



Is Thomas Edison's Innovation Model Still Effective?

Thomas Alva Edison, the great American innovator and businessman, is probably most well-known and appreciated for the invention of the light bulb. However, his passion for innovation earned him 1093 patents. His innovation model worked great in the early 1900s, but is it still an effective approach today? Let's explore this question further.

A few years ago I had the privilege of meeting Thomas Edison's great-grandniece, Sarah Miller Caldicott. She co-authored the book "Innovate Like Edison" with Michael J. Gelb. In this book, Sarah did an excellent job explaining the five-step system that Thomas Edison used for breakthrough business success.

Thomas Edison's Five-Step Innovation System

Step 1: Create a Solution-centered Mindset

The phenomenon of seeing what we want to see is called "mindset." Edison's mindset was clear: to bring out the secrets of nature and apply them for the happiness of man. A solution-centered mindset was his launching pad for the realization of innovation objectives.

Step 2: Develop Kaleidoscopic Thinking

Kaleidoscopic thinking is the ability to liberate your mind from the constraints of habitual thinking. This is more commonly referred to as "thinking outside of the box." The ability to juggle multiple projects, generate ideas, make creative connections, and discern the patterns are all part of kaleidoscopic thinking.

Step 3: Channel Full-spectrum Engagement

Undertaking everything with the least amount of friction and with the whole momentum of his mind enabled Edison to operate in an almost constant state of flow. In other words, it is the ability to engage fully along a remarkable spectrum of behaviors keeping a balance between concentration and relaxation.

For more information on how GaMEP can help you develop an innovation model, contact:

Mike Stonecipher, Project Manager

Expertise includes: Strategic planning, product & process innovation, team development, lean implementation

Georgia Manufacturing Extension Partnership (GaMEP) at Georgia Tech

mike.stonecipher@innovate.gatech.edu



Step 4: Master-mind Collaboration

This competency highlights the need for the coordination of knowledge and effort in a spirit of harmony between two or more people for the attainment of a definite purpose. This form of teamwork can multiply individual brainpower in an expanding framework of positive, creative energy. As a result, the team will generate higher group intelligence.

Step 5: Super-value Creation

Edison learned early in his career that the most rewarding kinds of creativity came from ideas targeted to markets. Creating value for others is the core of personal happiness and business success. To be successful in a business, creativity must be translated into commerce and successful commerce is based on meeting the needs of the customer.

Based on these five steps, the concepts of Edison's model are definitely still applicable and effective. In fact, we see evidence similar to his approach every day, such as team engagement, thinking outside the box and a focus on value creation. However, Edison's model has become limited in capability because he didn't have the benefit of the internet and the ability to conduct open source innovation.

Bill Joy, one of the cofounders of Sun Microsystems, which is now a division of Oracle, made the following observation and quote, "No matter who you are, most of the smartest people work for someone else." This concept became known as Joy's Law. It is based on the belief that the smartest people come from outside the organization and are from different fields, functions, geographical locations, experiences, training, education, and the list goes on. Therefore, the modern open source innovation approach that is enabled by the internet and taps into the brainpower of the smartest people from around the world should become step six on Edison's innovation system to maximize its effectiveness.

***"Anything that won't sell, I don't want to invent.
Its sale is proof of utility, and utility is success."
-Thomas Edison***

For more information on how GaMEP can help you develop an innovation model, contact:

Mike Stonecipher, Project Manager

Expertise includes: Strategic planning, product & process innovation, team development, lean implementation

Georgia Manufacturing Extension Partnership (GaMEP) at Georgia Tech

mike.stonecipher@innovate.gatech.edu