

The

INNOVATIVE MINDSET



*5 Behaviors for
Accelerating
Breakthroughs*

JOHN SWEENEY
ELENA IMARETSKA

WILEY

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FOR ACCELERATING
BREAKTHROUGHS**

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*John: To Jenni and William and Michael, thanks for showing me
what the mindset of discovery looks like each and every day.*

*Elena: To my amazing parents Rada and Dimitar for helping me
discover the world and to my husband Bryan and son Dimitar
for inspiring me to be a better person every day.*

Preface

For more than 15 years I have been speaking about, or conducting training sessions on, innovation for leading corporations across the globe. Clients always tell me during initial calls that they are interested in finding ways to increase innovation in their organizations. If I've heard the question once, I've heard it a thousand times: "What can we do to make our company more innovative?"

Individuals who see me speak or people I run into in my day-to-day life often ask me another question. Whether I'm sitting next to someone on an airplane, serving on a committee for a nonprofit organization, or talking with other parents from my children's school, students in our school of improvisation, or audience members at our theater, people always ask me a little bit about my life and what I do. After we chat a bit they want to know: "What are some things I can do to make myself more innovative?"

This book will try to help answer both questions. Like many of you, my life has been mostly a journey. Many of the stops on the journey have been quite unexpected; my successes and failures have been unpredictable at best. I'm a different person than I was 15 years ago. I have learned more than I've taught and I made some plans, most of which changed. I've been working hard to be a good husband, a good father, and a contributing member of my community, to build a business, and to share what I have learned about innovation with the

thousands of people I speak to and train each year. This book is a collection of observations, stories, and practical advice about how we can become more innovative at work and at home, the science behind our approach, and conversations with people who are truly living behavioral innovation—mixed in with some comedic levity.

I've written this book in concert with a woman who has played a significant role in the success of every aspect of the Brave New Workshop Creative Outreach, Elena Imaretska. She is an international business MBA turned improviser, performer, and new product developer.

Prior to joining the Brave New Workshop, Elena was raised in Bulgaria, studied in Germany, worked in Japan, and received a BA degree at Colorado College in Colorado and an MBA from Arizona's Thunderbird School of Global Management. It's fair to say she's been through the ringer on three continents and recognizes the value new ideas, diversity, and different points of view can bring to a company. Our philosophies about the mindset of discovery as it relates to innovation are extremely similar. This book is from my point of view, but any time I reference *we*, Elena is right there with me.

Elena and I chose to include interviews with innovative thinkers and doers from diverse fields. You will hear from leaders who spend their days in places ranging from the corporate world to a social enterprise venture to city government to a convent in Minnesota to Martin Luther King's church in Montgomery, Alabama. Their stories are personal and diverse for a reason: Innovation demands that we open our minds to all possibilities as a way to find our own personal path to success and solution. We ask that you hear the messages of these stories and then personalize them in a way that works for you. Their journeys and insights will illustrate the concepts we will introduce you to, and hopefully nudge you a bit closer to believing that you yourself can foster an innovative mindset.

This book's goal is to bring the behavioral side of innovation to the forefront of the conversation. We hope it inspires you to embrace the idea that like an athlete or an artist, you can create a daily, weekly, monthly, yearly, and lifetime plan to practice and improve your personal innovation behaviors. It will show that everyone is capable of life-changing and perhaps world-changing innovation, and that if we all choose to simply spend more time in a mindset of discovery instead

of a mindset of fear, our lives and this world can become richer, more productive, and more innovative.

In Chapter 1 we explain how focusing on behavior is an important, and often forgotten, element of creating an innovation culture. Chapter 2 sketches the ups and downs of our organization's growth to illustrate how we have tested the mindset of discovery in our entrepreneurial practice. It also shamelessly attempts to convince you to read on by outlining how an innovative mindset can benefit you personally. Chapter 3 dives into the world of improvisation, and specifically its behavioral and cultural norms, whose study and experience gave us the mindset of discovery. Chapter 4 outlines ways to practice and weave key behaviors into your daily life, and provides examples from the world of improvisation and from a centuries-old spiritual practice. Chapter 5 reveals the mindset of fear and links current research to the reasons behind our quest to transform fear into discovery. After scaring you sufficiently, we deconstruct the mindset of discovery in Chapter 6, and you get to learn why I married my wife. Chapter 7 touches on habit formation and techniques for transforming our behaviors. Chapters 8 through 12 each dive into a specific innovation behavior and give you lots of practical ways to practice that behavior and integrate it into your daily routines. Finally, Chapter 13 wraps it all up together and appeals to your idealism to inspire you to apply the ideas of this book to your daily life.

