

ISA | Innovation & Idea Management Center

The Tortoise and the Hare Revisited

(Does the tortoise really win?)



Innovation mavens have long placed their bets on the tortoise. Keep the risk down... keep the investment low... let R&D run it... and plod slowly along to success. That's been the strategy for most U.S. companies for a couple of hundred years.

The name of the game used to be to “keep just a little bit ahead of your competition.” Problem is, that doesn’t work unless your competitor is playing the same game. These days, that’s not what’s happening. ‘Live and let live’ is gone. **Now, it’s innovate or die.**

Maybe in the last century that worked – the early part of the last century. But for the past 20 years that approach has been a total failure. It isn't that Detroit's Big 3's 'get up and go' 'got up and went.' **They never got up to begin with!** Their strategy was incremental. You know, a driver's airbag this year, and a passenger air bag next year. Or maybe the year after. Keeping price down was the strategy.

Still, lots of companies think that **incremental innovation** will continue to serve them well. After all, it works for Gillette, right? You know, introduce a slightly different razor every five years or so and wait for the money to roll in.

So Gillette went from two blades to one, back to two, then to three. And then five. **Oops, what's next?** Six? Ten? A razor for each side of the face? Anyone think maybe it's time for a breakthrough?

Those **little innovations** that worked so well in the past just aren't working any more.

Your CEO may have figured this out, and you may even have an “innovation council” hard at work now. If you do, the big boss may already be disappointed. At least, that’s what 70% of all CEO’s say about “innovation initiatives.” Here’s what’s wrong: **innovation isn’t the job of a council or committee.** It’s the job of everyone who wants to continue receiving a paycheck.

Some years ago, David Murray, a New England entrepreneur, acquired a Burger King franchise. Other Burger Kings were grossing about \$1M annually, but David wanted to do a lot **better – and faster**. So he added a huge fireplace and an adult section to his restaurant. Soon he had 30 of them, grossing an average of \$1.4M annually. Eventually he got greedy and robbed the pension plan. Next stop, Danbury Federal Prison. (Hey, at least he was creative!)

Vernon Hill, another Burger King franchisee, wanted to start a bank. But he wanted to be different, too. So he decided to keep his bank open seven days a week. Now, there are 400 of them all over the east coast and Commerce Bank is one of the **fastest growing** banks in the U.S. He got in some trouble, too, and recently resigned. Hopefully there is not a message in that.

See a trend here? No, it's not that you need to own a Burger King franchise to be successful – it's that you need to be **different** from your competition. You need breakthrough ideas, not just incremental ones! (Isn't it interesting, though, that both of these guys were entrepreneurs?)

Your company already has creative thinkers. More than you imagine. Many of these folks don't necessarily see themselves this way. Entrepreneurship and creativity often come in the same package. Find one and you often find the other. You know what? If you have some of these people – even if you don't know who they are – you will lose them if you don't give them an **outlet for their ideas.**

You don't have much time. These people aren't going to wait around forever for your company to ask for their help. They want their creativity appreciated. **They want their ideas valued.** They want to know they're more than "hired hands," but "highered minds" as well. Know this: if you don't appreciate them soon, someone else will.

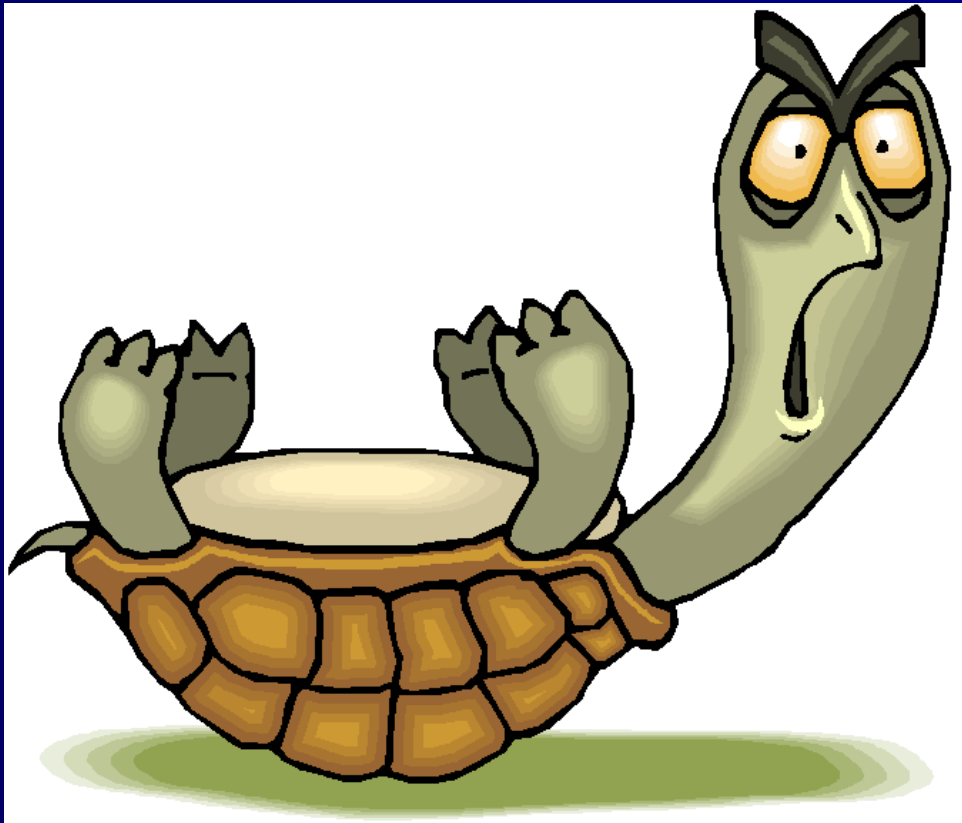
So how do you do that? Well... "Idea Management" is one thought that comes to mind. But it isn't quite as easy as some might tell you. Most people have never learned to be creative. In fact, back in school **conformity** ruled the day – a dependable way to keep everyone in line. The few students who kept asking 'Why?' were sent to the principal's office. (They are also the ones that became rich entrepreneurs).

So if you want more creativity – not just from the entrepreneurial types, but from everyone – you will need to do two things: 1) Make sure your employees know you really, really, want their ideas and; 2) **Create the conditions** that make it easier for people to originate really good ones.

Engage people and make the process of “getting out of the box” more dependable than common practice. Ah... now Idea Management is starting to make some sense! Well then, what makes Idea Management software successful? Great ideas! And how does a company increase the likelihood of great ideas being originated? By helping their employees become more creative. That’s how...

Are you starting to get the idea? Good!
Create a seamless process that will result in the appearance of all the breakthrough ideas your company needs. (Oh...and some really good incremental ones, too).

The result? You'll start finding the breakthroughs before your competitors do. **You'll be the hare, not the tortoise.** Which simply proves what we all know really happens to the tortoise...



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