

Leaders & Success

IBD's 10 SECRETS TO SUCCESS

Investor's Business Daily has spent years analyzing leaders and successful people in all walks of life. Most have 10 traits that, when combined, can turn dreams into reality. Each day, we highlight one.

- 1 HOW YOU THINK IS EVERYTHING:** Always be positive. Think success, not failure. Beware of a negative environment.
- 2 DECIDE UPON YOUR TRUE DREAMS AND GOALS:** Write down your specific goals and develop a plan to reach them.
- 3 TAKE ACTION:** Goals are nothing without action. Don't be afraid to get started now. Just do it.
- 4 NEVER STOP LEARNING:** Go back to school or read books. Get training and acquire skills.
- 5 BE PERSISTENT AND WORK HARD:** Success is a marathon, not a sprint. Never give up.
- 6 LEARN TO ANALYZE DETAILS:** Get all the facts, all the input. Learn from your mistakes.
- 7 FOCUS YOUR TIME AND MONEY:** Don't let other people or things distract you.
- 8 DON'T BE AFRAID TO INNOVATE; BE DIFFERENT:** Following the herd is a sure way to mediocrity.
- 9 DEAL AND COMMUNICATE WITH PEOPLE EFFECTIVELY:** No person is an island. Learn to understand and motivate others.
- 10 BE HONEST AND DEPENDABLE; TAKE RESPONSIBILITY:** Otherwise, Numbers 1-9 won't matter.

To harness the power of innovation-on-demand at your company, try using a creative thinking system called "directed creativity."

Developed by Atlanta-based engineer and creativity coach Paul E. Plsek, directed creativity in his words "is the purposeful production of creative ideas in a topic area, followed up by deliberate effort to implement some of those ideas."

Plsek's creativity process is divided into four phases: preparation, imagination, development, and action. They "generally flow in that order," Plsek said in an interview, "but not always. You can deliberately use methods in any of the four phases to get the creative process going."

The methods to which Plsek refers are dozens of tips, tools and techniques. He's culled them from extensive research

into creativity and from 20 years' experience as an engineer and quality-management director. The tips and tools are designed to help discover ideas — and new ways of thinking — in each phase of the process.

Here are descriptions of Plsek's four phases of directed creativity, and a sampling of some of the tips and tools available on his Web site, www.directedcreativity.com.

■ **Preparation.** This phase involves honing your "powers of observation in order to see more creative possibilities," Plsek explained at his Web site.

"Think of creative preparation as providing the raw materials" for innovation, he wrote. By observing sights, sounds, smells, words, people and processes around us, we store up images, thoughts and ideas "that our imaginations can rearrange later."

Tools for the preparation stage include: setting out to observe and notice things; reading and absorbing material from different fields and genres; talking to strangers; listing assumptions, paradigms and rules related to a particular challenge — and to the way the workplace typically operates.

Another tool is constructing a "new world" from which to consider a challenge. For instance, you might try mentally or through role-playing pondering your problem from an office on Mars, or the sidewalk of a Lilliputian city.

■ **Imagination.** The imagination phase encourages one to "escape the confines of the current ways" of thinking and doing things in order to see new

possibilities, Plsek explained.

Group tools for being imaginative in the workplace include: using sensory cues, like photographs, videotapes, doodles and drawings to provide a mental starting point; or reversing an assumption or workplace rule and exploring its opposite application.

■ **Development.** "Creative ideas have no value until they are put into action," Plsek noted.

One way to start this phase is to select a few of the most promising ideas to work on.

The selected ideas can then be enhanced by asking questions like these: How can we modify the idea to meet objections that could cause rejection? How can we increase the power or value of the idea? What can we do about weak points? What can we do to the idea to enhance the probability of implementation? Who must be involved? What could possibly go wrong with this idea? What can we do about that?

■ **Action.** "Use your judgment and your organization's internal policies and infrastructure in deciding how to proceed in implementing ideas," Plsek advised. "Whatever has worked for you in chartering and supporting quality teams (for example) will probably work for innovation."

To ensure your ideas come to life, he recommends setting deadlines that keep implementation moving forward.

"Change is hard and scary," he said, "especially when the change is a true innovation with no past history of success."

By Linda Stockman-Vines