



**home innovation**<sup>®</sup>  
consulting network

## **The innovator – a rebel**



Are innovators essentially rebels and what is it that enables them to bring new ideas to fruition?

The first step is to define what a rebel is and identify what kind of rebel he or she is. The term rebel (from the Latin *rebellis*, 'insurgent') describes someone who starts an uprising. In this regard, the rebel's basic approach plays a decisive role. If the rebel adopts a nonconformist approach, this means that his or her views and individual actions do not conform to the generally accepted opinions, the predominant lifestyle or the cultural mainstream.

***The innovator, like the rebel, occupies the conflict area between destruction and creation.***

The more the idea contravenes the learned mindset of the establishment, the greater the need for an innovator's tenacity and assertiveness. A rebel's grand visions also require tremendous forces to overcome existing ones. The higher the degree of innovation, the more the status quo is fundamentally called into question. Right from the outset, the rebel and innovator must not be swayed from the fundamentals of his or her idea by seemingly good counter arguments.

***The characteristics and attributes of rebels and innovators are often identical.***

Rebels and innovators must destroy something in existence to create something new. This is all the more difficult during periods of relative safety. Relative safety insofar as flourishing markets can be lulled into safety or, rather, sleep. In this case, disorderliness of any kind is often perceived as a threat as opposed to an opportunity for future security. Radical innovations often signify a paradigm shift and can overwhelm people and their imaginations.

***The fear of the 'new' often spells the end of an innovation while it is still in the developmental stage.***

Especially during the so-called “good times” when the energy and risk-capital would be available to create something new. Often, however, innovation is only brought about by a crisis, just as uprisings occur only after a prolonged period of mismanagement. To bring his or her idea to fruition, the innovator and rebel needs proponents with foresight and the necessary means. Since the rebel usually cannot develop the innovation independently, he or she also requires a group of core allies. The rebel’s ability to excite people about the idea is also essential for success.

***A rebellion, like an innovation, will fail if it is driven alone.***

The innovator, like the rebel, must be able to transform from the lonely wolf into the leader of the pack to develop the idea further. The innovator and rebel must be willing and able to change in order to forge cooperation and display leadership qualities. This also includes the ability to acknowledge the valuable contributions of his or her allies and to let them be incorporated to strengthen the idea. Listening and determining which information is important becomes a balancing act for a speaker and requires a wide range of abilities.

***Inspiring speakers are able to listen and accept well.***

Determining the right time to proclaim the revolution or introduce an innovation will play a key role in its success. Because it must be recognised when an idea that initially opposes the prevalent lifestyle or cultural mainstream is ready to excite masses of people (in other words, the market) for itself and against the status quo.

***In this regard, a rebel, like an innovator,  
must be able to sense when the time is right.***

There is a time for everything. “Time to innovate”, however, does not mean that the client or ally is not yet ready for the innovation, but rather it may not be the right time to introduce the innovation, in the sense of “time to market”. Sometimes this also requires patience and a maturity period. In the fast-paced age of the Internet, innovations are often forced and not allowed to mature or, conversely, the perfect opportunity is missed due to an excess of risk assessments, discussions, and perfectionism.

It is said of French History that “the revolution eats its children” and thereby harmed it. This should be a lesson to innovators to share their thoughts and success with their allies and make sure they do not ultimately turn into a despot or lonely inventor. Respecting human dignity and ensuring open communication with allies is fundamental to counteracting these undesirable developments.

***Instead of holding on to things, sharing and giving away  
things are key to sustainable success.***

After its implementation, or after the revolution, the rebel and innovator must be able to determine when it is the right time to pass on responsibility for the idea to others. During an innovation’s lifecycle, other abilities are often required for the idea to survive in the long term. That is because in society and in the economy it can often be observed that big ideas fail prematurely because the rebel and innovator does not pass on responsibility to others at the right time.

***People and their abilities create markets when the time is right.***

Innovators and rebels have better chances for success if they can speak and listen in an inspiring manner, are able to change without buckling, stay true to the fundamentals of the idea and yet incorporate the valuable contributions of allies, to lead and to share, and to recognise the right time to pass on responsibility. Since rebels and innovators are not superheroes, they, too, will make mistakes during the revolution, or the revolution can lead to contempt for what was. The “burning of the books” at the time of the revolution prevents further learning from the past and minimises the value of the revolution for the future. It is often the case that first-generation inventors merely lay the foundations for the next step in innovation.

***Valuable innovations are always founded on making improvements to existing ones.***

Luminaries such as Nelson Mandela or Steve Jobs, as well as many, equally valuable small and big revolutionaries and innovators are worthy of honour for their life’s work if they consider the sanctity of human dignity as important, even when this does not suit their own ideals.