

# 21 Principles for Innovation

DERIVED FROM DIEGO RODRIGUEZ





## Principle 1 - Experience the world instead of talking about experiencing the world

Instead of spending sixty minutes talking about what might be done, they build four 15-minute prototypes to immediately jump to the lessons that only come when you start breaking things



## Principle 2 - See and hear with the mind of a child



If experiencing the world firsthand is about wisdom, then being open to what that world tells you requires cultivating the un-wise mind of a child:

Open, Curious, Fun-loving



## Principle 3 - Always ask: "How do we want people to feel after they experience this?"



Too often we focus all of our energy on designing the thing, and forget about the people who will use it. As we approach any design effort, we must step back and always ask: "How do we want people to feel after they experience this?"

Example where designing for the entire experience has made for success in the world - Disneyland vs. your local amusement park



## *Principle 4 – Prototype as if you are right. Listen as if you are wrong.*



What is a prototype? A prototype is nothing other than a single question, embodied. In a way quite similar to the scientific method, productive prototyping is about asking a single question at a time, and then constructing a model in the world which brings back evidence to answer your question. In order to believe in the evidence that comes back to you, you need to prototype as if you already know the answer. A strong belief in your point of view will push you to find more creative solutions to the question at hand.

Once your prototype is ready for the world, it is important to listen as if you are wrong.



## *Principle 5 - Anything can be proto typed. You can prototype with anything.*



“Prototypes aren't just for physical products. I routinely see people prototyping services, complex experiences, business models, and even ventures”

Prototyping is the lingua franca of innovation. It externalizes internal thinking in a tangible form, rendering it more intelligible by others and the world



## *Principle 6 - Live life at the intersection*



Innovation needs to happen at the intersection of desirability, viability, and feasibility. These three elements make up the legs of a proverbial stool called "it'll work in the world."



## Principle 7 – Develop a taste for the many flavors of innovation



Three different flavors of innovation can be defined

**Incremental Innovation:** you seek to deliver improvements to offerings you already sell to people who you understand fairly well. Your capabilities as an organization are designed to deliver these offerings to these people.

**Evolutionary Innovation:** one aspect of your offering (either unfamiliar people or an unfamiliar offering space) is changing as you seek to bring new something to market, forcing you to evolve away from what you know. Your mainstream organization will be only partially equipped to successfully innovate here.



**Revolutionary Innovation:** the proverbial blank sheet of paper. Everything is new, as you don't have a history with the offerings, nor do you understand the people here. Your mainstream organization not only is not equipped to innovate successfully here, it won't even see the value in innovating here.

