

# Introduction

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**I**nnovation means so many things: new-product development, new brands, new ad campaigns, new Web sites, new production processes, new designs, new strategies, new solutions to persistent problems, and a great deal more.

Truth is, you need to innovate to succeed in your working life. The creative, forward-thinking people are the ones who make their mark and get ahead. It's often risky to try new things or propose new approaches, but it's even more risky to play it safe and close your mind to creative change. If you don't take the lead as an innovator in your workplace and your field, you can be quite sure that somebody else will.

Businesses need to innovate too — and by *businesses*, I mean any organizations where people work, including startups, small businesses, big businesses, government offices and agencies, schools, hospitals, theaters, museums, temples, and churches.

My work has brought me into all these workplaces and many more. It's so rewarding to help people create their own, better futures by teaching and facilitating the challenging process of innovation. It's the most fun work I've ever done, except, I suppose, when I'm the innovator myself and am creating a new product, building a new business, or producing something innovative just for pleasure (such as a new art exhibit). Without innovation, work would be a dull, thankless routine. With it, there's a reason to get up and rush to work each morning. Innovation gives us energy, and it gives energy to our workplaces as well, allowing them to grow and prosper instead of stagnate and fail.

## *About This Book*

There's a great need for innovators. In fact, that's really all we need right now. People who resist change and don't want to discuss new options and ideas are of no use to the world today, if they ever were. We humans are the innovators. Innovation is what separates us from all other life forms on this planet, and what creates the social and economic growth that we need to nurture to prevent future economic meltdowns.

Your career, wherever it may be today, will accelerate if you pay more attention to how you contribute ideas, manage their development, and spearhead their implementation. Whether you work as a lone inventor, an enthusiastic entrepreneur, or a salaried staffer who insists on finding the time to contribute to new initiatives, your innovativeness stimulates your own career and contributes to the healthy growth of the organizations and people surrounding you.

In working with tens of thousands of employees all across North America, I've found that many of us working stiffs already know the basics of how to brainstorm ideas. Sure, I could show you many more advanced techniques, but I assume that you've already been exposed to the basics and feel confident about how to brainstorm, either alone at your desk or with a small group in a conference room. But here's the other statistic that I've gathered in my travels as an author, educator, and consultant: Basic brainstorming and its variants take place regularly in very few workplaces.

There you have the paradox of innovation in business: Everyone knows how to generate fresh new ideas, but nobody uses these techniques. As a consequence, most decisions are made without anyone examining a full set of creative options. Many opportunities to innovate are lost, and usually nobody even realizes that an opportunity has passed by.

So you see, I have a personal agenda in writing *Business Innovation For Dummies*. I want to help you and others actually use the incredibly powerful tools and techniques of innovation. I want you to try being an active, practicing innovator. Give it a try for the next week or two. If you like it, extend the experiment to a month. If that works for you, try being an innovator all year. I'm pretty darn sure you'll get hooked for life, and your life will be far richer for it.

## Conventions Used in This Book

When you're reading this book, be aware of the following conventions:

- ✓ Whenever I introduce a new term, I *italicize* it.
- ✓ Any information that's helpful or interesting but not essential appears in *sidebars*, which are the gray-shaded boxes sprinkled throughout the book.
- ✓ Web sites and e-mail addresses appear in `monofont` to help them stand out. When this book was printed, some Web addresses may have needed to break across two lines of text. If that happened, rest assured that I haven't put in any extra characters (such as hyphens) to indicate the break. When you use one of these Web addresses, just type exactly what you see in this book, pretending that the line break doesn't exist.

Additional conventions that you should be aware of are my uses of three terms that appear often in this book: *innovation*, *creativity*, and *brainstorming*.

- ✔ **Innovation** is applied creativity or creativity for a purpose. It involves creative generation of new ideas, designs, plans, and so on — and then it involves the development and refinement of those ideas and their implementation. Sometimes, innovators need to bring their inventions to market, putting on their sales hats to finish the process. At other times, the end user is within the innovator’s own organization. Still other situations may involve spreading an innovation to society to benefit public health or for some other worthy cause. Whatever the goal, innovation has a practical purpose that aims to create value by changing something in the real world, not just in the imagination.
- ✔ **Creativity** simply means coming up with fresh ideas, designs, or solutions. It’s often the result of intuitive “aha” insights but also can come after careful analytical study of a topic. Artists are often creative, but not always. Businesses sometimes do creative things, but less often than artists do. Everyone working in business, however, can and should do some creative thinking every day. This book shows you how to weave more creativity into your work, and how to profit from the benefits of having fresh ideas and new perspectives to offer to your workplace and field or industry.
- ✔ **Brainstorming** refers to the broad range of structured techniques for idea generation. Alex Osborn, a cofounder of the giant advertising agency BBDO, coined that term back in the 1940s, and it’s become a generic term that almost everyone uses. It’s cumbersome to say *idea-generation techniques*, so people say *brainstorming* instead. Osborn had a specific technique in mind when he first used the term, however, and if you want to follow his specific brainstorming rules, see Chapter 6.

## *Foolish Assumptions*

I assume that you’re intelligent (not a foolish assumption, given what I know about my past readers). But although I believe that you’re intelligent, I assume that you don’t have all the technical knowledge, practical experience, and encouragement and support needed to come up with creative insights or innovate with success in your workplace. Everybody needs some help when it comes to innovation. You’ll find lots of helpful methods and ideas here.

I also assume that you’re able to adapt the techniques and examples in this book to your own situation. The methods I cover are very broadly applicable. Have faith that you can adapt them to almost any situation. Sometimes, it might take a little creativity, but I’m sure that you’re up to the challenge of making innovation happen wherever you are!

