

What Innovation Feels Like

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There are countless books and articles on **innovation**. You can read how others have done it, what worked and what didn't, how best to organize the company and how to define it. But I have not read much about how it feels to do **innovation**.

Before anything meaningful can happen, there must be discontent or anger. And for that there needs to be a realization that doing things like last time is a bad idea. This realization is the natural outcome of looking deeply at how things really are and testing the assumptions of the status quo. And the best way to set all this in motion is to do things that generate immense boredom.

Boredom can be created in two ways. 1. Doing the same boring work in the same boring way. 2. Stopping all activity for 30 minutes a day and swimming in the sea of your boring thoughts. Both work well, but the second one works faster.

Next, with your discontent in hand, it's time birth the right question. Some think this the time for answers, but with **innovation** the real work is to figure out the question. The discomfort of trying to discover the right question is seven times more uncomfortable the discomfort of figuring out the right answer. And once you have the right question, the organization rejects you as a heretic. If the organization doesn't dismiss you in a visceral way, you know you don't have the right question. You will feel afraid, but repeat the cycle until your question threatens the very thing that has made the company successful. When people treat you like you threaten them, you know you're on to something.

To answer your question, you need help from the organization, but the organization withholds them from you. If you are ignored, blocked or discredited, you're on the right path. Break the rules, disregard best practices, and partner with an old friend who trusts you. Together, rally against the organization and do the work to answer your question. If you feel isolated, keep going. You will feel afraid and you will second guess yourself. Proceed to the next step.

Make a prototype that shows the organization that your question has an answer. Don't ask, just build. Show the prototype to three people and prepare for rejection. You and your prototype will be misunderstood and devalued. Not to worry, as this is a good sign. Revise the prototype and repeat.

Do anything you can to show the prototype to a customer. Video the customer as they interact with the prototype. You will feel afraid because you are breaking the rules. This is how you should feel. Keep going.

Set up a meeting with a leader who can allocate resources. If you have to, set up the meeting under false pretenses (the organization is still in rejection mode) and show the video. Because of the uncertainty of their response, you will feel afraid. Show the video anyway.

The organization is comfortable working in the domains of certainty and control, but **innovation** is done in the domain of uncertainty. By definition, the organization will reject your novel work. If you are rejected, keep going. Revise your heretical question, build a prototype to answer it, show a customer, show someone who can allocate resources, and be afraid all along the way. And repeat, as needed.

With **innovation**, mostly you feel afraid.

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