

Innovative Approaches to  
Outstanding Performance

# The Practical Innovator

For clients, colleagues and friends of Lynne C. Levesque Volume III, Issue 1.

## From the Editor

Over a year has passed since the last Practical Innovator newsletter. The delay is the result of competing priorities:

1. Publication of my book, *Breakthrough Creativity: Achieving Top Performance Using the Eight Creative Talents* (Davies-Black).
2. Working with publisher HRDQ ([www.HRDQ.com](http://www.HRDQ.com)) to produce the *Breakthrough Creativity Profile* and *Facilitator's Guide* for team leaders and trainers wishing to use the Eight Creative Talents to build great teams.
3. Collaboration with Tom Schinkel, a recognized innovation expert in the office products industry. (See *Lessons from Research* on page 2.)
4. A time consuming assignment at Harvard Business School studying management practices in large organizations, with particular emphasis on new business creation. This research is leading to a revised direction for my consulting practice. You'll be hearing more about this new direction in upcoming issues.
5. The development of a website, [www.breakthroughcreativity.com](http://www.breakthroughcreativity.com), to share more current news.

I hope this third issue continues to provide you with a quick reference to ideas for becoming more creative, prosperous and competitive.

I look forward to your comments!

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## Creativity Messages from around the world

Regular communication with Susanne Dennings, Voluntary Coordinator of the Malleefowl Preservation Group in Ongerup, West Australia, indicates that Southern Australia continues to suffer unprecedented drought. "The mallee-fowl has scratched up all its leaf litter and is waiting on the wet weather, too."

This is not great news, and let's all pray for rain! However, there is some good news: the Malleefowl Preservation Group has been officially recognized by the Nature Conservancy as one of the organizations it supports, making US contributions for malleefowl preservation efforts tax deductible.

Instead of "Creativity Messages from Down Under," I thought I would share with you some creativity insights from a recent trip to a relatively unknown region of France, the Dordogne.

As we drove through the absolutely beautiful countryside of this region known for its picturesque villages, castles, prehistoric cave paintings, delicious wine and food, I was reminded of the importance of history in creativity.

We tend to dismiss the impact of history and too often associate creativity with coming up with something brand new. Similarly, the notion of "creative destruction" is frequently considered a prerequisite for organizational innovation and creativity. I hold a quite different view. Few creative ideas are truly original. Most are built on the work of others. Which is why a proper understanding and appreciation of history is so important! Let's look at an example.

The invention of the printing press, considered by many to be the greatest invention in history, was not the work of one individual. Years of small adaptations and persistence by many who preceded Gutenberg paved the way. Gutenberg's creative contribution of moveable type was the last step.

In addition to providing a foundation on which to adapt, understanding history contributes insights into the context in which a change or innovation will occur. Appreciating this context will facilitate the selling of an innovation, often the most critical factor contributing to the success of the innovation.

Rather than dismissing history and those who remind us of its critical lessons, we need to recognize that "history teaches us what not to do more often than what to do. The key is, though, history teaches."

## True Stories

*"Most of what happens in successful innovations is not the happy occurrence of a blinding flash of insight but, rather, the careful implementation of an unspectacular but systematic management discipline." -- Peter F. Drucker*

The so-called "creative" finances and accounting of Enron continue to be all over the news. Known as one of the most innovative companies for years, Enron collapsed in the midst of apparently fraudulent acts and poor management practices. Its fall threatens to take creativity's reputation down with it.

*True Stories continued on pg. 3*

## Managing for More Creative Results

(adapted from *BREAKTHROUGH CREATIVITY: Achieving Top Performance with the Eight Creative Talents*, by Lynne Levesque)

**Question:** I have a couple of "blue-sky" idea people on my team. They know they are "creative." At the same time, they are all over the map in getting things done. Is there anything I can do to help them be more productive as well as creative?


**Answer:** For these big idea people, who prefer what I call the Explorer talent, their creativity, or *their ability to consistently produce different and valuable results*, comes in the form of "pulsating possibilities." They excel at:

- ▲ Promoting new enterprises and ideas
- ▲ Helping others push past what is accepted and expected
- ▲ Inspiring discovery in others.

