

Allen Iverson & Innovation

As much as he is a famous NBA Hall of Famer, Allen Iverson will always be remembered for his infamous quote: **“We are talkin’ about practice.”** At the time, interviewers were challenging Iverson because he had missed a practice session and were questioning his commitment to the team. He then went on 3-minute rhetorical commentary about practice.



So, you are probably wondering, “Corey, what does that have to do with innovation?” My response is that it has everything to do with innovation. Actually, I would go as far as to say that it is a core part of innovation. Innovation is really easy to talk about it. It's probably one of your department's key goals or built into your company's mission statement, but it's not so easy to do. It's even harder to make it a habit in your day-to-day workflow. Ultimately, *it comes down to practice.*

As competition for market share and customer loyalty is at every corner, organizations are increasingly embracing innovation as a tool to drive their business forward. According to an Accenture survey, over 65% of North American companies are hiring CIOs (Chief Innovation Officers) and more than 90% are using new technologies to support the innovation process.

In my research on innovative leadership, I found a research paper about the thought process behind innovation published by the Institute of Advanced Discovery & Innovation at the University of South Florida. The research explained that innovation is a series of steps and that innovators possess certain characteristics that every individual possesses to varying degree. Additionally, this research looked at what those characteristics are and how we can “awaken” them in order to unleash our own innovative genius.

In working with organizations across all industries for over 15 years, I have learned that one can benefit greatly from practicing the following 4 key habits to developing innovation at the individual and organizational level. They are simply: Go. Copy. Ask. Put.

1. Go Back in Time

Go and look back at methods and services that were used in your business or sector years ago but have now fallen out of use. Can you bring one back in a new updated form? Even as you read this article, fashion brands of 30 years ago like Champion, Crocs, and Dr. Martens are getting a resurgence as their once outdated brand is now looked upon as “unique” and “original”.

Action: At your next meeting, bring up or ask about what was working well for the organization 10 years ago that may be worth revisiting.

2. Copy Someone Else's Idea

Imitation is the greatest form of flattery and one of the best ways to innovate is to pinch an idea that works elsewhere and apply it in your business. You do not have to look far to see how shopping malls have imitated hotels and how healthcare organizations have copied real estate agent practices. Henry Ford saw the production line working in a meat packing plant and then applied this method to the automotive industry to dramatically reduce assembly times and costs and changing the industry around the world. Even Steve Jobs repeatedly referenced Star Trek during product releases and frankly, a number of Apple products strongly resemble Star Trek aesthetic and functionality.

Action: Look at leaders in industries outside of yours and see what they are doing that is bringing them success.

3. Ask Impossible Questions.

In the context of innovation, impossible questions are more useful than hard questions. Impossible questions challenge the scale of your ambition with the problem itself. This can turbocharge creativity and will launch you into problem solving mode instantly. Dee Daa, a Thai restaurant chain based in NYC, needed to tell the world about its authentic dishes, yet couldn't afford traditional media. The company asked, "How can we make something we're already doing spark more conversations than an advertisement could?" The team focused on its packaging and drew inspiration from the Thai Pinto "lunchbox" to create iconic, authentic, and remarkable packaging (especially amid the sea of generic take-away containers). The Pinto is now one of Dee Daa's most recognizable brand assets and the company has positioned itself as a category thought leader.

Action: Write down 3 questions that seem impossible for the organization to achieve today and share them with peers in your organization. The responses will create conversations and possibilities that would have seemed ridiculous just last month.

4. Put Yourself in Innovative Environments

It's probably no surprise that your environment plays a major part in developing the innovative characteristics you possess and also determines how often you use them. In my world of learning and performance I have seen and continue to see how much more innovative people are when they are in collaborative settings.

To maximize collaborative encounters, Marriott International hosts "Innovation Days," at its global corporate head office. These "Innovation Days" are an internal conference to bring people from across the organization together and to provide a space to ignite new ideas. The results of these Innovation Days have turned into a stronger customer experiences and improved returns for the entire business.



Action: Create an innovation team or add the topic of innovation to your next team meeting to get the ball rolling.

From this list, we can see that innovation is really about practice. Practice looking back, copying great ideas, asking different questions, and putting yourself in situations that promote innovation. Start building your innovation mindset by following Iverson's lead... **"We are talkin' about practice."**

Corey Atkinson

VP of Strategic Learning & Development

corey@mycspn.com

Office: 905-477-5544

Cell: 416-898-6433

Follow Corey on [LinkedIn](#). His focus is to deliver meaningful and measurable strategies for organizations to harness team potential and create engaging leaders. With over 20 years in the learning, development and training industry, Corey is well known for his ability to connect with any audience at any size. He has provided participant focused learn and development design and consulting, professional speaking, coaching and training for organizations - of all sizes - across North America. He has a focused results-based partnership approach to develop and deliver customized solutions that meet an organization's unique business needs and resolve their most significant issues, helping them to create a lasting competitive advantage.