

**“A Message to Young Innovators.”**

**Delivered By**

**Hon Dr Mal Bryce**

**At the**

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The theory and practise of innovation is supported by a veritable mountain of worthy tomes, references and reports. It is not my intention today to watch your eyes glaze over as I troll through a range of innovation theory. After 40 years of involvement in innovation programs and projects I would like to refer to a few practical realities concerning the business of innovation at the coal face, for the benefit of the wonderful young innovators here today whose work has been on display.

In a global context it is important to remember that as a nation of only 25million people with a very high standard of living to defend in a fiercely competitive world of 7billion people, we have a powerful vested interest in continuing our development as a creative community and a highly innovative economy. Our ability to compete in the Global Digital Economy will depend upon our ability to innovate continuously, Identify and utilize cutting edge technology, become the learning society and be the community with a futures context. In the decades ahead nations and regions which contribute to global innovation will prosper. Bystanders will suffer hardships.

**YOUR CHALLENGE:** *is to develop the ability to connect disparate ideas, people and organizations, ask appropriate questions and conduct yourself as a citizen of the world.*

Any map of the world can reveal the vivid picture of those provinces where non-renewable resources are now depleted or exhausted. One of the most enduring assets we can bequeath to subsequent generations of Australian's is a resilient culture which recognizes, supports, facilitates and rewards creativity and innovation in respect of everything we undertake.

Today we are proud to recognize and reward some of Curtin University's most outstanding young innovators.

Culture is an intangible phenomenon. Developing that intangible phenomenon takes generations and demands sustained commitment. My purpose to day is not to dwell on elaborate strategies for achieving this but to confine my remarks to a limited number of practical observations and reminders.

Understanding the fundamental nature of innovation is a key to your success.

- Innovation is unpredictable and disruptive. I have always found this to be a great source of excitement. It is important to realise however that not everyone shares this form of excitement.
- Innovation is collaborative and networked and we are amongst the best collaborators and networkers in the world.
- Innovation is open and global. Advances based on innovation are diffusing at an ever increasing rate. Innovative breakthroughs achieved in one part of the world today are known and understood almost instantaneously in all corners of the globe.
- Innovation is more often than not messy in both intellectual and organizational terms. Coping with mess presents vital challenges for those of us who may be charged with managing creative people and innovative ventures.

The great Albert Einstein reminded us that imagination is more important than knowledge.

Understanding the links between imagination, creativity and innovation is also important in determining the success of innovation programs and innovative projects. Creativity is the application of our imagination to combine existing facts and objects in different ways for new purposes. Innovation is the process of taking creative ideas to market or to usefulness. In essence Innovation is creativity with a job to do. Exercising the creative mind and joining the dots in exciting new ways is fundamentally different although highly complementary to the job to be done in taking the creative idea to the market.

**YOUR CHALLENGE:** *Is to manage the mess, revel in the excitement of unpredictability and perfect the art of collaboration.*

Appreciating what happens in practise when taking a great new idea through to successful implementation may help you in developing your resilience. Over the years I have developed with the help of many people what I refer to as the Innovators Reality Check. In summary it reminds us of the six basic stages that any classic innovation passes through. STAGE ONE is Wild enthusiasm and exuberance associated with the birth of the bright new idea. STAGE TWO is summed up in one word; Frustration, usually resulting from the difficulty of getting you peers or superiors to see the picture. STAGE THREE is Fear connected to the possibility of failure. This may lead to panic in some of your most worthy colleagues and supporters. STAGE FOUR.....if the initiative fails; then the project is an orphan, there is a search for the guilty and the innocent (usually the most vulnerable) are punished. STAGE FIVE.....if the initiative succeeds; then the project has many friends. There is high praise, accolades and rewards for those who were not really responsible. STAGE SIX is the next vision.

**YOUR CHALLENGE:** *Is to manage the frustration, anticipate the fear and irrespective of the outcome move on to the next vision.*

Having drawn your attention to some human realities associated with the success and failure of various innovations I should perhaps mention some of the readily identifiable villains in all walks of life who serve as obstacles to innovation. You won't find references to these groups in any of the text books on innovation but in the real world they are the;

- The bean counters.(*necessary but risk averse*)
- The creatures of habit.( *anesthetized in their own comfort zone*)
- The control freaks.(*disciples of orderliness*)
- The conformists.( *to whom change is an anathema*)
- The gossips or rumour mongers. ( *disruption is part of their DNA*)

These individuals are to be found in all organizations across all cultures. They may break your heart on a day to day basis but never allow them to break your

spirit. Strategies can be developed to go around them, over them and on occasions if necessary to go through them.

**YOUR CHALLENGE:** *Is to avoid being distracted or deflected. Never give up the pursuit of your dream.*

**REMEMBER: the words of Milan Kundera**

*“.....A dream with courage is innovation; a dream without courage is a delusion.....”*