

Innovating with Meaning



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Innovating with Meaning: You Reap What You Sow | posted by Dr. Alex Pattakos

We would like to briefly share key lessons from the bestselling book, *The Seeds of Innovation*. From our experience conducting research, teaching, practicing, and consulting in Innovation Management for over 20 years, we see that *innovative* thinking can be enhanced by improving core competencies (i.e., knowledge, skills, and attitude) in three key areas: Creative Thinking, Strategic Thinking, and Transformational Thinking. Outlined below is a quick overview of the 9 "seeds of innovation." For more details and tools and techniques, please see our book, *The Seeds of Innovation*.

The Seeds of Creative Thinking

Overall business performance can be enhanced if employees are encouraged to believe in their own creative thinking abilities, become more curious, and discover new connections.

Seed #1: Believe in Creativity

It is not enough for a leader to simply encourage "creativity" and creative thinking. Everyone must *believe* in their own creative thinking abilities. They must also be willing to **unlearn** some of their old habits in order to truly participate in the innovation agenda and become an integral part of the organization's innovation engine.

Seed #2: Be Curious

The foundation of creativity is the curious mind. Without a curious mind, many great opportunities will simply slip by unnoticed. Employees should be encouraged to broaden their perspectives and look for ideas beyond their particular department, organization, and industry. Innovative organizations encourage their employees to ask questions and challenge "the way it's done in our industry." It is important to note that employees can be encouraged to ask questions while still respecting the essence and realities of organizational life.

Seed #3: Discover New Connections

Creativity involves connecting diverse objects or thoughts in a new way. For some, this is an easy task. For others, learning specific creativity connection techniques is beneficial for jumpstarting their creative thinking.

The Seeds of Strategic Thinking

Creative thinking is only part of the overall concept of "innovative" thinking. In order to be truly innovative, a creative idea must add value to the organization. Employees need to develop their ability to turn their creative ideas into strategic ideas that can bring maximum value to the organization. Employees can learn skills in seeing the BIG picture, looking to the future, and doing the extraordinary.

Seed #4: See the BIG Picture

Often employees will bring creative ideas forward and expect their leader to determine how it fits or doesn't fit the strategic context of the business. It should be the *responsibility* of each and every employee to understand the overall business context within which his or her creative ideas may fit. Employees can learn skills in seeing the bigger picture and enhancing their understanding of how things are *interconnected* within the organization and in the overall marketplace.

Seed #5: Look to the Future

All employees need to be challenged to look to the future instead of holding too tightly onto the past and "the way it's done in our industry." Once employees have these insights into the future, they need to develop the skills to integrate these new ideas into their operating plans. In addition to being able to share *best practices*, all employees, more importantly, should also be able to look for "next" practices.

Seed #6: Do the Extraordinary

Great innovators evolve from the ordinary to the **extraordinary**. Employees can learn how to apply the strategies and ideas of great innovators, as well as develop a predisposition for stretching beyond the norm.

The Seeds of Transformational Thinking

Employees need to be encouraged not to overlook the "human side" of innovation. In our experience, *you can not have organizational transformation without personal transformation*. Specific *intra-personal* and *inter-personal* strategies for developing, presenting, and implementing new ideas can be learned and practiced.

Seed #7: Seek Greater Awareness

Innovators benefit from gaining a greater awareness of themselves and the effect their behavior can have on others, as well understanding the dynamics of innovation in the team and organizational setting.

Seed #8: Ignite Passion

Passion is really about linking creativity with a higher purpose. Ultimately, as Tom Peters would say, passion is what makes and sustains "excellence" (and thereby innovation) in organizations. Employees can benefit from developing skills for overcoming resistance to change, as well as skills to continually ignite their own passion while they work to identify, recommend, and implement new ideas.

Seed #9: Take Action

Great ideas are not really "innovative" unless they are successfully implemented. Employees can learn specific action steps that can increase the likelihood of an idea being understood, accepted, and implemented. They can also learn specific steps to help build the collaborative networks needed to support new ideas.

The seeds of *creative* thinking, *strategic* thinking, and *transformational* thinking need to be integrated in order to capitalize fully upon the innovative thinking potential of *all* employees. Are you Innovating with Meaning by enhancing *your* core competencies in these 9 key areas?

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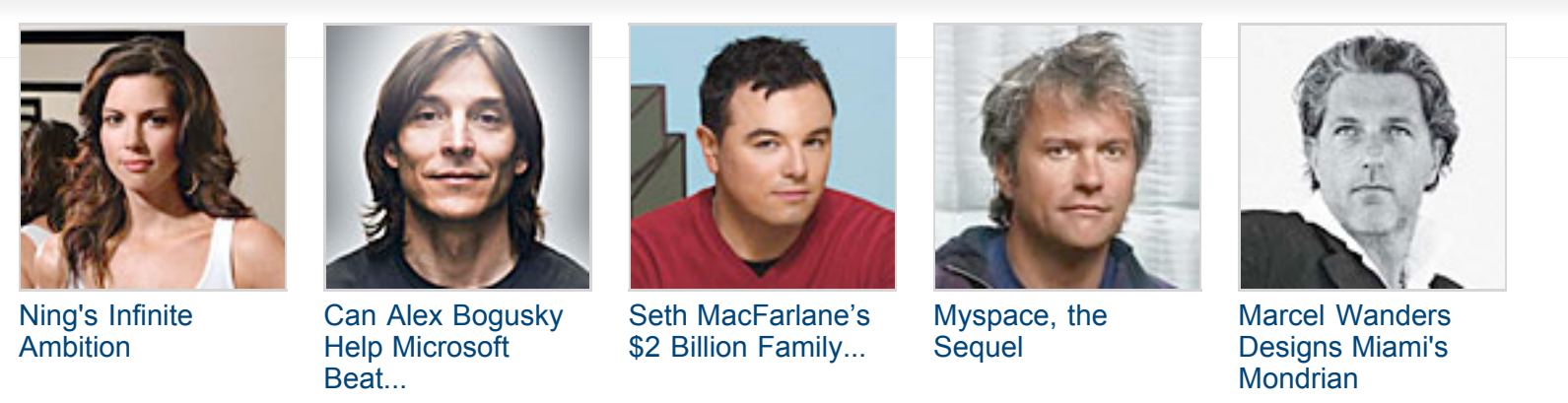
Dr. Alex Pattakos is the author of *Prisoners of Our Thoughts* (www.prisonersofourthoughts.com) and Elaine Dundon is author of *The Seeds of Innovation* (www.seedsofinnovation.com). They are co-authors of an article, "Innovating with Meaning," in *Leadership Excellence Magazine* (November 2008) and the book, *Innovating with Meaning* (forthcoming).

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