

A Conversation with Gerald Haman

by Laraine Spector

Gerald Haman is president of SolutionPeople, owner of the Chicago Thinkubator, and adjunct professor of Innovation, Northwestern University.

How did the idea for inspiring innovation take hold in you? While working for P&G and Arthur Anderson I recognized the need for helping companies foster more innovation. I started our company in 1989. However the first inspiration came early in my career as while a concert producer for musicians such as Air Supply, Harry Chapin, Cheap Trick, Alice Cooper and the Little River Band. I was interested in their music creation process and that later led to my interest in business creativity and innovation.

Do you think “Innovate or Die” represents the real or sole choice for most businesses? I think the focus should be “Innovate to Thrive” and if you do not innovate you may

only “get by” and never thrive. Innovation is a choice for *all* businesses and every individual. I define creativity as coming up with new or interesting ideas. Innovation is implementing creative ideas to create value or profit. In other words, innovation is how businesses make money from creativity. It’s easy to be creative. It’s more difficult to be innovative and make money or gain profit from your creative ideas.

Can you tell me more about how to ignite creativity/innovation in individuals and organizations? I could share a lot in this area as we have had 18 years to develop systems, models, processes and tools for large companies, teams and individuals. First, people should know that there is a “process” that stimulates innovation. We have a 4-Step Accelerated Innovation Process that is being used by thousands of people.

The design of a space or environment can trigger creative thinking and innovation. Our Thinkubator in Chicago’s West Loop is an ideal “space” for inspiring innovation and it is often used by innovators from Motorola, McDonald’s Kraft, and a number of Chicago ad agencies. My *KnowBrainer* innovation tool, *FlashBrainer* software and *PodBrainer* e-Tool for iPods are tools that can be used by nearly anyone to generate innovative thinking.

How well do you think most organizations are doing in encouraging innovative and effective, solutions-oriented action?

Some are doing well. SolutionPeople has helped people from over half of “BusinessWeek’s 30 Most Innovative Companies in the World” but there is still along way to go. Many organizations can be innovative *once* and the key is to be able to experience *continuous* innovation.

To what extent is creative/innovative thinking related to risk-taking, effective solutions management, achieving a competitive advantage, leadership?

We have found that there are Six Essential Ingredients that are critical to fostering more innovation. These include leadership, teamwork, processes, tools, technology and space (or work environment). A unique combination of each of those ingredients should be formulated to realize results. Bottom line is that organization leaders and teams need to know how to “formulate to innovate!”