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The LIBRARY INNOVATION TOOLKIT

Ideas, Strategies, and Programs

Edited by Anthony Molaro
and Leah L. White

Foreword by R. David Lankes

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FOREWORD

R. David Lankes

Nothing is different, but everything's changed.

—Paul Simon and Brian Eno
"Once Upon a Time There Was an Ocean"

I recently took a family vacation to Walt Disney World. There, in the Magic Kingdom's Tomorrowland is a ride called the Carousel of Progress. It is a rotating stage show that follows an animatronic family as it copes with progress (mostly technological advancements) at the turn of the twentieth century, in the 1920s, 1940s, and sort of today (more like the 1990s). The theme throughout each tableau is the same: look how far we've come; we live in a great era of innovation.

What is interesting about the ride/show is that each era makes a claim that its time is the era of great progress and innovation. "Look, indoor plumbing—how could it get any better?" "Look, electricity—surely we are living in the greatest time of advancement." "Look, a stove that is voice activated—there's a great big beautiful tomorrow. . . ." It is a trap that we all often fall into when we describe innovation and advancements in our own era. It is a narrative that we adopt and is clear throughout this book: this is a time of great change and, in implication, the era of greatest change.

My point is not to challenge this concept—it is clear we are in a time of great change—but rather to say that it is a narrative we adopt, and often from previous generations. We are, as a society and as a field, addicted to

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innovation. Those who talk about librarianship as a risk-averse, slow-moving field have not been paying attention. Adoption of social networking and makerspaces has come on the heels of adoption of virtual reference, which came upon adoption of the Internet itself, after the adoption of the personal computer, after the adoption of microfiche. Michael Gorman once referred to the library as the graveyard of abandoned technologies.

True innovation is not simply change that matches this larger societal meme of progress for progress's sake. True innovation is positive change, and when you assign terms like *positive* or *negative*, you must have some standard to measure it against. Positive for whom? Compared to what? At what cost? As Walt Disney's script calls out the miracles of electricity and cars, he does not talk about (nor was he likely aware of) the environmental impact of pollution and greenhouse gases. He talks about commuting and the rise of suburbs without mentioning the ensuing urban blight.

So, how can we look, not just at change, but at innovation—positive change? I believe the answer is put succinctly by Hashemi Scott and McNamee in chapter 1 of this book: "Libraries serve communities, and communities change."

I might add that libraries are part of those served communities as well. As the condition of communities improves, so should the condition of the libraries and librarians. My point is that it is the community that must be our yardstick and arbiter for good and bad—not the collection (making it bigger, making it circulate more, making it better described), but the community and the community's ability to fulfill its needs *and* aspirations. And, as Hashemi Scott and McNamee note, these needs and aspirations change, and so must libraries and librarians—change, not to fit a narrative, but to improve their communities and society as a whole.

This book adds to the conversation around innovation and change going on in librarianship but also, and more important, at the interface between librarians and communities. I see each chapter as a sort of case study. These cases serve as necessary reality to more conceptual discussions on innovation and the predominant narrative that innovation is good because change is good. These chapters, however, call out for the next step, the next turn of the conversation: making cases transferrable and assessable across libraries and, indeed, across domains.

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So, I have a request of you, dear reader. As you read this book and you spark upon a good idea, first, do the good idea. Second, reach out to the author behind that idea. Every project I have ever embarked upon improved by sharing. This book is one side of a conversation; add the other side. Link these ideas into your practice, but also deeper concepts and theories. Use these ideas, these points, these work plans as a foundation for a larger personal network of innovation.

To steal from Walt Disney's song: there is a great big beautiful tomorrow shining for libraries and librarians. That tomorrow will come from a coordinated effort to network as professionals, and to include our communities as part of the library, not simply as consumers of ideas we dream up.

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INTRODUCTION

Anthony Molaro and Leah L. White

We live in a fascinating time. Sure, there aren't flying cars, but every day something new, exciting, and totally different is launched or announced or, sometimes, declared. The ways we consume and then disseminate information are shifting. The ways people think and interact are transforming. And the way libraries provide services for their communities is rapidly changing.

