



THE BRIGHT SIDE® OF CHANGE

Written by Donna Rae Smith

INVESTING IN INNOVATION

It's the first week of September, and as always, this time of year brings a flurry of activity. One of the highlights of this month for me is Smart Business' [13th Annual Innovation in Business Conference](#). Jamba Juice's CEO, [James White](#), is the featured speaker, and Dustin Klein and I will moderate an interactive discussion focused on "Innovating Cleveland."



Innovating Cleveland is a topic I feel particularly passionate about. I have lived in this community for most of my adult life and love it! The people, the arts, the sports, the lake, and the business community make northern Ohio a great place to live and work. I believe the future growth of this region hinges on our ability as individual leaders within businesses to competitively innovate. I feel incredibly optimistic because I see dozens of examples of innovation in our midst, including [Hattie Larlham](#), [Kent Displays](#), and [Codonics](#). An LA Times [article](#) on Cleveland's weathering of the recession points to the competitive innovation of businesses in our region, businesses that are reinventing themselves by taking existing capacities and materials and using them for new purposes.

Sometimes there's a tendency to think of innovation as a "thing," something that spontaneously happens. But that's erroneous. Innovation is a way of thinking, a behavioral approach that doesn't settle for the status quo and that doesn't throw in the towel in defeat. Innovators are curious, they're active learners, and they're always looking at how they can expand existing services, technologies and processes to add value. They don't needlessly rock the boat; they recognize what they're good at and they seek ways to build on it.

Leaders who are innovators create environments and cultures within their businesses that encourage and support innovation from others. They model and exemplify the behaviors they want to see and hear in the work place. They also create structures and processes that support innovative ideas, giving people the needed room and freedom to experiment with new ideas and approaches.

James White is a great example of an innovator. He [revitalized a struggling Jamba Juice](#) by recognizing and building on the company's key strength—its employees. At the same time, he wasn't afraid to make changes, such as adding food to Jamba Juice's menu. He also instituted shared metrics that created healthy competition between store personnel. By doing so, he generated improvements, ideas and behaviors that differentiated Jamba from its competitors and positively impacted the customer as well

as the bottom line. He did it by piloting the ideas in a number of stores first, before rolling them out on a larger scale.

Innovators are always looking ahead because they know that nothing is certain. They know that taking action is the key to success, and they know that achieving success (and even survival) demands the ability to adapt, to think creatively, and to change with changing circumstances. Innovators [experiment](#) knowing they can apply iterative innovation and creativity to move around or through the inevitable barriers and roadblocks. Rather than wait and delay until they are certain the approach is “just right,” innovative leaders act by assuming a balanced amount of risk in order to move toward the target without hesitating or slowing down the process of getting to the goal.

THE EXPERIMENT

Ask yourself the type of questions White asked when he took over as CEO.

1. What does your company do best?
2. What are the three things that shouldn't be changed, & three things that could be?
3. How would your employees, customers and suppliers answer these questions?
 - a. What are ways in which you can expand existing services or processes to add value?
 - i. Bring your colleagues together and collectively brainstorm.
 - ii. Ask your customers what would really thrill them.
 - iii. Don't be constrained when you consider the possibilities.
4. Remember:
 - a. Steal shamelessly as a base for expansion of new ideas.
 - b. Encourage people to suggest the wildest ideas imaginable.

Let the sky be the limit and see what creative ideas they generate.

THE CONVERSATION: Share the results of your experiment in the comments below or contact the author directly at donna-rae@bright-side.com.

ABOUT DONNA RAE SMITH

Donna Rae Smith is a guest blogger for Smart Business. She has forged a career, enterprise and an applied discipline on the practice of teaching leaders to be masters of change. She is the Founder and CEO of Bright Side, Inc., a transformational change catalyst company with an emphasis on the behavior-side of change. For more than two decades, Donna Rae Smith and the Bright Side team have been recognized as innovators in executing behavioral strategies coalesced with business strategies to accelerate and sustain business results. Bright Side®, The Behavioral Strategy Company, has partnered with over 250 of the world's most influential companies. For more information, please visit www.bright-side.com or contact Donna Rae at donna-rae@bright-side.com.