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1

Behavioral Innovation: Remembering the Human

Chad

What's up?

Melanie

Not much, working on a brainstorming list.

Chad

For what?

Melanie

Brad said everyone on the team had to come up with 10 new ways our product could be used by 10 new types of customers in 10 new markets.

Chad

Sounds simple enough.

Melanie

Truly.

Chad

Did he give you any guidelines?

Melanie

The usual, think outside the box (ugggh!!), no bad ideas, be disruptive, how would Google or Apple approach the list?

Chad

Did he give any restrictions?

Melanie

The usual, has to match our brand, needs to have a huge ROI, has to be for the demographic of moms ages 26 to 38 with more than \$42,000 annual disposable income, needs to pass the legal department test and work within our current distribution, packaging, and marketing plans.

Chad

How's it going?

Melanie

So far, I have a piece of paper and on the top I have written the word "Ideas."

Chad

How long have you been working on it?

Melanie

Six hours.

Chad

When did he ask you to do this?

Melanie

41 days ago.

Chad

When is it due?

Melanie

Tomorrow at 10:30 A.M.

Chad

Want to go get coffee?

Melanie

Meet you at the elevator.

When people approach our organization—Brave New Workshop Creative Outreach—to work with them on their innovation programs, the first step is always to simply set up a call to get to know them and their situation. For more than 15 years I have started with the same question: “Can you tell me a little bit about your current innovation program?”

Although I have posed that question more than one thousand times to thousands of different people in hundreds of different industries and organizations whose programs varied in their degree of development, the answers seem to have much in common and are startlingly consistent. Let’s see if I can paraphrase what I’ve heard:

Recently the leader of our organization decided that innovation is absolutely the most important part of our [insert *principles, values, directives, mission, values statement, strategy, or beliefs*]. The whole company knows that innovation is important because last quarter our leader gave a presentation and the third slide in the 161-slide presentation stated that innovation is the key to our success. She even represented how important it was by illustrating it with a [insert *pillar, pyramid, photo of a light bulb with a question mark in it, or quote from Steve Jobs*]. In response, we have built our innovation program.

So far we have hired a chief innovation officer from outside of our industry; he seems to have worked at several companies in the last decade and we’ve decided that’s a good thing. His job isn’t that well

defined because innovative people really don't like to be shackled by things like job descriptions. We are really excited to have him. We hired an outside consulting firm to define the word *innovation* for our organization, our leader explained, because our culture, company, industry, and customers are so different from those of any other company. The outside firm charged us a ton of money after claiming to spend a lot of time in "research mode" in order to come up with a definition particular to us. As a joke a guy down the hall Googled our innovation definition and we were all a bit surprised that it was only two words different from 16 other organizations' definitions of innovation. Ironically, all of those companies had hired the same third-party consultant that we did.

Once we had our definition we had to get top-down buy-in, so we asked senior executives to volunteer some of their time to head up what we like to refer to as the Innovation Vetting Panel, or IVP. The members gather quarterly to discuss innovative strategies and they decide what ideas and innovations should receive moderate funding to go to the next step. Once I heard a guy in the cafeteria ask if the IVPs wear robes at their meetings and if they have some sort of secret headquarters or sanctum. I chuckled and said I wasn't really sure. But they probably do.

In an organization of our size we clearly couldn't put much pressure on a small number of execs, as their bandwidth is already quite low. So we created an enterprise-wide team of innovation advocates. We named that group of innovation leaders the I Team, so everyone would understand who they are and what they do. The *I* in I Team stand for *innovation*—and that move alone is awfully innovative.

We had our third-party consultant hire a third-party firm to develop an ideation receptacle portal—we call it an IRP—which is a place where people can deposit fresh ideas. What's really cool is that people can also go there and vote on which ideas they like. The third-party firm that our third-party consultant hired came up with a supercool way to rank the ideas: We use a series of red, yellow, and green buttons to allow the user to weigh in on the idea. We really feel that our IRP is state-of-the-art. So far we only have 7 percent participation, and many people have said that it seems as if it's

simply a website in a survey we sent out, but our third-party consultant's third-party firm assured us that it was much more than that.

After taking all of this in, I ask, "So what are some of the results your innovation program has achieved?" Once again, I tend to get a consistent response:

It's funny you ask. Our chief financial officer had a quite similar question. You see, we are in a period of expense efficiency, or as we like to say, operation transformation, and the CFO is interested in identifying tangible and results-based return on investment from our innovation program. That question seemed to really irritate our chief innovation officer.

