

The Pursuit of Luck

Innovation is a low-odds business—and luck sure helps. (It’s jolly well helped me!) If you believe that success does owe a lot to luck, and that luck in turn owes a lot to getting in the way of unexpected opportunities, you need not throw up your hands in despair. There *are* strategies you can pursue to get a little nuttiness into your life, and perhaps, then, egg on good luck. (By contrast, if you believe that orderly plans and getting up an hour earlier are the answer, then by all means arise before the rooster and start planning.)

Want to get lucky? Try following these 50 (!) strategies:

1. At-bats. More times at the plate, more hits.
2. Try it. Cut the baloney and get on with *something*.
3. Ready. Fire. Aim. (Instead of Ready. Aim. Aim. Aim. ...)
4. “If a thing is worth doing, it is worth doing badly.”—G.K. Chesterton. You’ve gotta start somewhere.
5. Read odd stuff. Look anywhere for ideas.
6. Visit odd places. Want to “see” speed? Visit CNN.
7. Make odd friends.
8. Hire odd people. Boring folks, boring ideas.
9. Cultivate odd hobbies. Raise orchids. Race yaks.
10. Work with odd partners.
11. Ask dumb questions. “How come computer commands all come from keyboards?” *Somebody* asked that one first; hence, the mouse.
12. Empower. The more folks feel they’re running their own show, the more at-bats, etc.
13. Train without limits. Pick up the tab for training unrelated to work—keep everyone engaged, period.
14. Don’t back away from passion. “Dispassionate innovator” is an oxymoron.
15. Pursue failure. Failure is success’s only launching pad. (The bigger the goof, the better!)
16. Take anti-NIH pills. Don’t let “not invented here” keep you from ripping off nifty ideas.
17. Constantly reorganize. Mix, match, try different combinations to shake things up.
18. Listen to everyone. Ideas come from anywhere.
19. Don’t listen to anyone. Trust your inner ear.
20. Get fired. If you’re not pushing hard enough to get fired, you’re not pushing hard enough. (More than once is okay.)
21. Nurture intuition. If you can find an interesting market idea that came from a rational plan, I’ll eat *all* my hats. (I have quite a collection.)
22. Don’t hang out with “all the rest.” Forget the same tired trade association meetings, talking with the same tired people about the same tired things.
23. Decentralize. At-bats are proportional to the amount of decentralization.
24. Decentralize again.
25. Smash all functional barriers. Unfettered contact among people from different disciplines is magic.
26. Destroy hierarchies.

27. Open the books. Make everyone a “businessperson,” with access to all the financials.
28. Start an information deluge. The more real-time, unedited information people close to the action have, the more that “neat stuff” happens.
29. Take sabbaticals.
30. “Repot” yourself every 10 years. (This was the advice of former Stanford Business School dean Arjay Miller—meaning change careers each decade.)
31. Spend 50 percent of your time with “outsiders.” Distributors and vendors will give you more ideas in five minutes than another five-hour committee meeting.
32. Spend 50 percent of your “outsider” time with wacko outsiders.
33. Pursue alternative rhythms. Spend a year on a farm, six months working in a factory or burger shop.
34. Spread confusion in your wake. Keep people off balance, don’t let the ruts get deeper than they already are.
35. *Disorganize*. Bureaucracy takes care of itself. The boss should be “chief dis-organizer,” Quad/Graphics CEO Harry Quadracci told us.
36. “Dis-equilibrate ... Create instability, even chaos.” Good advice to “real leaders” from Professor Warren Bennis.
37. Stir curiosity. Igniting youthful, dormant curiosity in followers is the lead dog’s top task, according to Sony chairman Akio Morita.
38. Start a Corporate Traitors’ Hall of Fame. “Renegades” are not enough. You need people who despise what you stand for.
39. Give out “Culture Scud Awards.” Your best friend is the person who attacks your corporate culture head-on. Wish her well.
40. Vary your pattern. Eat a different breakfast cereal. Take a different route to work.
41. Take off your coat.
42. Take off your tie.
43. Roll up your sleeves.
44. Take off your shoes.
45. Get out of your office. Tell me, honestly, the last time something inspiring or clever happened at that big table in your office?!
46. Get rid of your office.
47. Spend a workday each week at home.
48. Nurture peripheral vision. The interesting “stuff” usually is going on beyond the margins of the professional’s ever-narrowing line of sight.
49. Don’t “help.” Let the people who work for you slip, trip, fall—and grow and learn on their own.
50. Avoid moderation in all things. “Anything worth doing is worth doing to excess,” according to Edwin Land, Polaroid’s founder.

Now write down the opposite of each of the 50. Which set comes closer to your profile?*

In short, loosen up!

* This list was stimulated by a friend who attended a several-day seminar I conducted in early 1991. The group, I thought, was vigorous. Her comment on the last day: “Are *all* those people dead?” It shook me and got me wondering about the narrowness of my own vision.