



Little Red Riding Could

A Tale of Intrapreneurship

By Paula Rosch

Once upon a time...in the midst of a big company, there was a small office occupied by a young woman. She had an uncanny ability to understand the needs of consumers and turn those insights into successful product ideas. That, and her predilection for peddling her red bike to work, brought her the nickname of Little Red Riding Could. Others thought of her as "one of those creative people." One day the CEO said to her, "Our business is very ill and needs help. Why don't you pick one of those product ideas of yours and take it to market? Be very careful, though. It's competitive out there. Don't talk to anyone and stick to the corporate path as you work and never leave it. That way there will be no risk."

Little Red Riding Could embraced her new project and started to make a to-do list. "Don't worry," she told the CEO, "I'll take

my idea all the way to market and never stop." The young woman had good intentions, but soon after starting she picked up a popular magazine and saw an article with a title that seemed to be related to her project. She stuck a green Post-it® sticker to the title page so she could easily find it later, but then another article caught her eye; putting her to-do list aside, she sat down to read and didn't finish until the journal's pages were heavy with idea-laden Post-it® notes.

Suddenly, Little Red Riding Could remembered the task she had set out to do, but she was intrigued by something she had read, and she took a new direction. Instead of hurrying ahead with her plan, she decided to run a few errands around town to look for some materials she knew the company would not have at hand. Needing a jolt after all her activity, she stopped at a coffee

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What Veteran Innovators Are Saying

By Lanny Vincent

The recent flood tide of media regaling the promises of innovation reflects welcome enthusiasm but lacks the wisdom of experience.

What is often prescribed for innovating ignores the constraints of context. The lifecycle state in which a company finds itself, the industry context and the external conditions that surround the company, make it reckless to compare innovating best practices from one company to the next.

Seldom mentioned in the media is the resistance that corporate innovating encounters from a company's own existing operations. This it is not a new phenomenon. Veterans of corporate innovating are experienced with such resistance and workable countermeasures, and know that the "vine" of innovating must relate to the "trellis" of the host company's operations if it is to succeed.

In May we conducted a qualitative survey of 43 veteran innovators representing a diverse set of corporate innovating contexts. Considering our sources, the survey went directly to what is really going on underneath all the hype.

Unlike other opinion surveys, this one went deep by tapping the experienced wisdom of seasoned veterans, each of whom remains engaged in corporate innovating efforts. The experience of each respondent on average was close to two decades.

The survey revealed in general:

- Innovators not having enough time for innovating efforts because of their "day job,"
- Managers lowering the threshold of what qualifies as an innovation,

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shop, had a latte, and looked through her purchases. The lyrics of a song playing over the sound system provided a key to how her product might come together, and she hurried back to her workshop to construct a sample.

She took her work to one of her engineer friends. "Bob," she said, "What if instead of designing the product like we planned, we tried something like this?" showing him the sample and describing its potential as he quickly did some sketches on notepaper.

By now, Little Red Riding Could was deep within the world of her own creativity, and unknowingly under the scrutiny of some hidden and very unfriendly eyes. As she left Bob's office, the swish of someone behind her made her shiver a little. She was afraid she had strayed too far from her assignment and hurried away to get back on track.

She headed down the hall but was startled by an authoritative, gruff voice: "Where are you going with that sample?" It was a high level manager in the corporation.

"I'm taking it to market," she told him. "Our business is ill and this will help it get better."

Well, the manager didn't like the looks of the new idea. It looked different. It looked complicated. It didn't look like anything they had done before. He didn't want it to go any further, so he stalled for time. "Why don't you put together a presentation to the department? I know everyone will want to hear about your new product idea. Let's have the meeting tomorrow at 2:00 p.m."

Feeling happy that the manager was supporting her product idea, Little Red Riding Could launched into preparing a compelling presentation. Meanwhile, the manager rushed back to his office and had his administrative assistant set up a *1 o'clock* meeting to forewarn his own managers: "I don't want to spend any money or time on

this idea," he told them.

When Little Red Riding Could showed up for the meeting with her data and her prototypes, the manager and his deputies were there. Their narrow eyes and suspicious demeanor made them all seem a little wolfish, not like the idea benefactor she had met in the hall the day earlier. "I've called this group together to discuss your idea," said the manager, and he opened the discussion up to the group.

"I don't think we will make enough money on this idea" said the financial manager. "My" said Red, "what a big profit you need!"

"I don't think we can advertise this idea," said the marketing manager. "My," said Red, "what a big audience you need!"

"I don't think we can make this idea work," said the research manager. "My," said Red, "what a big machine you need!"

They argued and protested against Red and her idea until they had gobbled up all of her confidence. The CEO, passing by the meeting room, noticed the loud protests coming through the closed door. She decided to intervene, and when she saw the manager and his cronies ganging up on Red's idea, she said "I have been watching you discourage new ideas for some time now, and I am not happy about it." She gave him the ax.

Little Red Riding Could went on to bring another product to market. The consumers were happy and the company regained its health. Feeling proud and yet lucky that she had skirted another potential disaster, Red told herself, "Never again will I stray from the path and go off on tangents to find new ideas...at least not until next time."

Paula Rosch is a discovery-to-invention innovator with hands-on technology, marketing, and product development expertise. Paula is the inventor on nearly 100 patents, uncovering original insights about human behavior through her ScoutPath™ process and translating them into commercialized brands and products with great consumer appeal and staying power. You can contact her at paula@paularosch.com.

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- Leaders reacting to uncertainties by avoiding risk, and
- All complaining about the poverty of insight amidst a flood of data.

Despite significant contextual differences from company to company, the survey found common issues hindering corporate innovating: persistent interruptions, *ad hoc* orientations to innovating, role ambiguities, and system imbalances versus innovating system imbalances.

Three broad recommendations are offered:

- Count what matters, not what is measurable.
- Be choiceful rather than reactive by first creating options, so you have choices.
- Neither integrate nor isolate innovating efforts. Instead invite everyone to seek improvements and, in the process, a few will emerge who actually innovate.

To join us in this conversation about corporate innovating and to receive a copy of the full survey report, please contact Jane Gannon (jane@innovationthatwork.com) or Lanny Vincent (lanny@innovationthatwork.com) or call us at (415) 387-1270.

The Myths and Realities of Corporate Innovating

Myth:

Corporate innovating requires freedom from constraint.

Reality:

The more profound innovations occur because barriers and constraints are overcome.

This is one of 20 myths about innovation revealed in our survey report entitled, *Corporate Innovation Management: Reconciling "Trellis" and "Vine."* What Veterans of Corporate Innovating Are Saying. For more information contact lanny@innovationthatwork.com.

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