Innovation seems easy enough. According to the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* (2014), innovation is "the act or process of introducing new ideas, devices, or methods," and this sounds like a pretty simple concept. In reality and in the day-to-day life of a library worker, trying to innovate can occasionally feel like moving mountains. Yet libraries, despite budget restraints, staffing issues, and all nature of obstacles, continue to innovate in the most fascinating ways in order to fulfill their missions and create positive experiences for their patrons.

Many argue that innovation is not so much a destination as it is a process. We would add that innovation is not a process as much as it is an organizational (or departmental) culture, mind-set, or worldview. Innovation needs to be systematically ingrained in us as librarians and library organizations. It requires a dedication to the innovative spirit, to looking at problems through a holistic lens, to experimentation and rapid prototyping, and to taking risks.

Innovation doesn't always mean a disruption but can also include incremental or sustaining innovations, but in both cases the goal is the same: to offer the best experiences and services for patrons. Again, innovation doesn't

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need to be a big, shiny, new thing but can also include small tweaks and alterations to existing services, tools, and spaces.

What you will glean from the following chapters is that innovation is much less focused on technology and much more focused on people, either staff or patrons. Innovation happens through people (library staff) to improve services and experiences for the community (patrons). In the chapters of this book lie outstanding and unique examples of ways libraries and librarians are innovating to not only keep up with the times but also lead the way into the future.

Innovative Culture

Part I introduces the innovation mind-set framework. "Zen and the Art of Innovation," by Sarah Hashemi Scott and Heather McNamee, introduces the beginner's mind as a crucial element of innovative cultures. The next chapter, "Driving Creativity and Innovation in Your Organization: It's Easier Than You Think," by Kelly Pepo, discusses the importance of creating organizational structures that lead to innovation. Pepo introduces the concept of Innovation Champions, who are tasked with monitoring trends while seeds committees are tasked with caring for an idea from inception to fruition. This part's concluding chapter, "The Library's Role in Promoting Tolerance and Diversity in a University," by Lorna E. Rourke, shows how innovation can mean standing up for those whose voice is often silenced. Readers will see that to be innovative may require us to be bold and to take great political risks, even in the face of opposition.

Innovative Staff

Part II is devoted to strategies for building staff buy-in for innovative ideas and engagement in innovation practices. This part begins with "Innovation Wizardry," by Sarah Strahl and Erica J. Christianson, which examines the "magical" aspects of innovation as we learn innovative wizardry. "Innovative Boot Camp: A Social Experiment," by Robin Bergart and M. J. D'Elia, walks readers through a systematic, boot camp–style approach to innovation, through which we learn to ask, Why do we do things this way versus that way? The concluding chapter, "Building a Toolkit to Craft Your Instruction

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Program: The Virginia Tech Experience," by Tracy M. Hall, Edward F. Lener, and Purdom Lindblad, offers a toolkit to kick-start your instructional program. In each of these chapters, readers will find a step-by-step process for achieving certain innovative outcomes.

Innovative Outreach

Part III is about getting outside the library to deliver exceptional and innovative outreach services to patrons. From catching a ferry across the bay ("Get on Board with Community Needs: Ferry Tales, a Monthly Book Group aboard a Ferry," by Audrey Barbakoff) to grabbing a drink in a bar ("A Librarian Walks into a Bar," by Ben Haines and Kate Niehoff), readers will see the essential role librarians play in expanding the library beyond its own walls. Both chapters talk about the importance of reaching a fuller part of the community, particularly the community that doesn't use the library. We may not all have the luxury of jumping on a ferry, but many of us can apply this type of inventiveness to our own communities in unique and meaningful ways.

Innovative Technology

While both of the chapters in Part IV come to us from academic libraries, they are fully applicable to libraries of all types. The first chapter, "Seizing the Opportunity for Innovation and Service Improvement," by Cheryl McGrath and Brad Warren, provides two examples of using technology to improve the experience of the user. Both projects not only improved user experience, and saved their time, but also saved the library money. In "The 'Eyes' Have It: A Digital Media Lab in an Academic Library," Pat Duck describes the creation and implementation of a digital media lab, providing guidance and examples for any type of institution that may wish to create this much-needed service.

