



In This Issue

[Freedom to Innovate](#)
[The Washington Webcaster Features June Mickens "Quotes"](#)

Quick Links

[EA Home Page](#)

[About Us](#)

[News](#)

[Contact Us](#)



"Quotes"

"If you don't fail now and again, it's a sign you're playing it safe."
~Woody Allen

"After taking a break to reflect..., I'm excited to launch a new blog that I hope will offer readers an insight into the ... industry[.]"
~Andy Beal

"We have to improve in all areas; we can't stay status quo."
~Wally Buono

"It's a fine balancing act. If you don't innovate right, you're going to screw up your brand image, and if you don't innovate at all, [people] will lose interest."
~Rob Callender

"Don't try to innovate for the future. Innovate for the present."
~Peter Drucker

"When you innovate, you've got to be prepared for everyone telling you you're nuts."
~Larry Ellison

"Sometimes when you innovate, you make mistakes. It is best to admit them quickly and get on with improving your other innovations."
~Steve Jobs

Dear Friend,

New and Improved!

My husband and I were in the grocery store this morning. As we walked up and down the aisles, we saw on boxes and bottles and packages claims of "New and Improved!"

(Okay, the cynic in me is about to show.) Come on. Is it really...new? Is it really...improved? Or, did they just put the same old stuff in new packaging to draw my attention (and dollars) to it? (I told you that I have moments of skepticism!)

A commitment to constant improvement, to innovation, should be central to any business. But, how often is that commitment spoken (and sometimes fervently so), only to be countered by practices that choke the life out of any bit of creativity that dares to be shown? Or, how often is innovation relegated to one arm of an organization (call it "New Initiatives," "Research and Development," or whatever), and everyone else is supposed to park their inventiveness at the door?

No, innovation, at its best, occurs when every function and every person is free to be creative.

So, in this month's edition of **EA Insights**, we focus on three essentials of innovation. I hope you find this information both liberating and productive.

All the best,

June

June Melvin Mickens
Executive Advantage, LLC

Freedom to Innovate

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Business, good business, is about meeting the needs and wants of your customers.

And, this must happen as those needs and wants vary. It must happen despite changes in markets, supply chains, technology, the workforce, and a host of other factors.

Constant improvement, and keeping up with change, requires innovation, though. While some companies innovate just for the sake of being new or daring, most organizations link innovation to improving their ability to meet a need, carry out a function, control a cost. The challenge for that latter group (and, honestly, for most of us) is that it's easy to talk about fostering a culture of innovation, but it's far more difficult to live this out on a daily basis.

So, how does a company, a department, or a team make innovation real? It's wrapped up in **freedom**.

Freedom to buck the status quo

True innovation never will occur in an environment that is mired in the way things always have been.

To foster innovation, leaders must free themselves and their team members to view nothing as "off limits." (That is, unless a matter involves something that is immoral, illegal, or completely contrary to the



organization's values.) However, when leaders free their folks to buck the status quo (even if the original ideas or practices were their babies), they unleash the creative juices that enable people to be on the lookout for improvements, cost savings, new markets, etc.

Freedom to think and explore

It's hard to be innovative, when you're constantly scrambling because of inadequate staffing, unclear priorities, or constant fires.

It's hard to be innovative, when you've been told that it's your job to *do*, not to *think*.

It's hard to be innovative, when you are not exposed to other parts of the company or not included in problem identification and solving.

If innovation truly is important to an organization, people must be free to think and explore.

What is the problem we're facing?

What are our untapped resources?

What is the feedback we're receiving from our customers?

What are possible options to bring about the results we're after?

What is the best choice, given whom we are or desire to be?

The questions aren't always obvious, and the answers don't just materialize. Often innovation involves a process that requires time for exploration, thought, and working through different options. And, in many respects, this is where the true nature of the leader's and the organization's commitment to innovation is shown; it comes through the grant of actual time, resources, or information to think and explore.

Freedom to fail

Some of the best "finds" come as a result of, or following, failure.

For a commitment to innovation to be real, the people involved must know that they are free to fail. Now, that doesn't mean that you are inviting people to fail. (That can be costly, embarrassing, time consuming...you name it!) However, instilling the notion that it's okay to fail, while on the quest for answers or improvement, gives people permission to think beyond what is safe and to be wildly creative in arriving at solutions.

So, are you serious about innovation? If so, know that it goes hand-in-hand with encouragement, time, and patience. Ah, but when you offer these three freedoms, the results often are beyond your expectations!

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The Washington Webcaster Features Executive Advantage's June Mickens



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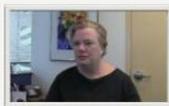
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Edition 5
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"Going Green"

Check out Edition 5 (December 17, 2012) of The Washington Webcaster.

Executive Advantage's own June Mickens is featured in this edition on infrastructure development.

[Click here](#)

"[I]n the long term, innovation will be a strategy to survive in a highly competitive world. If the companies don't innovate to open up new business opportunities, they will sink."

~Kiran Karnik

"A company's ability to innovate, improve, and learn ties directly to the company's value."

~David Norton

"We can't maintain the status quo and expect growth. We have to innovate with price, marketing and our product."

~John Porter

"'Status quo,' you know, is Latin for 'the mess we're in'."

~Ronald Reagan

"What great things would you attempt, if you knew you could not fail?"

~Robert H. Schuller

"That doesn't mean that competition is getting any less. It just means that companies have to turn inward to innovate in order to boost profits and customer satisfaction."

~Diane Swonk

"I have always been driven to buck the system, to innovate, to take things beyond where they've been."

~Sam Walton

"It sounds like a pretty simple idea. But it hadn't been done before. Listening to what our customers needed forced us to innovate and ultimately develop new products for them."

~Ronald Williams

About Executive Advantage

At **Executive Advantage**, we are committed to providing results-based business and management consulting, leadership development, and coaching support. We partner with business leaders to build healthy, well-functioning organizations, where goals are met and people thrive. We also partner with individuals to create professional (and personal) lives with clearer direction, improved results, and greater balance.

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