the fear of loss with the anticipation of gain. In doing so, our innovation will improve us, our communities, our companies, and our country.

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