Innovative Spaces

Part V concerns library spaces. Monica Harris's "Participatory Spaces and Idea Box" explores how to create a truly unique participatory space for all patrons. The space inspires the creativity of community members, serves as a way to exhibit their work, and builds anticipation for the next iteration of

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the idea box. "'Like a Kid in a Candy Store': Marketplaces in Public Libraries," by Daisy Porter-Reynolds, deals with merchandising our collections, and why we don't need to reinvent the wheel when publishers and retailers have figured out all of this stuff with their deep, marketing dollars–lined pockets. This chapter incorporates the best practices of our retailing competition to improve the services for our patrons and provide them with a system with which they are more comfortable.

Innovative Programs

Part VI, the book's longest part, highlights several innovative program ideas. In each of the chapters, readers will find unique ways to create positive experiences for our patrons. From re-envisioning a children's writing club ("Apprentices of the Book Empire at a Glance," by Amy Holcomb and Anna Fillmore), to launching a Readtember (month of literacy) program with zombies, dads, and gaming ("Monsters, Rockets, and Baby Racers: Stepping into the Story with Children and Young People," by Matt Finch and Tracie Mauro), to running a C2E2-style comic convention ("Librari-Con: Bringing Magic to Your Library," by Erika Earp and Melissa Lang), to creating a TED-style event for your community ("The Business of Ideas: Using a TED-Like Event to Spread Innovation," by Troy A. Swanson), the reader will see a common thread emerge. Each of these programs requires an innovative attitude, a willingness to fail and to learn from mistakes, and a deep desire to reach new patrons and create positive experiences for all.

We hope that you enjoy the contents of this book. May it inspire you to take big risks, ask deeper questions, strive for better service, and dream bigger ideas. As Brian Mathews (2012) once remarked, "Innovation is messy. It takes many wild ideas that flop in order to find transformative gold. Innovation demands leaders who are persistent and who can challenge the status quo. Innovation requires organizations to live in liminality. Is your library ready for disruption?" (3).

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PART I

INNOVATIVE CULTURE

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1

Zen and the Art of Innovation

Sarah Hashemi Scott and Heather McNamee

Innovation is a hot topic in all industries and service sectors these days. In recent years, innovation has become a central focus of conferences, publishing, research, and popular discourse and has emerged as a key strategic priority in organizations of all kinds, from public sector agencies to large corporations. Innovation, by definition, means change and moving toward the unknown. There is no blueprint. However, putting innovation in its proper context—the rich history of human society—offers us a framework for understanding why it is important, how we can become better innovators, and how libraries can support innovation in society at large.

In this chapter, we argue that success in innovation begins in the mind, and we describe how having the right mind-set will help everyone in your library through the process. We begin by considering why innovation has become a key strategic priority and examining how recent developments in technology have transformed society and culture and placed new pressures and demands upon libraries and other organizations. We also explore the relationship between innovation in libraries and innovation in other sectors, positioning libraries as facilitators of knowledge creation and innovation throughout society and as potential partners in coordinated efforts to improve society. Finally, we describe qualities of the innovative mind-set, drawing on the concept of "beginner's mind" from Zen Buddhism, and offer a number of practical suggestions for both managers and frontline staff to help foster innovation in their own work and organizations.

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Background and Context

We live in the Information Age, and our world is rapidly changing. New, disruptive technologies continually emerge, gain widespread adoption throughout society, and impact the ways in which people live, learn, work, communicate, and interact. The past few decades have seen the emergence of the Internet, mobile communication, digital media, blogs, online social networks, and 3-D printing—several examples of technologies that have profoundly changed, and continue to change, the lives of people across the globe. These historic changes of the recent past and present continue to dramatically transform twenty-first-century society, as the Industrial Revolution transformed society in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Information and communication platforms such as Twitter and Facebook and technological tools such as smart phones and tablet computers are now available to and utilized by a wider spectrum of society than ever before. The globalization of communication networks, information systems, economies, and workforces has linked people to one another across the world in unprecedented ways, and the advent of the Internet has eradicated many of the geographic and socioeconomic barriers that isolated communities in times past. We live in a world of ubiquitous social connections. In the words of entrepreneur and author Seth Godin (2008): "Geography used to be important. . . . Now, the Internet eliminates geography" (11).