We've had some attrition in our I Team, as the members sometimes get frustrated that the ideas being generated aren't going to market fast enough. A couple of them have left the company to join small start-ups.

The most successful part of our innovation program seems to be our i'nnovation rally events. They are super well attended, and the energy level is great! We're not sure; however, if we will be able to continue having them, as the survey results showed that the attendees' motivation was tied greatly to the food served at the event.

This is the point in the conversation at which I typically drop the big question. "So, tell me about what your company is doing to help people behave more innovatively?" On the phone, there is always an awkward silence; in person, there is a bit of eye glazing and a far-off stare. In both cases the reply is usually the same: "What do you mean by *behavior*?"

I then get very complicated and scientific in my response, which is typically, "What I mean by behavior is, how do the people in your organization *act*? How do they treat each other? What does it feel like after people come up with ideas? What happens when an innovation attempt fails? How do people treat each other on conference calls or in brainstorming sessions? Does the vibe in the room ever change when certain individuals walk in? What I mean is: *How do people behave?*"

When it comes to a big, beautiful, exciting, but somewhat vague term like innovation, it is easy to migrate to the conceptual, high-level

thinking at which many leaders operate on a daily basis, especially when the enterprise is concerned. And that is absolutely great and necessary for setting strategy, goals, and systemic approaches to becoming a more innovative organization.

However, we often forget about everyday behavior, because in a way it is so basic that the big thinkers—the super smart innovation architects—can assume that everyday behavior is a given that will automatically change once a great system is in place. The old saying “Everything looks like a nail to a hammer” can be an appropriate way to think about the manner in which innovation programs are structured—and often the teams who work on those programs forget a very basic ingredient of a successful innovation effort: *the people*—and all their fears, emotions, and humanness—who need to fuel it.

Although sometimes Steve Jobs is quoted too frequently, we are fans, and can’t help but share the way he put it: “Innovation has nothing to do with how many R&D dollars you have. When Apple came up with the Mac, IBM was spending at least 100 times more on R&D. It’s not about money. It’s about the people you have, how you’re led, and how much you get it.”

Innovation is about people and their assumptions and subconscious thought patterns (a.k.a. their mindset) and their daily actions and habits that stem from that mindset (a.k.a. their behavior). Put all those together, add some procedures, rewards and penalties, social dynamics, unspoken rules—and a pinch of stress—and you get a wonderfully messy, organic, and complex environment. An environment in which behavior, not lip service (although words are also important), drives the results. If you fail to address that daily behavior, even the greatest strategy and plan to drive innovation are doomed to fail.

If the systems we create aren’t rooted in a thorough understanding of the human interaction they are supposed to support they can actually deter the experience we want to create for our customers. Ryan Armbruster, experience lead and cofounder of Harken Health, is a passionate proponent of human-centered design—innovating with the end user, the patient, at the center of everything he does. Ryan is a pioneer and leader of human-centered service design and innovation in the healthcare industry, whose work includes significant roles at UnitedHealth Group and the Mayo Clinic. In addition, he teaches graduate

and executive courses in service design and innovation at the University of Minnesota.

I wanted to bring in Ryan's perspective for a number of reasons. The first is that his innovation motivation starts in his heart. He's simply the type of person who wakes up every morning with an unquenchable yearning to find answers to questions that will help as many people as possible. He innovates for the sake of others, not for the sake of innovation.

He also is innovating in perhaps the most interesting space in American business today: a simple challenge we sometimes refer to as "just fixing healthcare." Even those of us who are outside the healthcare industry know that we're at a very critical place in a very critical time in an industry that embodies one of our most pressing national issues. The answers in healthcare will be a drastic departure from the current status quo. They will be disruptive, and they will come—in some version—at lightning speed compared to innovations in other industries, such as commercial airlines or network television.

Lastly, Ryan has lived in several worlds, from small innovation labs to giant hundred-thousand-person-plus companies. He is simultaneously a teacher and a student of innovation.

Here's a part of a recent conversation we had, which we'll revisit throughout the book:

John: Healthcare is a really great example of an industry that has increased the technology and systemization of its relationship with its customers, but it hasn't necessarily introduced a lot of behavioral innovation.

Ryan: It's an exciting time to be in healthcare, as we have been rapidly evolving on many different fronts, especially in terms of how healthcare and technology intersects, resulting in some groundbreaking innovations.

However, healthcare is complex—I think each of us at one time or another has experienced some level of frustration with the health system, which has been slower to adapt to a more customer-oriented society than our peers in other industry sectors.

John: So how can the healthcare industry change that dynamic?

Ryan: I think our goal over the next 5 or 10 years is to figure out how we design for caring.