



Reinvent Smarter!

Do You Know Your Territory?

“All adventures, especially into new territory, are scary.”
-Sally Ride, Astronaut

Choose Your Strategy

Reinvention is the only way to stay ahead in a fast changing and challenging environment. Having said that, I don't believe everyone should reinvent themselves the same way. A wise person moves with caution. Your naivety may be your “Achilles heel.” Move cautiously in the minefield of negativity.

Preston Tucker tried to reinvent the automobile... and was run out of business by the establishment of his day. He had ideas that were years ahead of the times he lived (1948). He developed innovations for the automotive industry based on customer needs, safety concerns and concepts that most carmakers were only dreaming. He put customers first, and as a result he developed some features that were economical and user friendly.

Tucker thought of concepts and built them into his “car of tomorrow... today” like the following:

- A perimeter frame for improved driver safety
- Easy to reach instrument panel
- Directional head lights
- Disc brakes
- Shatterproof windshield
- Easily interchangeable motor
- Seat belts
- Padded dashboard
- Fuel injection

How many of these designs are standard in your automobile today?

The existing automakers teamed up with federal regulators, the media and lawyers to put him out of business. They had a “good thing” going and didn’t want competition or the new ideas that would cause them to change their beliefs and patterns of behavior.

If Tucker had thought out his strategy as well as the innovations he introduced, he might have succeeded and completely reinvented the automobile industry for years to come. He didn’t know the territory he was venturing into, though, and he wound up causing more damage than the good he wanted to do. He was in trouble from the start for being ignorant of his business environment.

Avoid Trouble Ahead

You can get into trouble if you are highly creative in an exclusive environment. I know from experience. People aren’t always open to new ideas, even if they are much better, cost effective and provide a better world. Sometimes the “establishment” is very happy with the status quo. They have their own good thing going and don’t want your innovations shaking up their world. You need to know how the status quo operates.

Here are some questions to help you reinvent smarter. Learning these “the hard way” means that you go out and do it wrong and pay a greater price. The easy way is to learn from other’s experiences to safely navigate the minefields or pitfalls of reinvention. You must be much smarter at reinvention than your detractors.

I hope you can use these as your territorial map for reinvention.

- 1. Are you threatening the control core?** Don’t tug on Superman’s cape! Don’t mess with people who are secure (or worse – insecure) in their position. I have lost potential clients because the CEO or power structure didn’t want to lose influence and control. Innovative leaders continually want to push the envelope – true. But they don’t always want every envelope pushed or mostly their own personal envelope.

Although Steve Jobs fostered a culture of creativity, it doesn’t mean he went along with every idea. He was a protector of his power and control core. The same is true of innovators like Dale Carnegie, Henry Ford, Thomas Edison and Alexander Graham Bell. These were innovators beyond their times, but they protected themselves and their positions strongly.

Know the power and control structure and act in concert with them.

I have belonged to many volunteer organizations and learned that control is in the hands of a few who generally *like* being in control. It helps you to know who is in control.

You may start your own group but know that when you do, it will take longer, cost more and momentum will not be on your side for a long, long time. It is hard to start from scratch.

2. **Do you have permission to act?** I worked with a team in a church years ago who transitioned the entire congregational involvement and new member orientation process. It took years to implement. Many on the innovation team who were frustrated with their lack of authority left the church for “greener pastures.” The established groups withheld permission to act, often on purpose.

On the up side, the process caused us to slow down and make changes much more gradual. On the down side, it reinforced the despair that had sunk over the congregation that “things will never change.” They did change, but not always to everyone’s (or our advantages). Once we got permission from the influential authorities the process went smoother and transition was almost seamless.

You can’t reinvent where you don’t have permission to act.

Get it from someone with more influence with you or you will have a rough road ahead. The lack of permission might even derail the entire process or your career. Be careful where and when to act. Know who is in charge... and why!

Great innovators know who to seek out and who NOT to threaten with their ideas. You can get stomped *very hard* by the “permission givers” when you don’t have their support initially before going into the new arena yet.

You *might* get permission one day; just not today. There are several instances where you can get permission to act:

- The environment or attitude can change to support your ideas.
- The leadership can change, retire or retreat and you will have permission to act.
- Your ideas will mature or people will accept the new versions better.

Patience: Don’t assume that you have permission - just act on the lack of it now and shift your thinking or plan of action. If the one you have isn’t working, only a fool would venture into a reinvention without legitimate permission in some form.

You might hear, “There is a way we do things around here...”

Learn the way; learn why... and do it.

3. **Is the cost greater than the value?** You can’t reinvent without counting the cost. No smart person goes out into new territory without a map or GPS. Know what you are doing and where you are going.

Innovators who don’t count the cost or fund themselves to fuel their new ideas are blindly walking into a dark room without a flashlight. It is one thing to make mistakes or missteps. We all do that. But it is completely foolish to impulsively launch a new direction without a “backup plan.”

4. **Know the value before you reinvent at a higher cost.** John Maxwell says that if you pay the cost up front, the expense will be less. If you pay later, the cost is increased. This is a lesson you learn when the credit card bill arrives each month!

Invest in your value early by generating support. Support *follows* value; not the other way around. The value of support is the key to every reinvention. When there is no perceived value on the part of people you want to buy into your creative ideas, there will be no support. Reduce the cost by building value early into the reinvention.

What have you done to create value with your support circle? Spend more time on this and it will cost you less in the future.

“Uncharted territory is a good place to be in.”
-Bo Burnham

Proceed with Caution

Choose your battles, their locations and particularly your timing. Don't act impulsively unless you are 100% certain of a positive response.

Hollywood made a movie about Preston Tucker (*Tucker, The Man and His Dream*), quite sometime after his death in 1956 of pneumonia. He never saw the success of the movie or the popularity of many of his innovative ideas. Tucker's long-time friend Alex Tremulis said that Preston's death certificate said "pneumonia" but the real cause of death was a broken heart.

Can the same be said for many innovators who didn't act with caution and boldly moved forward with nothing to back them up? Nikola Tesla, a great inventor, died penniless while most of his ideas went on to be extremely popular and successful. Sadly, he never saw any profit from them.

You can reinvent the hard way or the easy way. I hope you choose an easier route based on knowing your territory. Learn from their experience and do the best you can. Know your environment, your support group and come out smarter.

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Jim Mathis, IPCS, CSP, MDiv. is *The Reinvention PRO*[™], an International Platform Certified Speaker, Certified Speaking Professional and best-selling author of *Reinvention Made Easy: Change Your Strategy, Change Your Results*. To subscribe to his free professional development newsletter, please send an email to: subscribe@jimmathis.com with the word SUBSCRIBE in the subject. An electronic copy will be sent out to you every month. For more information on how Jim and his programs can benefit your organization or group, please call 407-369-7842, or visit our updated web site at: www.jimmathis.com. © 2020 Reinvention Nation, LLC.