Libraries serve communities, and communities change. As we have seen, geography is no longer a precursor to forming or maintaining a community, and as new communication networks give rise to new communities, people connect to one another in new and different ways. People are more mobile than ever before, and relationships that begin online often develop offline, leading people to move to be with new friends or partners, take new jobs, pursue education, or start new businesses. In addition, political conflicts drive migrations of large populations from one city or country to another. Migrations and circumstances shift the demographics of local communities, which are the traditional types of communities that libraries have focused on serving. This leads to new demands from library users. Innovation becomes a necessity and an explicit strategic priority.

As new communities form and as existing communities change and evolve, values—both inside and outside our organizations—conflict and

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shift. From democratic uprisings in the Arab world and partisan politics in the United States to the "free knowledge" movement and the shifting balance between traditional publishing and self-publishing, the values and interests of different parties clash and compete and put pressure on libraries and other organizations to adapt. Although the profession of librarianship is grounded in a number of traditional values, including intellectual freedom, privacy, and confidentiality, these values are often challenged by the development of new technologies and services, compelling librarians to prioritize certain values over others or to resist change in light of the ethical dilemmas it presents. Tensions between professional values concerning privacy, preservation, digital access, filtering, and censorship are evident in many areas of our field today, including the delivery of e-books and other digital media to patrons, the provision of public Internet access, and the adoption of social online public access catalogs (OPACs). Internal conflicts over values present barriers to—and opportunities for—innovation.

Approaches to innovation in the private and public sectors vary. The differences lie mainly in motivations. According to Christian Bason (2010), Director of Denmark's innovation unit MindLab, "in the private sector competition and the efficiency of markets is [*sic*] generally regarded as the main source of innovative pressure," whereas in the public sector innovation is motivated by community needs (61). In democratic nations such as the United States, public sector organizations such as libraries, schools, and city or county agencies operate within the framework of democracy. The purpose of any particular organization can be discerned from many sources, including its formal charter or charge, mission and vision statements, strategic plans, and guiding principles. Public sector organizations are bound by their role in the community to a greater extent than are private sector innovators. For example, Google's approach to innovation is centered on their product, aiming "to take things that work well and improve upon them in unexpected ways" (Google Inc. 2013), whereas the US government's Office of Social Innovation and Civic Participation is tasked with making "greater and more lasting progress on our Nation's challenges" (SICP 2013).

Libraries play a unique role in the ecosystem of innovation. As providers of access to information and as facilitators of the creation of new knowledge, libraries foster innovation throughout society. By being adept at innovation ourselves, we can better meet the needs and demands of the communities we

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serve, thereby better facilitating innovation throughout society. In addition, in partnership and collaboration with other organizations such as schools and universities, city agencies, or nonprofits, libraries can play an important role in coordinated efforts to address community needs and improve society.

Given the environments in which our organizations operate, the imperative to innovate has taken on a new sense of urgency. So, how is a twenty-first-century library to succeed at innovation? One key step toward success in innovation is to adopt an innovative mind-set. This is something that individuals and organizations can do immediately as they begin their journey toward creating flexible, responsive, and effective organizations. We can learn a lot about the state of mind most conducive to innovation by turning our attention to the school of thought known as Zen Buddhism. In the following sections, we explore beginner's mind concepts from Zen Buddhism as articulated in Shunryu Suzuki's (1997) book *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind: Informal Talks on Zen Meditation and Practice*, incorporating these with practical applications for both frontline staff and managers in libraries.

The idea that Zen teachings can be applied to innovation is not new. In a 2012 post on Fast Company's design blog *Co.DESIGN*, Warren Berger discussed several recent books linking Zen teachings and innovation. Berger asserted that his own research on the relationship between fundamental questioning and innovation supports the notion that "some of the most successful innovators adopt a 'question everything' mindset that could be compared to the Zen notion of *shoshin*, or 'beginner's mind.'"

Beginner's mind is a state of openness to the point of emptiness. With a beginner's mind one sees things as they are, can hold many possibilities in the mind at once, has no thought of achievement, gives full attention to the present moment, and uses straightforward communication. The beginner's mind is patient and calm: "in the midst of noise and change, your mind will be quiet and stable" (Suzuki 1997, 57–58). The qualities of an innovative mindset discussed in this chapter are organized under broad categories: Communication, Perception, and Action. Each quality is discussed with an eye toward practical applications for frontline staff, managers, and organizations. The qualities were drawn from our own experiences as members of our public library's Innovation Team and are meant to be not prescriptive or comprehensive but a starting point for developing your own approach to innovation.