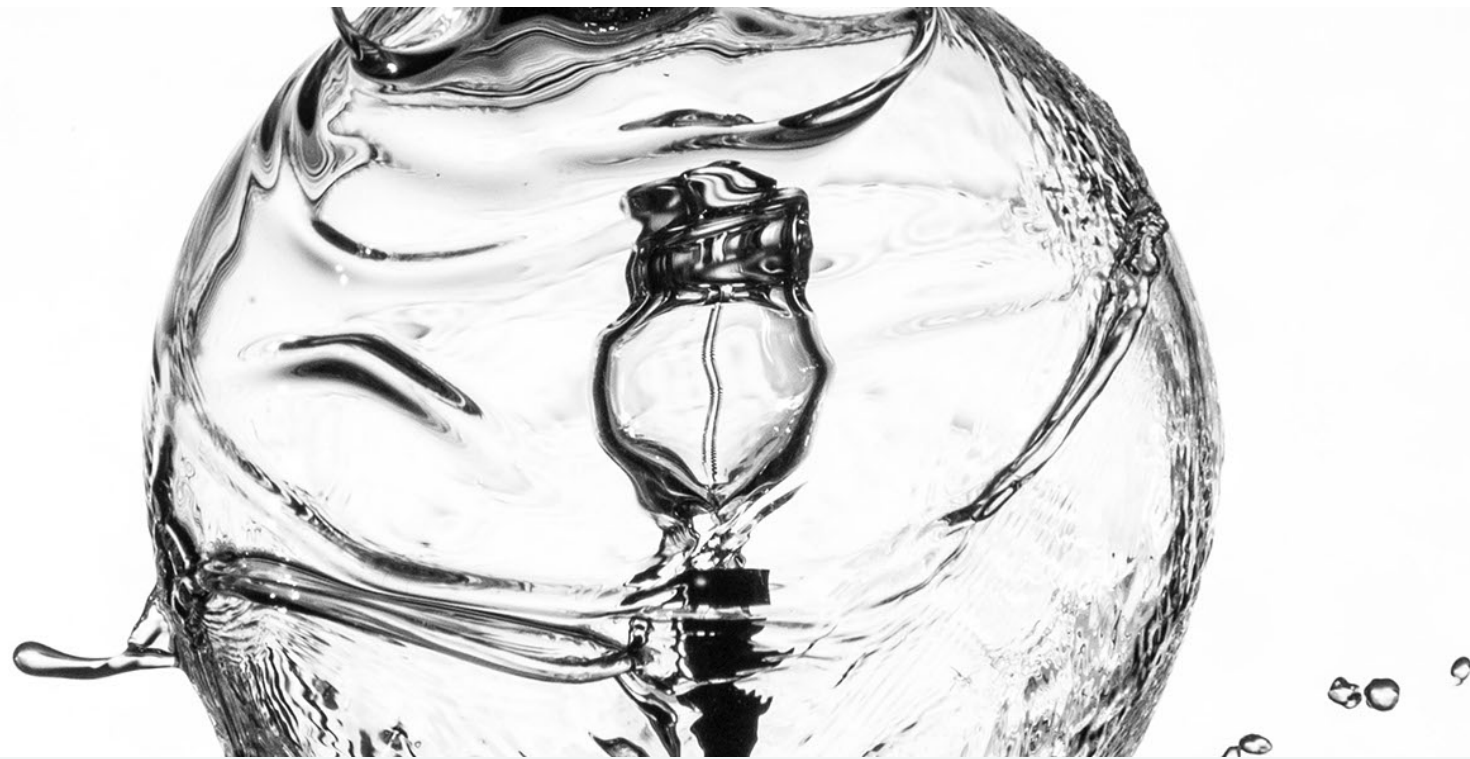


## *Principle 8 - Most new ideas aren't*



Most new ideas aren't. Someone, somehow, somewhere already thought up the essence of what you're thinking about.

Much of innovating is actually about stealing ideas from one context, connecting them to other ideas, and putting them to work in another.



