



## Don't be a Dinosaur ... Innovate!

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He's the man with the plan  
The guy with all the answers  
He has years of experience, so he knows all ... about the past  
...but today ain't the past, its today  
...and today's different, really different  
With his suit and tie, he holds on to what he knows  
...and defends it with great zeal  
...and refuses to change  
Holding us back with extinct ideas

In today's hyper-competitive global environment, change and innovation are essential to survive, thrive and win. Despite this, many people are committed to [old thinking](#); using ideas that worked in the past, but fail in the present and future. To avoid becoming one of these dinosaurs, one needs to think outside the box and [innovate](#)!

*Thinking outside the box* means that one is an unconventional thinker, but what does that mean exactly? [Unconventionals](#) stand out compared to most people. Their thinking is based on an amalgamation of ideas from a wide range of areas. They often use bits and pieces of very simple concepts in unique combinations to craft innovative solutions to new or old problems. Their unique approach is often reflected in their eclectic mix of interests and people with whom they form relationships. They like information and ideas, and often focus on details others overlook. Unconventionals like to ponder and understand things fully. To illustrate further, below is a comparison of conventional and unconventional thinkers.

### Conventional Thinkers (bankers, accountants, government bureaucrats, etc.)

- Like safety, avoid risk
- Say things like, "that is just the way we do things" and "everyone does it this way"
- Accept things as they are presently
- Will avoid expressing their ideas unless agreement is likely, conflict is avoided
- Follow trends, there is safety in numbers
- Are less willing to think, prefer continue doing things the same old way
- Agreement is very important, as is consistency
- Perceive differences negatively; these are weird, strange, odd, etc.

- Don't question why things are the way they are, don't think of a better way
- Continue using ineffective methods despite awareness of better alternatives
- Will fiercely defend doing things the old way
- Inherently opposed to change
- Value established knowledge, even if it is outdated

### Unconventional Thinkers (kids, modern artists, tech. entrepreneurs, etc.)

- In the quest for improvements or even perfection
- Think and act differently from most [people](#)
- Re-evaluate everything, including their beliefs & assumptions, and change them if necessary
- Integrate disparate [ideas](#) and knowledge into new ideas and solutions
- Are not restricted by other people, do not care what they think or do
- Like change, see it as an opportunity for improvement
- Willing to try new things & learn from them whether or not they work out
- Believe that constructive conflict is good, leads to more ideas and a better understanding of issues
- [Openly express](#) what's on their mind
- Value thinking and creating new knowledge

Everyone is born an unconventional thinker. Just observe young [children](#) and you can see the amazing creativity and free thinking they have. Unfortunately, as kids get older, they are taught to be like everyone else in their family, at school, etc. They learn to become conventional thinkers. However, if this can be learned, it can be [unlearned](#). Although it might not be an easy change, conventional thinkers can become more unconventional. You might not become as unconventional as Albert Einstein was, but you can become far more unconventional in your thinking. Below are some ideas that you can use to start on that path. Doing these activities is easier if they are done with other people, so look for groups that you can join or create to help you try new *stuff*.

### Become an Unconventional Thinker

- Force yourself to try new things: music, food, activities, travel, etc. (ex. Marco Polo who inspired millions to learn about other cultures).
- Question everything you do and believe, stop doing things to fit in or just because everyone else does it (ex. Albert Einstein who dared to question Newton's ideas and developed new theories that revolutionized physics).
- Get used to people not agreeing with you. Always tell people what you think, even if they might not like it (ex. Ralph Nader who helped make cars safer by challenging the auto industry and regulators).

- [Debate](#) with people who disagree with you in order to understand their point of view. Accept their ideas even if they are different (ex. The opposite of politicians!).
- Talk to people who are totally different from you and learn from them: younger, older, retired, foreigners, different professions, etc. (Reporters do this everyday and deliver new and insightful ideas we wouldn't ordinarily find).
- Try new ideas even if you aren't 100% sure they will work. (ex. Steve Jobs and the iPhone).
- When new ideas don't work out, view this as part of the learning required to try new things, the cost of creativity, not as a failure or mistake (ex. Thomas Edison and the thousand of tries before perfecting the light bulb).
- Don't take yourself too seriously, use [humor](#) to make fun of yourself when things don't work out (ex. Ronald Regan who was famous for using humor in his speeches to make himself likable).

These activities are just a first step! They create a pattern in your thinking and behavior that allow you to be more comfortable with new ideas in general. Once you create this foundation, you will be ready to take further steps and do similar activities in your work context. Soon you will become open to trying more and more new ideas at work; a prerequisite for creativity and innovation.

Perhaps you think you're already innovative. Everyone thinks they're creative or innovative, but are they really? Owning an iPad does not make you innovative! Wearing a t-shirt with something clever on it does not make you creative! Being innovative means thinking of new ideas that are valuable. The ideas can be a mix of new and/or old ideas. Not all creative ideas are innovative. For creative ideas to qualify as innovative, they must be useful and valuable: a money saving process, a new product that sells, a training program that really transforms people, etc. ...so here are the top ten ways to know if you're innovating!

1. If you have to customize the tools you need to work, you might be innovating
2. If you mix ideas from different fields, you might be innovating
3. If you are always right, you're probably NOT innovating
4. If you openly express what's on your mind, you might be innovating
5. If you don't know how to do what you're doing, you might be innovating
6. If you are a skeptic, you might be innovating
7. If you have [insufficient experience](#), you might be innovating
8. If the establishment says you'll fail, you might be innovating
9. If you are willing to risk failure, you might be innovating
10. If the answers you need aren't in books, you might be innovating

Don't be a dinosaur ... evolve and innovate! While changing is not easy, becoming an unconventional thinker is worth the effort. It can help you become

open to new ideas, creative, flexible and willing to take the risks necessary to innovate and win. If others can innovate, so can you!

Follow me on [Twitter](#) and check out my [book](#) to get tons of great ideas on how to become an unconventional leader and create an innovative organization.

Eric J. Romero, PhD is an Unconventional Leadership Badass! For over 15 years, Eric has helped managers become **unconventional leaders**. Eric partners with leaders to help them create competitive advantage based on **creativity, flexibility and risk-taking** so they can innovate and win. Eric has written over [35 articles](#) and presented his ideas around the world. He is the author of [\*Compete Outside the Box: The Unconventional Way to Beat the Competition\*](#). Originally from New York City, his presentations are delivered with a sense of humor, 100% unedited honesty and street smarts! For more information go to [www.CompeteOutsideTheBox.com](http://www.CompeteOutsideTheBox.com).

**Rebel, Innovate & Win!**