The Behavior of Experimentation

When we think about history’s great inventors, it’s easy to see that experimentation is essential for success. Rarely if ever is a brilliant idea perfected on the first try – it’s about trial and error until finding the right approach. It took **Jack Dyson** 15 years and more than 5,000 prototypes before bringing his vacuum to market. He didn’t throw his hands up in the air—rather he paid attention to what was working and what wasn’t. He continued experimenting in order to learn and to refine his vacuum.

It’s the same with children. Children learn by experimenting and, unlike adults, aren’t constrained by myriad thoughts of what could go wrong or how they might look if they fail. As we grow older, we learn from our experiments – this is normal and beneficial. If you didn’t learn, you would keep sticking pins into electrical sockets.

As we age beyond childhood though, we have a tendency to stop or severely reduce our behaviors of experimentation. The list of reasons is long: we think we know what the outcome will be, we don’t want to look silly or foolish, we don’t want to waste time, etc. Unfortunately, we end up depriving ourselves of real opportunities for learning and growth. Experimentation gets our creativity flowing, engages our senses, and allows us to learn from doing.

Scott Cook of Intuit **has seen the massive benefits** of allowing employees to experiment. By giving employees freedom to experiment and encouraging them to do so, a few things happen. Employees become more engaged and enthusiastic. And, as importantly, ideas are judged externally by consumers, not internally by the boss. Creating an environment where employees can experiment doesn’t mean that anything goes, or no holds barred. Experiments **need to be conducted** in such a way that you can measure business benefit and results.

So go ahead. Embrace your inner inventor and your inner child. Allow yourself to experiment and see what you learn and discover in the process.
The Experiment:

1. **Have fun with it.** Start with something small and personal you have questioned or wondered about. Choose something that is fun for you to play with conceptually or physically.

2. **Explore** what the value and benefit would be if you could create a better mouse trap.

3. **Stretch the possibilities.** Play with the idea or concept in your head and discuss it with others to expand your thinking.

4. **Design and deliver.** Experiment with options and possibilities until you create, design or deliver a working process / prototype.

5. **Be patient.** Expect and anticipate 20 to 50 failures as you work toward an output that delivers the value and benefits you identified.

6. **Share** your journey with us as you apply the experimentation behavior.

THE CONVERSATION: Share the results of your experiment in the comments below or contact the author directly at donnarae@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](http://www.bright-side.com) or contact Donna Rae at donnarae@bright-side.com.

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