The Top 100 Lamest Excuses for Not Innovating

Since 1986, I've been working with a wide variety of organizations who have acknowledged their need to innovate -- enough, at least, to invite Idea Champions in to help them on their way.

It's been a fascinating ride.

Along the way, I've noticed that a lot of people who work in corporations are ruled by a host of "reasons" why innovation can't happen.

Many of these reasons, I realize, are based on years of in-the-trenches experience. My clients are not hallucinating, merely reporting how difficult it's been for them along the way.

I guess you could call these people realists.

I understand their point of view, but it is precisely this point of view that's the problem.

Innovation, as I've said before, is an inside job. It begins with the individual. Organizations don't innovate. People do. And if people are ruled by past experiences, old assumptions, and limiting concepts of what's possible, nothing much will ever change.

And so, as a public service, it is my pleasure to present to you the Top 100 Lamest Excuses for Not Innovating -- excuses I continue hearing again and again out there on the front lines of corporate America.

Please remember, dear reader, that there may be a kernel of truth in each of these reasons. Indeed, what sometimes may seem like an excuse may simply be a clear assessment of current reality.

Current reality, however, is only one form of reality. And just because it's current doesn't mean it's the way it will always be. Orshould be.

Real innovators challenge excuses. Real innovators challenge the status quo. They do not concede to current reality. They find a way over, around or through whatever obstacle is in their way -- whether that obstacle is a lack of funding or the assumption that there is a lack of funding.

As you read through the list, take note of the excuses YOU find yourself making. Also take note of the excuses you hear others making.

At the end of the list, I offer you a simple technique to free yourself from the tyranny of these innovation-averse excuses.

Give it a shot.

1. I don't have the time.
2. I can't get the funding.
3. My boss will never go for it.
4. Were not in the kind of business likely to innovate.
5. We won't be able to get it past legal.
6. I've got too much on my plate.
7. I'll be punished if I fail.
8. I'm just not not the creative type.
9. I'm already juggling way too many projects.
10. I'm too new around here.
11. I'm not good at presenting my ideas.
12. No one, besides me, really cares about innovation.
13. There's too much bureaucracy here to get anything done.
14. Our customers aren't asking for it.
15. We're a risk averse culture. Always will be.
16. We don't have an innovation process.
17. We don't have a culture of innovation.
18. They don't pay me enough to take on this kind of project.
19. My boss will get all the credit.
20. My career path will be jeopardized if this doesn't fly.
21. I've already got enough headaches.
22. I'm no good at office politics.
23. My home life will suffer.
24. I'm not disciplined enough.
25. It's an idea too far ahead of its time.
26. I won't be able to get enough resources.
27. I don't have enough information.
28. Someone will steal my idea.
29. It will take too long to get results.
30. We're in a down economy.
31. It will die in committee.
32. I'll be laughed out of town.

33. I won't be able to get the ear of senior leadership.
34. If it ain't broke, don't fix it.
35. The concept is too disruptive.
36. I won't be able to get enough support.
37. I don't tolerate ambiguity all that well.
38. I'm not in a creative profession.
39. Now is not a good time to start a new project.
40. I don't have the right personality to build a team.
41. Our company is going through too many changes right now.
42. They won't give me any more time to work on the project.
43. If I succeed, too much will be expected of me.
44. Nothing ever changes around here.
45. Things are changing so fast, my head is spinning.
46. Whatever success I achieve will be undone by somebody else.
47. I don't have enough clout to get things done.
48. It's just not worth the effort.
49. I'm getting close to retirement.
50. My other projects will suffer.
51. Been there, done that.
52. I don't want another thing to think about.
53. I won't have any time left for my family.
54. A more nimble competitor will beat us to the punch.
55. Teamwork is a joke around here.
56. I've never done anything like this before.
57. I won't be rewarded if the project succeeds.
58. We're not measured for innovation.
59. I don't have the right credentials.
60. We need more data.
61. It's not my job.
62. It will hard sustaining the motivation required.
63. I've tried before and failed.
64. I'm not smart enough to pull this off.
65. I don't want to go to any more meetings.
66. It will take way too long to get up to speed.
67. Our Stage Gate process will sabotage any hope of success.
68. I'm not skillful at building business cases.
69. Summer's coming.
70. The marketplace is too volatile.
71. This is a luxury we can't afford at this time.
72. I think we're about to be acquired.
73. I'm trying to simplify my life, not complicate it.
74. The dog ate my homework.
75. Help! I'm a prisoner in a Chinese fortune cookie factory
76. My company just wants to squeeze more blood from the stone.
77. My company isn't committed to innovation.
78. I don't have the patience.
79. I'm not sure how to begin.
80. I'm too left-brained for this sort of thing.
81. I won't be able to get the funding required.
82. I'm getting too old for this.
83. We're too competitive, in-house. Collaboration is a rarity.
84. Spring is coming.
85. I'm hypoglycemic.

86. That's Senior Leadership's job
87. I'm thinking of quitting.
88. Market conditions just aren't right.
89. We need to focus on the short term for a while.
90. Innovation, schminnovation.
91. What we really need are some cost cutting initiatives.
92. Six Sigma will take care of everything.
93. Mercury is in retrograde.
94. IT won't go for it.
95. Maybe next year.
96. That's my boss's job.
97. That's R&D's job.
98. I would if I could, but I can't, so I won't.
99. First, we need to benchmark the competition.
100. It's against my religion.

THE TECHNIQUE I PROMISED YOU

1. Make a list of your three most bothersome excuses.

2. Turn each excuse into a powerful question, starting with the words "How can I?" or "How can we?" (For example, if your excuse is "That's R&D's job," you might ask "How can I make innovation myjob?" or "How can I help my team take more responsibility for innovating?"

3. Brainstorm each question -- alone and with your team.