



Tucker on Innovation

Reporting on best practices, the latest research and upcoming events in the field of innovation, Tucker on Innovation is a free quarterly newsletter for organizational practitioners, thought leaders, and friends of the Global Innovation Movement.
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Judy Williams, Editor

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Is There a Ford in Your Future?

In 1986, long before innovation was the rage it is today, Peter Drucker wrote a book called "Innovation and Entrepreneurship." He predicted that the biggest organizational challenge of the 21st century would be changing fast enough to survive. Polaroid, Wang Labs, Montgomery Ward, Tower Records, and a legion of other firms didn't survive. Kodak, Blockbuster, GM, and Ford are on the endangered list.

"The business model that sustained us for decades is no longer sufficient to sustain profitability," Ford chairman Bill Ford announced recently in a message to the company's employees. The company lost 5.8 billion dollars in the most recent quarter.

Only yesterday, its gas-guzzling, highly profitable SUVs sold like hotcakes. Until, they didn't. I was standing with a group of people outside a Philadelphia hotel the other day when a Ford Excursion came up the driveway. "Look, it's a Ford *Extinction*," somebody quipped to knowing smiles. The ultimate status symbol five minutes ago is suddenly the poster child of excess.

How did Ford's vehicles fall out of fashion so fast? And don't they have people in the company who get paid to prevent this sort of thing? The Detroit Free Press recently carried an article about how Ford has hired a gaggle of futurists to help them get better at anticipating consumer trends. Bill Ford has hired a new CEO and launched a new advertising theme, "Driving American Innovation." Yet, Ford has a rough road ahead.

To rephrase a familiar slogan, "If the rate of change outside your organization is greater than the rate of innovation inside, the end is in sight." Ford is hardly alone in selling the wrong products at the wrong time. The real question is, what are you doing today to prevent waking up to a Ford in your future?

Leadership Decisions

As a leader, you make choices every day that determine the answer to this question. How you invest your time. How you mine the future and track the trends. How you allocate resources. How you choose ideas to pursue or not pursue. How you deploy the most talented people in your company. Even how you react when somebody walks into your office to pitch a new idea.

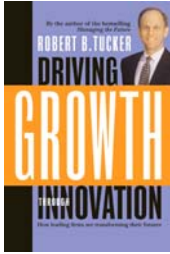
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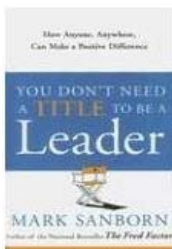
As a leader, you're either pushing your organization to embrace change, or you're being pulled in all directions, but mostly back. The sum total of your daily decisions determines whether you become the disruptor or the disruptee, the attacker or the defender, the Prius or the Excursion.

Even a cursory examination of your calendar from the past several months will give you important clues as to where you've been spending your time. And where you've been spending your time is even more important than where you've been spending your money because it is truly the most precious resource. It also makes plain for all to see what your priorities really are.

In hindsight, Ford would have been well served to look for new growth vehicles before the SUV craze ran out of gas. But as the people of New Orleans can tell you, it's hard to spend money on shoring up levees when the sun is shining.

Yet that's what leaders do, the good ones anyway.

You Don't Need a TITLE to Be a Leader by Mark Sanborn



[Buy on Amazon.com](#)

Why You Don't Need a Title to Be a Leader

Book Review

Sam Preston worked at S.C. Johnson Company all his life and rose to the position of executive vice president. When he retired, the company held a party in his honor. People lined up to shake his hand and wish him well, and to acknowledge a practice of his that touched their hearts. In all those years, whenever somebody did something meritorious, Preston took out a pad and jotted down a handwritten acknowledgement, "congrats on a job well done." And now people showed him that they'd kept the wrinkled notes years after he'd sent them.

Stories like this are common in a wise and reassuring new book called "You Don't Need a Title to Be a Leader," by motivational speaker Mark Sanborn (Waterbrook Press, 2006). I took the book along on a recent flight to Japan and was engaged by the stories, quotes, and aphorisms. Sanborn's perspective into what it truly means to *lead one's life* inspired me to be more conscious of my own actions in this regard.