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Communication

Transparent communication, active listening, and positive storytelling can help individuals and organizations to create a foundation for innovation. Open channels of communication allow for and encourage the free exchange and collaborative development of ideas. Effective communication reinforces that ideas are valued and builds understanding of organizational history and current efforts.

Transparency

Communication from the beginner's mind is open and honest. This type of communication does not hide from hard truths or from emotional responses but expresses them freely and respectfully. For managers, being transparent means being able to communicate clearly to staff about why and how decisions are made in your organization. Modeling for staff how to communicate truthfully and respectfully creates an environment where employees feel safe to do the same. As Suzuki (1997) noted, "You should be true to your feelings, and to your mind, expressing yourself without any reservations. This helps the listener to understand more easily" (87).

At the organizational level, transparency means providing all staff with access to documentation of the decision-making process, including leadership meeting minutes, updates about ongoing work group projects, and progress on goals. This information should be easily accessible to any staff. Also, providing the history behind past decisions and ideas about future decisions allows all staff to know where the organization has been and enables staff to develop informed perspectives about possible new directions.

Listening

One of the most critical and immediate things you can do is to listen to your colleagues, your supervisors, and those you supervise. Try to approach listening without eagerness to share your own opinions. Focus instead on what you hear. Don't try to form arguments to support your position, but rather take in the perspectives of others.

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Try this in your next meeting: Listen carefully, ask questions to clarify, and don't make assumptions. If you aren't sure, ask. Your colleagues' ideas and solutions may not be obvious or fully formed even once spoken. Rather than trying to "win" or make your opinion triumph over others, just listen. "Try not to force your ideas on someone, but rather think about it with him. If you feel you have won the discussion, that also is the wrong attitude. Try not to win in the argument; just listen to it; but it is also wrong to behave as if you had lost" (Suzuki 1997, 91).

This kind of openness in listening can happen anywhere in your organization. As part of an organizational culture, openness in listening can encourage respect for a variety of perspectives, forge new understandings about the many roles and responsibilities within your organization, and create connections. In the words of Suzuki: "When you listen to someone, you should give up all your preconceived ideas and your subjective opinions; you should just listen to him, just observe what his way is. We put very little emphasis on right and wrong or good and bad. We just see things as they are with him, and accept them" (Suzuki 1997, 87).

Storytelling

Managers must share a common language and common definitions about what it means to innovate. Telling the story of what it means to innovate in your own organization helps build this common language that everyone can use: "Through your master's language, you understand more than what his words actually say" (Suzuki 1997, 86–87). Having a way to communicate the story of your organization and how your mission and goals add value in the communities you serve will help to create a shared vision at all levels. By telling these stories, the whole organization can build upon this shared knowledge and vision and be inspired to continue to find new ways to be successful in achieving the goals of your organization.

Tell the stories of innovations large and small by staff everywhere in your organization. Managers and staff alike can share stories of how they or their colleagues have successfully brought to the table and executed their ideas, always making the connection to how these successes furthered organizational goals. Staff will see that they add value to the services you provide by bringing forward their ideas.

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Perception

How we view the world can greatly affect our ability to innovate. Diverse perspectives ensure that more ideas are explored and refined. Nonattachment helps us to try out new ideas even if we may fail, to freely share and collaborate, and to move on when necessary. Having a powerful vision for your organization ensures that innovations move your organization in the direction you want.

Diverse Perspectives

You are just one person and cannot see all of the possibilities on your own. Know that you don't know everything. Seek out the perspectives of others both within and outside of your organization. Cultivating a beginner's mind helps you remember that you don't know, and can't know, every best solution or best new service. As Suzuki (1997) noted, "In the beginner's mind there are many possibilities, but in the expert's there are few" (21).

