

Innovate Like Edison...IMC CONFAB 2008

"Innovate Like Edison" was an inspiring **CONFAB** keynote given by Sarah Miller Caldicott, a great-grandniece of Thomas Edison (1847-1931) who has given us over 1000 patented inventions. Some of his well known inventions include the incandescent light bulb, phonograph, motion pictures, and many others. I received valuable insight from the keynote, the two well-received workshops, and her book **Innovate Like Edison**. Here we learn that Edison's five competencies of innovation are:

Solution-centered Mindset

- Align your goals to your passions
- Cultivate charismatic optimism
- Seek knowledge relentlessly
- Experiment persistently
- Pursue rigorous objectivity

Kaleidoscope Thinking

- Maintain a notebook
- Practice ideaphoria
- Discern patterns
- Express ideas visually
- Explore the roads not taken

Full-spectrum Engagement

- Intensity and relaxation
- Seriousness and playfulness
- Sharing and protecting
- Complexity and simplicity
- Solitude and team

Master-mind Collaboration

- Recruit for chemistry and results
- Design multidisciplinary collaboration teams
- Inspire an environment of open exchange
- Reward collaboration
- Become a master networker

Super-value Creation

- Link market trends with core strengths
- Tune in to your target audience
- Apply the right business model
- Understand scale-up effects
- Create an unforgettable market-moving brand

For some of us who are on the cutting edge of new product development and competitive R&D, the workshops provided stimulation and reinforcement using small group case studies, mind mapping, and other innovation techniques. She pointed out that Edison's large number of experiments gave useful information even though no product or patent resulted from all the experiments. During his lifetime Edison started many companies. This required funding from a wide variety of sources to support businesses involving many technologies. His organizations were very flat where he would directly interface with large numbers of people. We need to remember that we can still get good ideas from all levels of an organization when we are focused on specific results.

I plan to use some of the ideas from this part of Confab because they provide value for me. Sarah Miller Caldicott's **Innovate like Edison** book contains a detailed Innovation Literacy Blueprint based on the five competencies of innovation. This is helpful in the evaluation of our ability to effectively innovate and in our evaluation of a client's ability to innovate in today's increasingly competitive markets. Today we do not have to do as many experiments that Edison did because we draw information from large data bases and simulate results on specialized computer models to shorten specific product development times, but we still have to consider the whole innovation process that includes product selection, development of concepts, product design, manufacturing, marketing and verification of quality.

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