



## Keeping Your Current Business Thriving While Simultaneously Innovating the Future

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Leaders today know that their organization must innovate in order to survive. In fact, no organization can exist without having some kind of innovation present. Innovation can lead an organization to new dimensions of performance. It is no longer strictly the purview of research and development departments. Innovation is important for all aspects of business and all processes. It isn't only about products and merely adapting to changing conditions. Organizations should be led and managed so that *innovation becomes part of the culture and is integrated into daily work.*

Managing today's business often requires that we move from one challenge, one problem, and one deadline to another continuously throughout the day. We are in a climate of shifting priorities and decisions by management seem arbitrary. This leaves little or no time for working on the future. We become expert "firefighters" in our own area of responsibility. But we seldom recognize that *the cause of the fire lies beyond our daily focus.* We spend too much time working *in*, not *on* the business. If we neglect the future today, most likely tomorrow will never be what we want it to be.

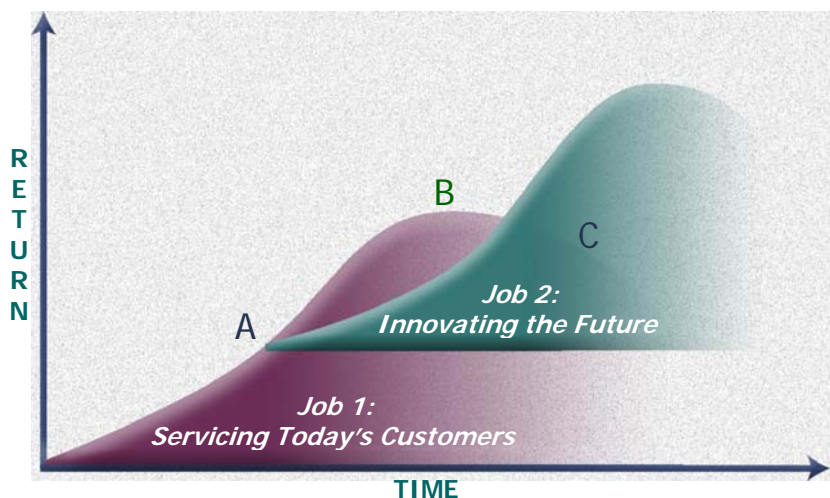
**We must service today's business while at the same time innovate, or create the business of tomorrow.**

Each key person in an organization has two jobs of equal importance: 1) Servicing Today's Business, and 2) Innovating the Future: Creating the Business of Tomorrow

*Servicing Today's Business* requires solving today's problems, operating consistent with today's policies and procedures, and reacting quickly to disruptions of daily routines.

*Innovating the Future* requires working on a variety of innovations simultaneously, improving people's capacity to innovate while always keeping the organization's Purpose, Vision and Values in focus.

When working on today's business while creating tomorrow's business, you are always balancing two



curves, as shown in this illustration. The curve in front is servicing today's needs; the curve in back is innovating the future. Each curve represents the life cycle of any business practice. When a new business practice is first implemented, it takes time for it to pay off due to the learning curve. Ultimately, the practice reaches its peak effective-ness, but soon becomes outdated and fails to provide the same benefits to the business. This is a natural cycle.

At which point in the life cycle of today's business curve should we begin innovating the future? Usually, we think of creating new ways of doing things only when the old ways begin to fail us, possibly around point "C" on the chart, or perhaps a little before that when we begin to sense that they might fail us, at point "B". Few people would think of beginning to innovate just as things are picking up, at point "A". And yet, given the time it takes to get full value from an innovation, if innovation is not begun early and does not occur continually, tremendous gaps will result. The secret to constant growth is to work effectively at both improving the present and innovating the future, while learning from both.

**Innovation needs to be started well before the existing product or process has stopped delivering value.**

Balancing the demands of these two jobs is a real challenge. To continually succeed, all employees from top to bottom must learn and apply the principles, practices and tools of innovation *within a system*, to improve today's business and simultaneously build tomorrow's business.

So how do you manage to do both?

## #1 Maintain the Overview



A key to working effectively and efficiently is *maintaining the overview*. Too often we get buried in the details of our work and lose sight of where we are going— towards our future. Maintaining the overview is another way of saying, "keep the big picture in view," while we work on both simultaneously.

## #2 Free Yourself to Innovate



As I travel the world working with all kinds of organizations, I hear the same reasons for not innovating again and again: "*We don't have the time; the culture won't let me; my boss isn't really interested.*" In each of these cases, the people honestly believe that the reasons they can't innovate are *outside* themselves, forces well beyond their control.



It is true that a number of forces both inside and outside our organizations influence us and keep us from innovation, but our *inner acceptance* of those forces as the reason we can't innovate is truly the determining factor. We are what we *think* we are. Give yourself permission to innovate a little bit *every day* and soon it will become a way of life.

### #3 Be Curious Rather Than Certain



Our most cherished beliefs must give way for innovation to emerge. Yet, giving up (or suspending) what we believe in most—our personal agendas, our biases, our deep beliefs, our most logical conclusions—is very difficult.

Genuine curiosity is a great aid to improving the way we think. None of us sees enough of the whole or knows enough about anything to act solely on our own. We are just not capable of figuring things out alone. Being genuinely curious helps others to be more open and truthful and thus moves the conversation into what is "possible" and what is "real." But merely being curious is not enough. We must also be willing to be less certain—admitting that we don't know everything about a subject or a problem. This stimulates creativity and an openness towards innovation. It makes innovative thinking part of our everyday work.

Innovation leaders allow and encourage their teams to devote time to both two jobs. Continually working on innovations while managing current business is the first step towards ensuring your organization will remain competitive. Utilizing a comprehensive *system of innovation* will guarantee consistent progress towards the goal and keep people committed to innovation as a way of life. Without this "dual tasking", current business tasks will always take precedent.

Make innovation a priority and communicate that commitment to everyone. Only then will the necessary time and resources be directed towards innovation and your organization's future success.

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A 30-year veteran of teaching and promoting innovation, **Andrew Papageorge** is the founder of *GoInnovate! Global* and the developer of the *GoInnovate! System*, a comprehensive systems approach to innovation taught in workshops and on-line. He is the author of the book, "*GoInnovate! A practical guide to swift, continual and effective innovation.*"

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