To Sanborn, genuine leadership is deeper than that which is conferred by a title. The kind he is concerned with isn't limited to those in the executive suites. Sanborn focuses on the kind of personal leadership demonstrated in our every day actions and how we "show up" (or don't show up) in the lives of people around us. Those actions in turn influence the lives of co-workers, friends, neighbors, kids on the soccer team you coach, the person seated beside you on the plane, etc.

Sanborn reminds us that when we do our job, any job, with initiative and

determination and selflessness, we not only make a positive difference – we become the most important kind of leader. And there is always the chance that we will transform the lives of another.

Concludes Sanborn: “In my experience, the marks in life we leave – our legacies – are most often left not in stone and steel, in history and politics, or poetry and literature, but in the lives of other people.”

As a result of reading this book, I find myself writing more notes to people congratulating them on jobs well done.

Listening to Customer Questions

At the end of a workshop for a group of 30-something AmEx managers, one of them asked a question that stopped me in my tracks. “Okay,” he said, “I buy your argument that every company needs an innovation process. But what’s *your* process for creating such a process?” Shortly after, the chief learning officer at Bausch & Lomb challenged me with the same question and pretty soon I was on to what we call in the innovation field an “unmet need”.

About this time I was also hearing from attendees at my lectures that they wanted a copy of my slides. To what purpose, I wondered? What use were the slides really, when some of them only had a few words of text on them.

Shawn Wu, a senior executive at Gates Automotive Technical Center in Michigan, cleared that up. He wanted to share them with the president of his company as a way of creating dialogue around innovation. I found myself asking whether there wasn’t a better way of helping Shawn satisfy his need along with the “process for creating a process” requests I’d gotten, and out came a new product idea.

If we tune in, questions can often lead us to a new opportunity, long before marketing surveys or focus groups make the need obvious. Yet how many times do we need to receive a request or hear that something is aggravating our customers before we finally take action?

Unusual customer questions should be valued, because they open new territory for exploration. “Innovators commonly recognize that questions are the limiting resource in innovation,” says Ed Boyden, a Stanford University neurobiologist. Boyden relishes questions such as “what is consciousness” or “how do we store memories?”

In the context of business, sometimes the best questions start with words like “Do you ...?” or “Where can I get...?” or “Why don’t you guys offer...?” or “Have you ever thought about...?” Often they don’t get asked when it is convenient for us to listen. And sometimes they are delivered with sarcasm and in a tone of complaint, and it is important to separate the question from the questioner.

**"Innovators recognize that questions are the limiting resource in innovation."
Ed Boyden,
Stanford University
Neurobiologist**

I've spent the last four years crisscrossing the planet, promoting the premise that innovation must become a systematic, sustainable process, just like TQM or Lean or 6 Sigma. But I had not attempted to develop a step-by-step, plug and play set of directions for how managers might more conveniently and quickly create an innovation process in their companies. Until, someone asked.

The result of listening to customer questions in our case is a new web-based, interactive "e-course" for senior executives that we've been hard at work on for over a year. We'll release it the first quarter of next year, and details on how to order your copy will be announced in Tucker on Innovation Q4. The product is a joint venture with Breakthrough Management Group, the leading 6 Sigma training and consulting firm based in Colorado. If you'd like to be a beta-tester of this e-course, please drop me a line at rtucker@innovationresource.com.

One-Day Seminar "Implementing Innovation for Growth"

In today's global economy, operational excellence is not enough. Trying to improve new product development or bring new technology to market without changing the overall approach to innovation often leads to disappointing results. This practical, hands-on executive workshop is designed for acceleration teams just starting out on the innovation journey.

Participants will create an enterprise-wide blueprint for innovation using a step-by-step process based on Robert Tucker's 20 years experience in the field. Each seminar is customized based on responses to TIR's Comprehensive Innovation Assessment. Modules include:

- Leading Innovation in Your Firm
- Maximizing Strategy Innovation
- Fortifying the Idea Factory
- Customer Driven Innovation
- Selecting, Prioritizing, and Implementing Growth Projects
- Taking Action in Your Firm: Translating the Blueprint into Results

Call us to schedule this workshop in Santa Barbara, CA at the Harbor Side Inn conference center or other suitable off-site location.



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