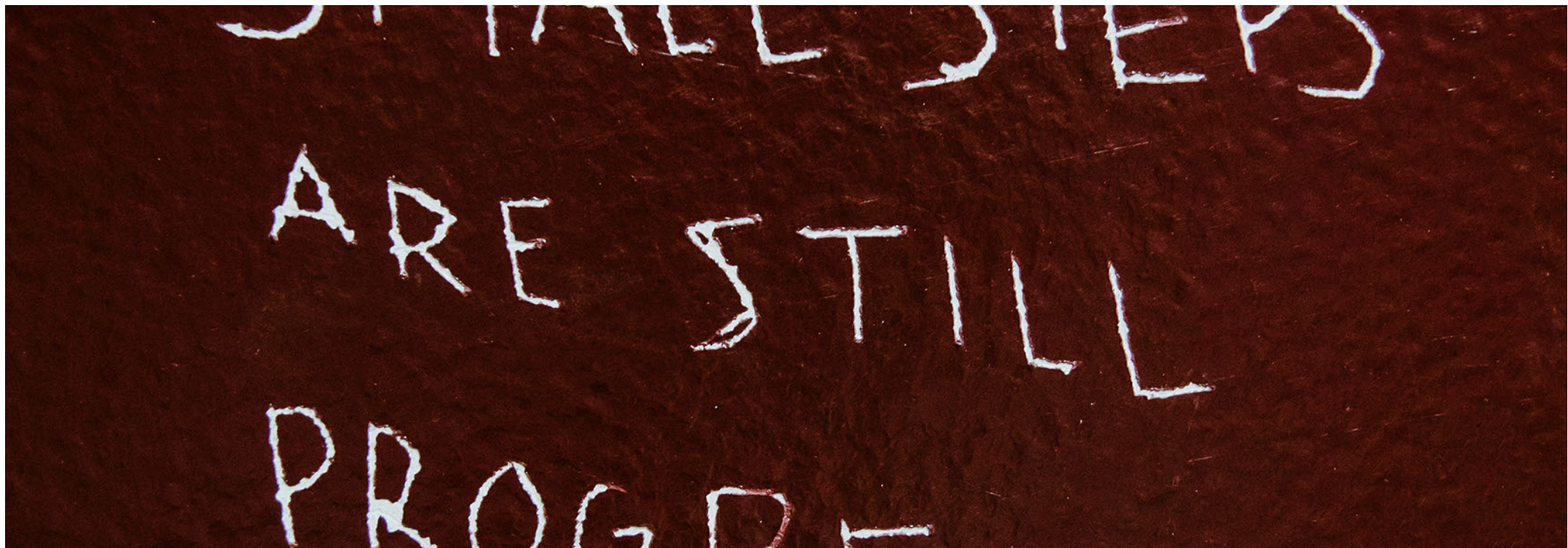
## Principle 9 - Killing good ideas is a good idea



The mental or organizational dialog goes something like this: "This one is good, and we're in a rush, so let's go do it."

Early closure is the enemy of innovation.

Better to move fast through lots of ideas early, throwing most of them out in the process, than to hone down to one in the very early days, polishing it to perfection in the vague hope that it is The One.



## *Principle 10 - Baby steps often lead to big leaps*



Starting something is essential to its completion.

It's easier to kill off ideas when they're expressed as baby steps, because there's no huge sunk investment tempting you to spend more time and money in order to save the project or your career.

Most important of all, baby steps increase the frequency of feedback you receive, because you can bring a lot of baby step prototypes to quick meetings.

You learn a lot this way.



## *Principle 11 - Everyone needs time to innovate*

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The idea that there two types of people: "creatives" and everyone else, is but a myth, albeit a damaging one at that. Up and down an organization, everyone needs time to innovate.

I'm not saying that everyone should be creative all the time. Far from it: we need people to be executing when they should be executing.

But for the critical questions of how, let's give everyone more time to make it all better.



## *Principle 12 - Instead of managing, try cultivating*



Leading people to innovative outcomes has much more in common with the successful cultivation of gardens than it does with traditional, top-down, centralized, command-and-control management techniques.

A leadership model based on a cultivation mindset can be found in the following four defining behaviors of cultivators of innovation:

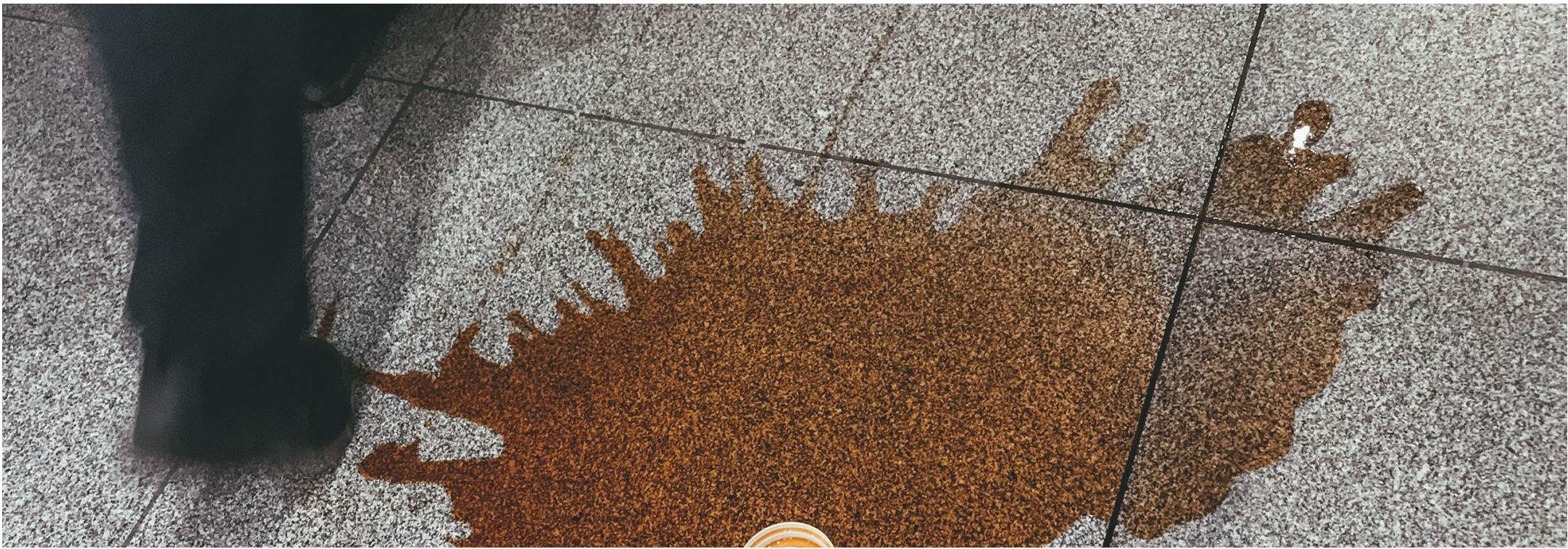
- 1) Being at the bottom of things

2)Trusting what is there - we don't "dig up the seed as it is growing"

3) Embracing the ecosystem

4) Taking a bird's eye view





## *Principle 13 - Do everything right, and you'll still fail*



This doesn't mean we shouldn't try to win, to make things happen. Quite the opposite: because the odds are so low, it means working even harder, pushing as much as you can to get things right.

But acknowledging that failure is a likely outcome enables us -- if we work with the end in mind -- to make a leap to a more productive state of being.



## Principle 14 - Failure sucks, but instructs



None of us want to fail.

But when we do, we have a choice to make

We can choose to learn from the failure

Or we can choose to avoid dealing with what the world is trying to tell us.



## *Principle 15 – Celebrate errors of commission. Stamp out errors of omission.*



For organizations trying to be innovative on a routine basis, a fundamental question must be asked and answered: do we want to reward smart thoughts in the absence of action, or do we decide to celebrate the act of trying, even when it takes us to places of failure? I say that we need to err on the side of errors of commission.

Doing must be weightier than thinking or talking.



## Principle 16 - Grok the gestalt of teams



If you're going to get innovative stuff done in the world, odds are you're going to do it with other people.

Behaviors that make for exceptional teams:

- 1) Build it out of T-shaped people: We want depth and breadth
- 2) Know thyself, and let everyone else know, too

3) Be friendly, because the networked world is your oyster:



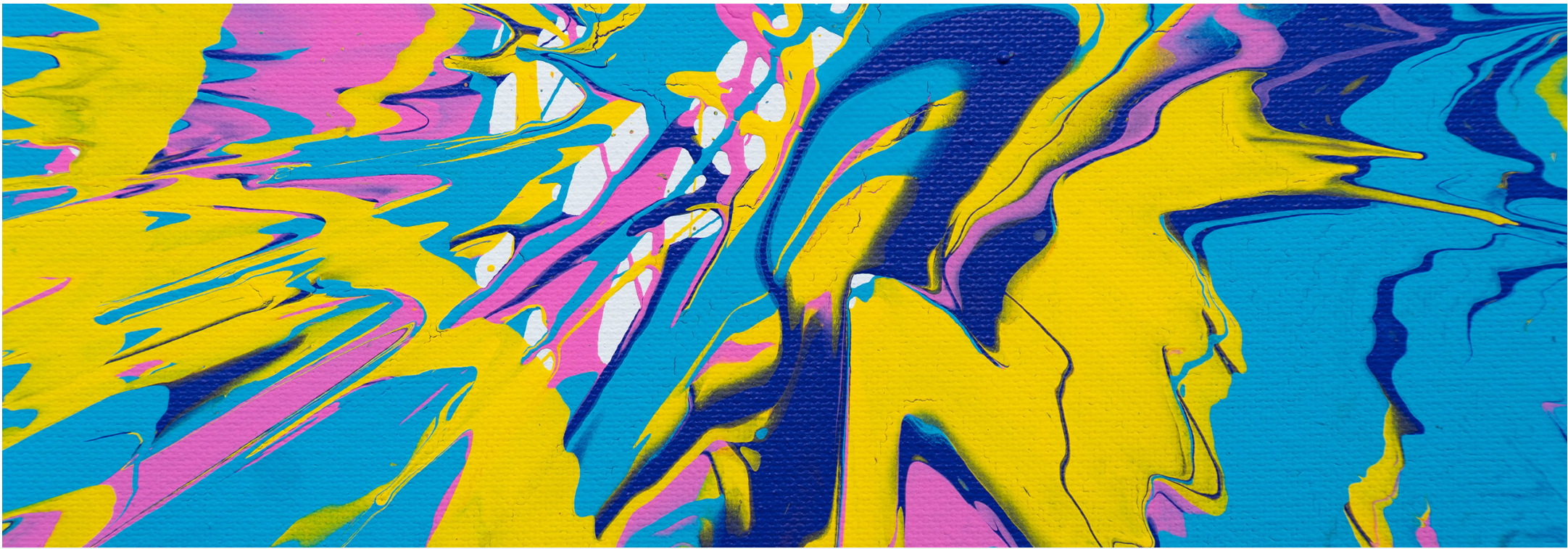
## Principle 17 – *It's not the years, it's the mileage*



In a high-variance situation, where we are expecting an innovative outcome, but have little to no sense what the right answer might look like, we need a different definition of what "experienced" means.

In this context, we want people who are experienced with the process of innovation -- in other words, people who have gone through the "understand - build - test" cycle many times.

We want folks with a lot of mileage under their belt, in other words, but that mileage need not be strictly correlated with years at work.



## Principle 18 - Learn to orbit the hairball



If the process of bringing new things to life were a living, breathing organism, it would be a nasty beast! Much like a hair ball

But in that fuzziness is an unpredictable wellspring of creativity, which -- if left to do what it will in its own nonlinear way -- is the source of the new and the wonderful.

Consequently, one must never give in to the temptation to shave the fuzzy hairball that is innovation. As institutions and individuals, we must learn how to live with the hairball and respect it.



## *Principle 19 - Have a point of view*



If you don't have a firm point of view about what matters, your chances of doing something remarkable drop to zero.

Great things happen when we make choices, and we make good choices when we know what we want.

Above all else, you must have a point of view. Don't leave home without it.





## Principle 20 - Be remarkable



Great things come from a total, unwavering commitment to being remarkable.

Do you want to achieve something amazing, or are you just here to phone in an acceptable, if ultimately forgettable, solution?

Remarkable successes are born of affirmative answers to the former.

Be remarkable.



*By acknowledging the fear we feel, and not ignoring it, but choosing to act because of it, we give ourselves - and those around us - a gift of inestimable value.*



*We owe it to ourselves - and to each other - to go for it, to try to help someone, to make something, to move things forward whenever we can.*



I've been doing this online course from Stanford on 'Leading Innovation' .

As part of the module that talks about the differences between creative and routine work, the professor introduces IDEO's former partner Diego Rodriguez and his 21 principles for Innovation.

You can find his blog here - <https://metacool.typepad.com/>

I created a PDF version of the 21 principles hoping more folks get to hear about it. And action it.



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