Recognized in the business world as "creative," they can lose their creative edge from overuse and may also fail to find focus and get things done. Help them see that coming up with new ideas is only one piece of the creativity puzzle.

Producing creative results involves persistence, discipline, and planning. You can help them build their creative capacities by encouraging them to:

- ▲ slow down and use their creativity only on those efforts that truly require it;
- ▲ take time to reflect and listen, to make sure they are considering the context of the problem;
- ▲ make an effort to understand the details;
- ▲ recognize the need to sell their ideas to avoid frustration;
- ▲ learn project, time, and change management to add structure and focus; or
- ▲ team up with other talents who excel at these activities.

Remember one size does not fit all when it comes to being creative! 

Next issue: **Managing the "thinker" for more creative results.**

## Creativity Tips

**Q:** With all the stress today, caused by the events that occurred on September 11, the war in the Middle East as well as the decline and subsequent dislocations in our economy, the issue today seems more to be about managing stress, than building our creative capacities. What does creativity have to offer our abilities to manage stress?

**A:** During times of stress, you first need to be able to quickly recognize your symptoms. Not surprisingly these signs of stress can vary by individual. Typical symptoms fall into two categories:

**1) An exaggeration of your normal self.** For example, if you normally enjoy life and take everything in stride, you may become obsessed with living in the moment and fail

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*"Not surprisingly, the signs of stress can vary by individual."*



## Lessons from Research

A few years ago I worked with the Cambridge Center for Creative Enterprise on a survey of creativity and innovation in family-owned businesses. We wanted to understand how these owners were responding to the need for more creativity and innovation.

We found that creativity and innovation, while a high priority, were not well understood. In addition, these businesses faced several challenges to bringing in more creativity and innovation. These challenges included limited time and resources, risk aversion, staff resistance, and lack of the right incentives. One respondent even questioned whether generating more new ideas was as important as implementation!

Now I am working with another colleague with deep expertise in innovation in the office products industry, to expand that study to a larger audience. To get a better understanding of the challenges of innovation in business today, Tom Schinkel and I have designed a new survey. We will be using the results

of the survey to develop practical insights into how to help companies prosper and be more competitive through the development and implementation of innovation strategies.


Those readers who send us a fully filled-out questionnaire will receive a summary of the results at no charge. In addition, the survey results will give you an opportunity to reflect on the state of innovation within your own company. In that sense, it can serve as a discussion tool to put on the agenda for your next management team meeting.

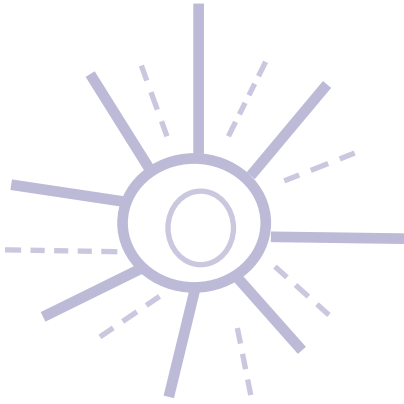
If you are interested in participating, you can log onto:

[www.thomasschinkel.com](http://www.thomasschinkel.com)

and click the special button labeled:

**"TSA Innovation Survey."**

Or email me at [lynne@breakthroughcreativity.com](mailto:lynne@breakthroughcreativity.com) and I will send you a copy through the mail. 



### *Creativity Tips (continued from pg. 2)*

to face reality. Or if you normally tend to enjoy working with details, you might start to obsess over those details, making sure everything is exactly in its place, and fail to see the big picture.

If you tend to normally enjoy brainstorming and exploring opportunities you may become excessively concerned about future possibilities and ignore critical facts about today. If you tend to love speculating about the far off future, you can start obsessing over all sorts of dire visions of the future.

Or, your usually balanced leadership tendencies can turn into over-control and irrational decision-making without sufficient information. Or your typical focus on others can turn into an obsession with making sure everyone else's needs are met. Or your normally analytical approach to life can turn into analysis paralysis. Or, your concern for the truth and beauty in life can become an obsession with finding the real meaning behind everything.

### **2) On the other hand, you can become totally the opposite of your normal self.**

Examples of this type of stress symptom include: Your typical love of life turns into a focus on all sorts of dire possibilities about your future. If you tend to normally be concerned about your family, community and the past, you might find yourself worrying about all sorts of dreadful predictions about the future of the world, society and your family.

