

# **American Ingenuity... No Limits, No Boundaries**

by Barry Wishner

## **Run For Your Life**

**This is the story about a dog in the woods.**

**He told all the other animals that he could catch any of them without any problem at all.**

**None of the animals, of course, believed him.**

**So, among themselves, they volunteered Mr. Rabbit to see if Mr. Dog could live up to what he claimed for himself.**

**Well, it was a mighty race.**

**The dog chased the rabbit.**

**Guess what. The dog does not catch the rabbit.**

**And, of course, after the race, all the other animals in the woods were looking around and laughing at the dog.**

**Finally the dog said to them all, "I gotta tell ya.**

**I was running for the fun of it. That rabbit was running for his life!"**

**It's no longer good enough in American business today to simply run with the pack. You have to be out front. You can't just plod along, you have to fly past the competition. You have to use your natural speed, agility and — most of all — ingenuity.**

## **Reflections On Ingenuity and It's Place in American Business**

**Recently I was speaking before an audience comprised primarily of Presidents, CEOs and owners of businesses. I posed the question: "How many of you believe that Innovation/Ingenuity is the key to survival and outsmarting the competition." There was unanimous agreement. I then asked, "How many have an execution plan in place that serves as a catalyst to guaranteed that ingenuity and innovation are implemented at your company?" Unfortunately, no one had a plan.**

**My challenge to all business leaders and entrepreneurs is to develop a R.O.I. — Return On Ingenuity — Plan. (A written plan. When it's in writing, you have a prayer. When it's not, you have nothing but air!)**

## Secrets to Developing Innovative Ideas:

- **It Starts With Oneself**
- **The Challenge Is To get The Old Ideas Out, Before Trying To Put New Ideas In**
- **Ideas Do Not Mean Anything Until They're Heard**
- **Great Ideas Need Landing Gear, As Well As Wings (Making it happen is the tough part.)**
- **The Realization That Every Big Idea Was A Small Idea Before It Became A Big Idea**
- **Big Ideas = Big Changes**
- **Look Under All The Rocks**
- **Avoid The Myth That If Anything Comes To You Easy It Doesn't Count**
- **Never Fall In Love With An Idea**

## Turning On The Ingenuity Light

In Silicon Valley, where I live, a practice among the more successful companies is to give their employees one day off a month to work at their house, or in their garden, or wherever...and just think. All communication with the outside world is to be cut off: phones, faxes, computers, etc. Their job becomes one of simple tasks, and just thinking creatively. (As many of us are aware, Einstein's breakthrough ideas often occurred while shaving.)

Another way to encourage creative thinking is to hold employee meetings in unusual surroundings. San Francisco companies have rented out art and car museums, taken employees to zoos and other places, to stimulate and inspire creative thinking. James J. Schiro, CEO of PricewaterhouseCooper, routinely takes his executive staff to cooking classes — assigning them to appetizers, entrees and deserts. It's a great way to develop team building and to get a free meal!

Having interviewed over 300 Fortune 500 CEOs, one of the major traits of leaders with ingenuity is they develop a mindset of "Daring To Be Different." They realize they either differentiate themselves, their companies and products...or they disappear. As we know, in business, most products and services have become commodities. Everything is beginning to look the same, smell the same, and taste the same. The solution, as the late musician Jerry Garcia said: "You have to be considered the only one who can do what you can do."

## How Do You Make The "Daring To Be Different" Happen

- **Realize that the impossible is often an opinion, not a statement of fact.**
- **Put everything that you're currently doing on trial.**
- **Adopt the philosophy that there are no corporate sacred cows.**
- **Challenge conventional wisdom and the status quo.**
- **Create a mindset that ignores "What is" for "What could be."**

## Closing Thought

If one goes back and studies American business over the past 100 years, the one core value which has been the one constant for all successful companies is ingenuity. It's a given that the future will belong to those companies which continue to adopt ingenuity as their competitive advantage.

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