Imagination, Creativity & Innovation: Open up a world of possibility

“To turn your dreams into reality, all your resources, efforts and concentration should be aligned in the same direction.”
- Roopleen, author, motivational counselor, speaker and author

If you are going to make a difference in today’s world, be productive and make a comfortable income, you will have to learn how bring value to other people. To do that, you must become thoroughly familiar with the steps to harness your imagination, explode creativity and generate an idea. It all begins by understanding three words and putting them into action: imagination, creativity and innovation.

What do these words mean - really? Many people believe imagining is creating, while others use the word “innovation” when they mean “creativity”, or “creativity” when they mean “innovation.” Once you draw a distinction between imagination, creativity and innovation, you will be able to apply your imagination more effectively to create and innovate.

Let’s begin with imagination. I would like you to pause for a few seconds, right now, and imagine something - anything.

Notice how your mind scrambles to latch on to a single thought and then, assuming you imagined something, you probably wondered if it was the appropriate thing to imagine.

The reality is that you imagine on many levels ALL THE TIME. Your imagination works so quickly that you can imagine dozens of things in seconds. You imagine when you hope, fear or simply daydream. You mentally travel to pleasant places and dark places, real places and invented places. When unchecked, your imagination runs wild.

Next, I want you to FOCUS your imagination and summon up an image of a person or pet you love or recall a location that is relaxing.

I suspect you found that assignment much easier than simply attempting to imagine “something”, because I coached you to DIRECT your imagination.

Imagination is an internal, invisible process. It does not really create anything external, except for your physiological reactions and, therefore, possible long-term effects on your body.

Now, pause for a moment and, using a pen or pencil, draw a picture of a tree, a sunset, a bird or anything else you desire.
From this very easy assignment, you have actually CREATED something. It might be a very childlike, amateurish drawing, but the physical markings are on the paper. You have APPLIED your imagination to make an idea real. In this case, you created a drawing. Does it have any value? This is where the definition of creativity gets tricky because creativity takes the process of imagination to another level. But, what level?

Imagination is not the same as creativity.

As the educator, Sir Ken Robinson defines it, “Creativity is the process of having original ideas that have value.” In my book, *Quantum Leap Thinking: An Owner’s Guide to the Mind*, I define the process of creative thinking as the ability to see something not seen before or bringing forth something new out of a rearrangement of the old. You might say that creativity is the ability to unleash the potential of the mind to make connections and conceive new ideas.

When you are creative, you bring an idea to reality. It could be anything - from a work of art to coming up with new solutions to old problems which may or may not have a larger value. For example, our team recently created a survey for one of our new projects that involved coming up with a unique questionnaire. We certainly hope this survey will be of great value to health care professionals and provide us insight on how to increase patient satisfaction. But despite our desire, there is no guarantee. Still, this was a project that resulted from applying the imagination - creatively. It required research, input from others, networking and questioning.

While you cannot be creative without applying the imagination, it doesn’t mean you are innovative. And, you cannot be an effective innovator without being creative. While creativity is subjective and hard to measure, innovation is completely measureable.

In order to be of value, applied imagination or creativity must lead to innovation, linking a breakthrough idea with the need of the marketplace. The idea must be implemented into something new. Stellar examples are the visionary entrepreneurs; Jeff Bezos of Amazon, Pierre Omidyar of eBay, A.G. Lafley of Proctor & Gamble and, of course, Steve Jobs of Apple. What set these companies apart are not just the products that were great innovation but also their business models and customer service.

While creativity is a SKILL, innovation is a PROCESS that must use the skill of creativity to be successful. Think of innovation as a four-part sequential process: 1) identifying needs or problems (opportunities), 2) creating possible solutions or generating ideas to address the needs or problems, 3) selecting the best ideas and 4) moving them to completion and then, generating value from those ideas. This also requires the courage to take risks and to learn from failure.
The late Theodore Levitt, economist/former professor at Harvard Business School and Harvard Business review editor put it best when he said: “What is often lacking is not creativity in the idea-creating sense but innovation in the action-producing sense, i.e. putting ideas to work.”

This brings me to the crux of this article – shepherding an idea by creating a strategy and taking the action to make it real.

It’s easy to dream or imagine and to talk to others about it. You can learn the skills to become a better creative thinker. I know because I’ve been teaching individuals and businesses how to do just that for four decades. You can go to our website and read a number of my cached articles or pick up a copy of Quantum Leap Thinking: An Owner’s Guide to the Mind. But, to truly be out there in the world, playing the game at its fullest, you have to take action to create an exceptional life. In my coaching practice, I prod clients to get out there, say what needs to be said, let go of what needs to be let go of, take the risks that need to be taken and become actively involved in creating the life they say they want. Here are a few strategies that can get you started on becoming an innovator.

-Observe and read: In order to discover how you can be of value, you have to know what is happening in the world. Read daily. Stay current on trends.

-Question: In order to innovate, you must question the status quo, step out of your own comfort zone and consider new possibilities.

-Experiment: Create new experiences for yourself. Look at your patterns of comfortable behavior and do something different that pushes you out of your comfort zone. Explore your world and have new experiences.

-Network: Network, network, network. Pick specific times to engage with people that are both your colleagues who believe as you do AND with those with diverse backgrounds, people who believe differently than you. Cultivating diverse relationships helps you gain different perspectives.

Imagination, Creativity and Innovation. It all begins with your imagination, so imagine the possibilities - now. As the great physicist Albert Einstein said, “Imagination is a preview of life’s coming attractions.”