If you generally love to explore possibilities, you can find yourself obsessing over every little detail or, alternatively, beginning to overindulge in


the sensuousness of life. Normally objective, analytical and "logical" individuals can become obsessed with the meaning of their existence or find themselves caught up in raw emotions. Or, usually nurturing, people-oriented individuals can become uncharacteristically critical of everyone around them and try to control every little thing.

Recognizing the signs of stress is the first step. After recognizing these signs, whether you follow any of the above patterns or not, what can you do? Here are some ideas about managing stress creatively:

- \* Take a deep breath and then ....
- \* Make sure you are balancing a wish to rush to make a decision with collecting more information.
- \* On the other hand, be sure to balance your need to collect data with some steps toward moving on. Be sure to balance action with reflection.
- \* Try consciously to do something that is outside your normal behavior patterns. You may find yourself being surprisingly inspired with some alternative courses of action.

*For example, if you tend to keep your stress to yourself, find someone to talk to. If you tend to let everyone know about your stress, try to find some alone time and write in a journal. If you tend to want to analyze every little decision, trying letting go. If you are normally a "go with the flow" kind of person, try using some "if-then" analytical tools to move forward.*

- \* Or, take a bath, go for a walk, put on some soothing music, light a candle, pray, or practice some other form of relaxation.
- \* Or consider stretching yourself into some artistic endeavors such as painting, writing, dancing, or sculpture.

The key thing is to learn to identify your own signs of stress and then find tools and techniques to let you address them quickly. Then you can get back on track to your healthy, creative self. 




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### *True Stories (continued from pg. 1)*

I have spent the last couple of years studying Enron. What I can share with you about this research is that Enron was clearly not an example of a creative organization. Creativity too often is used as an excuse for bad behavior. But doing so shows a lack of understanding of the true critical success factors for creativity.

Too many people think that creativity requires no boundaries or limits or that you can't manage creativity. This belief could not be further from the truth. When you look at the lives of those considered to be highly creative, they had a great deal of discipline and structure which they applied to their work.

In *Inc. Magazine* (September, 1999), Robert Lutz, now CEO of General Motors, stated "Real creativity has nothing at all to do with casual days. The absence of discipline and standards doesn't drive creativity. In fact, it's almost the opposite." The job of managers is to ensure that they are open to new ideas and that the structure is flexible, allows for questioning, and leaves room for growth and exploration. 

## The Practical Innovator

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*"Everyone has the potential to be creative.... But not everyone knows how to be his or her creative best."*

### About the Editor:

Lynne C. Levesque, editor of *The Practical Innovator*, earned a doctorate for her work on creativity in top executives after spending 17 years in industry and management. Seven years ago she started her consulting and research practice, now located in Charlestown, MA. She works with leaders to build more prosperous organizations through strategic application of innovation and creativity.

#### Consulting Services

Consulting and facilitation services support organizations in strategic planning, new business creation, teambuilding, and change management. Services include organizational, team and individual assessments, through the use of proven diagnostics, and ongoing support for leaders and teams.

#### Publications

*Breakthrough Creativity: Achieving Top Performance Using the Eight Creative Talents* (Davies-Black, 2001)

*Breakthrough Creativity Profile*, HRDQ, 2003

*Breakthrough Creativity Profile Facilitator's Guide*, HRDQ, 2003

### Workshops

Workshops provide substantive material in an interactive environment, focused on practical application. Because of their modular design, they can be easily customized to meet each group's particular needs.

#### The Innovative Environment

- ▲ Using The Innovation Assessment Process to Manage for Innovation and Change (one to two days)
- ▲ Building a Resilient and Innovative Organization (two days)

#### Creative Processes and Tools

- ▲ Creative Problem Solving (one day)

#### Creative Teams

- ▲ Building Team Talents using the Breakthrough Creativity Profile (half – full day)

We welcome your questions, success stories, and suggestions for future issues!  
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*The designs in this newsletter are based on Australian aboriginal symbols, describing travel and change. The logo depicts the new perspectives a traveller brings to the problems of others.*