Further, I assume that you're willing and able to switch from being imaginative and creative one moment to being analytical and rigorous the next. Innovators need to take both perspectives, depending on the challenge at hand. Sometimes, you need to compare options and reject the weakest. At other times, you need to suspend judgment and open yourself to fresh ideas and possibilities. Knowing when to be open and when to be tough is part of the art of being an innovator. Try to be aware of which role you're taking at any particular moment so that you can switch from creative to critical thinking as each situation requires.

Finally, I assume that you'll not only work on your own creativity and innovation skills, but also will encourage others. It takes lots of people to make the world a better place.

## *How This Book Is Organized*

This book is organized in parts that I describe in the following sections. Check out the table of contents for more information on the topics of the chapters within each part.

### *Part I: Making Your Mark as an Innovator*

The expression "to make your mark" is interesting because it suggests two different things. Making a mark means making an impact or a difference by doing something that other people remember and appreciate. Also, your mark means your personal stamp or brand, so making your mark means more than just making a difference; it also means being remembered or known personally for what you do.

In Part I, I show you how to apply your creative energy in ways that benefit both your organization or workplace as a whole and you as an individual pursuing your own career. Whatever your line of work, the chapters in this part help you bring more reactive energy and innovation to what you do on a daily basis so that you open your career options and see more and better possibilities for yourself. I show you how to step up as a leader of innovation before diving into the specifics of bringing the power of innovation to sales, marketing, and strategic planning.

There are many ways to make your mark as an innovator. I can't wait to see what you'll do next!

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## ***Part II: Stimulating Your Creative Side: Thinking in New and Different Ways***

Innovation has to start with a novel idea. People with better ideas rise to the top, floating their organizations and associates up along with them. That's the force of a strong creative idea, and to generate more of them when and where they'll do the most good, read this part with care!

Part II is an essential primer on how to run a productive, effective idea-generating session, as well as a deep toolbox full of powerful creativity techniques. It also focuses on ways to turn a specific problem or crisis into a great opportunity for forward progress and innovation, because problems are often perfect opportunities for introducing modest proposals based on your radically new ideas.

Also in this part, I share one of the secrets of successful innovators: You can often find existing innovations and bring them into your workplace or product line without the full cost and trouble of developing them from scratch. These *found innovations* are extremely important in the business world, and this book is the only one I know of that addresses them. Finally, I really let the cat out of the bag by sharing an even deeper secret of top innovators: You can create breakthroughs by combining two or more good existing ideas or designs. Inventing something entirely new would be nice, but it's actually amazingly difficult. More often in business, innovations are the result of clever combinations of other people's breakthroughs, with just enough originality to make them unique.

## ***Part III: Applying Creativity and Innovation to Daily Challenges***

Innovators often focus on really big goals: develop a best-selling new product, patent a winning new design, or create a new business model that produces runaway profits. Major breakthroughs are great, but they don't come along every day. What should you do in the interim to keep your creative edge and continue to make your mark in small but significant ways?

This part helps you apply innovative thinking and methods to some of the common challenges of daily work. I show you how to create compelling, memorable presentations and proposals that sway people's minds. I also show you how to apply the power of innovation to conflict resolution and negotiations; the force of creative thinking can easily sway the outcome in new and better directions.

Finally, I tackle an unpleasant but essential reality of business life: the need to find ways to cut costs. Budget cuts are usually performed with a very dull knife. I'd much rather equip you with a creative mind and an ability to turn budget problems into opportunities for improvement.

## *Part IV: Implementing a Major Innovation*

Usually, you won't be able to work alone as an innovator. It takes a team at the very least, and this part shows you how to form and run effective development teams to bring your innovation to life. In Part IV, I dive into the art and science of spreading the word and getting people to trade their old ideas, habits, and shopping patterns for new ones. I also focus on the ownership of inventions, designs, and expressions of ideas — the so-called *intellectual property* that people continually sue about in courts around the world. You probably need to study intellectual-property laws and practices to be a savvy innovator, avoiding trouble and taking advantage of the many benefits and protections that the law affords.

## *Part V: The Part of Tens*

I have so many exciting tips and ideas that I want to share with you, and this part contains 40 of them. Each pointer in the Part of Tens is a useful technique that didn't find a home in one of the main chapters of the book but probably ought to find a home in your approach to building your career, managing the creative process, and implementing the innovations that will make your mark visible for all the world to see.

## *Icons Used in This Book*



Look for these symbols to help you find valuable information throughout the text.

This icon alerts you to points in the text where I provide added insight on how to get a handle on a concept.



This icon points out mistakes and pitfalls to avoid. Whatever you do, don't skip these paragraphs!



Any information that's especially important and worth remembering gets this icon.



This icon points out real-life applications of the theories of creativity and innovative business practices.

## *Where to Go from Here*

The beauty of *Business Innovation For Dummies* is that you can skip to any part, chapter, or section, depending on your needs. You can certainly read the book from cover to cover, but you don't have to.

If you're about to plunge into a meeting or work session in which you really need some fresh ideas or insights, you might try making Part II your starting point. Flip through the chapters to find something you can try right away. There's nothing quite as satisfying as a fresh list of 10 or 20 helpful ideas to get you going, and the chapters in Part II can certainly deliver that many, if not a great deal more.

If you're thinking more broadly about your working life and how to pump it up with new energy and momentum, start with Chapter 1, and read as many of the chapters after it as you can. The book makes a good self-study workshop that will certainly change your approach to work if you give it half a chance.

