

Soft skills in innovation: Part 1 of 3

Sowing the seeds

It takes courage to start doing things better



INNOVATION is not always a huge and distant goal, but often small and within your capable hands.

Innovators are more like gardeners, someone we can all be.

It is possible for you to gain personal pleasure from gardening, as you do a little, in your own time and in your own way.

Successful gardeners confidently choose the seeds to sow. Next, they take the time to nurture these to their germination point. Finally, they share the fruits of their harvest with others.

So to be successful at innovation, you could become an "innovation gardener", knowing that for innovation to take root, you may need to remove three mental barriers standing in your way.

First, you need the courage to begin the process and select that early idea. Next, you need the time to let that idea develop in a relatively safe environment. Finally, you need to spread the word by communicating your ideas widely.

Today's article begins the journey by finding some courage for innovation.

Courage and fear

Fear is that anxiety you feel or emotions you experience as you wait, nervously anticipating something that could bring potential harm.

Fear derives from the old Saxon word "fār", meaning ambush. It is the emotion you get when you sense external danger.

In contrast, courage is an enabling quality, allowing you to face harmful situations without showing your fears.

Courage stems from the French word for heart, "coeur". It is that inner passion you feel for something you truly believe in.

Courage, then, is not the absence of fear. Rather, it is clarity of purpose, inner strength and willingness to act despite those fears you may feel.

Courage is about belief

Over 30 years ago, psychologist Albert Bandura introduced the theory of "self-efficacy", that is, your belief in your ability to perform tasks well.

Self-efficacious people believe that what they do counts.

They feel strongly that their contributions make a key difference to the success of outcomes.

They see events as challenges to master, rather than dangers to avoid. By taking full ownership of their situation, they know it makes a difference, on both good and bad days.

In his recent book *Clutch*, author Paul Sullivan looked at

pressure and how some people seemed to handle bad days better than others. One reason for this, he found, was their ability to take responsibility for their actions.

Those who took charge were more likely to perform well under intense pressure. Those who did not were more likely to buckle and fall by the wayside.

Courage is internal

Courage comes from within, is focused and uses your powers to act for good in specific directions. When exercised, this intrinsic motivation provides deep satisfaction.

Courage plays to your higher motivational needs. You feel its positive effects over a prolonged period. Intrinsic motivations stum your inner urges to do that which you are passionate about.

Inner passions may be the driving force, yet courageous people are grounded people. They assess and manage risks, ensuring that bravery does not lead to "bravado".

Courage and humility

The hardest part of courage is not that you don't have it. Everybody has it, in different amounts, at different times and for different purposes.

The real challenges come from those around you: How can you

remain comfortable, confident and courageous when others are not?

Courage requires humility, especially from the people surrounding an innovator.

In today's team-oriented world, success is only achieved with the support of all around — upwards, sideways and below.

Good gardeners aim to keep their plants pest-free and so do innovators. They recognise that not everyone may see their courage as a positive quality.

For instance, innovation can lead to more work or harder work for the team.

Initiatives can also become a distraction, diverting attentions and resources away from the team's mission.

Jealousy might also kick in. When you gain some of the sunshine, you might be perceived as taking the limelight away from others.

Work to help your team and boss embrace courage with positive, team-oriented intentions.

Their ability to express confidence and support for your courage will generally lead to greater overall successes for the team.

Next week: Overcoming the second mental barrier to innovation — time

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