The literature of innovation offers many suggestions for utilizing diverse perspectives in the service of innovation. Bason (2010) argues that it takes courage to relinquish control but that managers must do this in order to embrace the divergence of ideas and perspectives that feed innovation (29). Tom Kelley (2005), of design and innovation consulting firm IDEO, suggests encouraging diversity in several ways. First, "give your team greater variety and they will start seeing the outlines of new connections, making new leaps of imagination" (79). Next, hire for diversity. Don't hire someone just because he or she is like one of your best employees (72). Finally, enlist informal mentors to gain new and fresh perspectives: "Sometimes what managers really need is a mentor from a younger generation to inform and inspire" (86).

As an organization, the library is many things to many people. Libraries serve a variety of needs and provide diverse experiences and services to all members of our communities. "The library" means something different to all of the people we serve. We can seek out the perspectives of our community about what the library means to different types of users and use this diversity of perspectives to create and strengthen services in our community.

Internally, our organizations rely on a diversity of skills and knowledge to run smoothly: facilities and maintenance workers keep our spaces

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functional and clean; librarians conduct reference interviews to get at the information needs of customers; circulation staff understand the variety of issues with patron accounts and skillfully move users through policies and procedures; managers support and coach staff and build teams. The individual in each of these roles holds a particular perspective about the library, its purpose in the community, and how he or she fits into the larger organization. Utilizing the diversity of perspectives within our organizations allows us to understand how we all work together and helps us to provide better service to our users. Create opportunities for staff from a variety of departments and designations to get together and make connections. Avoid being what Bason (2010) called a "mono-professional culture" that doesn't allow for "constructive clashes" across disciplines which are "often a catalyst for radical new solutions" (16–17).

Nonattachment

Bason (2010) pointed out that strong professional identities lead to the inability to try and fail (17). We imagine that our continued success relies on maintaining an identity that we have worked very hard at achieving. However, this attitude holds us back from trying new things. In Suzuki's (1997) words: "In the beginner's mind there is no thought, 'I have attained something.' All self-centered thoughts limit our vast mind. When we have no thought of achievement, no thought of self, we are true beginners. Then we can really learn something" (22).

When we bring our ideas to bear and create new services, we do it in the spirit of serving our communities. Creating in the spirit of service is similar to the Zen Buddhist concept of *dana prajna paramita*, which literally means: to give (*dana*), wisdom (*prajna*), to cross over or reach the other shore (*paramita*) (Suzuki 1997, 66). We give our skills and knowledge over to the community to create services and resources that add value. We can do this as members of a team, giving our good ideas to the group to forward our mission. We can work together in the spirit of service and not cling to our ideas but give them away.

Don't be attached to your good ideas or to the problems around you. It is easy to get caught up in the latest disagreeable policy change or cultural constraint affecting your organization. Don't allow yourself to be attached to these issues; look at these problems simply as part of everything. This

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can free us up to see opportunities and release us from struggles that sap our energy and distract us from our mission. As Suzuki (1997) noted, "Only because you seek to gain something through rigid formal practice does it become a problem for you. But if we appreciate whatever problem we have as an expression of big mind [accepting everything as it is, everything is everything], it is not a problem anymore" (92).

Powerful Vision

Having a beginner's mind means keeping the big picture in mind. Organizations with a clearly defined vision provide a framework for all staff to contribute to the larger goals of the organization. Suzuki (1997) wrote, "And we should do something new. To do something new, of course we must know our past. . . . But we should not keep holding onto anything we have done; we should only reflect on it. And we must have some idea of what we should do in the future" (71). Writing for the *Innovation Excellence* blog, Jeffrey Phillips (2010) asserted, "Without a vision to strive towards, the [innovation] team can't make headway. A good vision should stretch the organization and take them out of their comfort zone, since you really can't innovate while resting comfortably in your little cocoon."

If your organization has not yet articulated a clear vision and mission, you can work with your colleagues and your supervisor to articulate the goals of your own unit within the larger organization. Don't wait for leadership to articulate these for you. Collaborate with your colleagues and find your vision. Continue discussing this vision and connecting it to the work you do every day. By articulating a vision, you can bring focus and relevance to the creation of new ideas, resulting in greater value for your community.

Action

Innovation ultimately requires action. When we think about innovation, we often think about big changes that affect many people. However, small-scale actions that we take on our own, including shifting our mind-sets or adjusting our attitudes, can be equally important. Collaborating, maintaining calm and patience, and accepting realities and challenges along the way are actions you can take now to enable successful innovation in your organization.

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