

Seeds: How high is WOW to



PowerUP Brilliance™



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OF INNOVATION

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by Merom Klein, PhD & Louise Yochee Klein, PsyD
Courage International Business Advisors

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Abstract

Studies on innovation estimate that 80% of all new product introductions are small incremental upgrades rather than bold breakthroughs that change the lives of the people who buy or use your products. When one miscalculation can affect your company's valuation and could make the board question the way you're spending the shareholders' money, it's a lot safer to keep playing the same old game – rather than thinking out of the box and changing the game. This white paper starts with a Chinese children's story – and ends with deeper questions about the difference you are committed to achieve. Bon courage!

About the authors



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lead Courage International, a global innovation and strategy execution consultancy. Courage equips C-level executives to be empowering Sponsors of innovation – and equips mid-level leaders to Orchestrate innovation initiatives with matrix structures, global alliances and cross-functional teams. Merom and Louise Yochee are business psychologists with 25+ years of experience equipping large corporations, entrepreneurial teams and government agencies to accelerate innovation and lead transformational change, including M&A integration. They have lived and worked in Israel and the USA, Canada, the UK, Eastern and Western Europe, Asia, Latin America, Oceania and Africa.

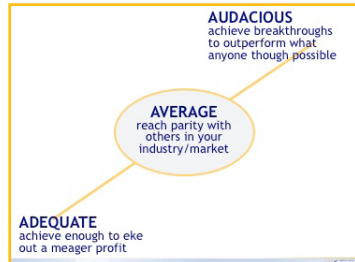


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The innovator's dilemma

“SMART goals,” the CEO said, “can only WOW investors and customers if we dare to **set the “A”-level at Awesome and Audacious** Achievements, rather than settling for something Achievable, Average, Adequate.” We can set Specific, Measurable, Relevant and Time-bound goals without making anyone’s palms sweat. But when we set the bar high and someone says, ‘Ouch!’ – that’s a defining moment, when leaders have to PowerUP Brilliance™ so we come away from a debate saying, “Bring it on!” and “Let’s make it happen!” rather than, “Can’t you be reasonable?”



Research by innovation guru Robert Cooper reports that 80% of the projects in most corporate pipelines are safe incremental me-too upgrades – rather than bold breakthroughs that will change the lives of the people who buy the “brand-new” discovery, use it, or have it used on them. An automobile journalist reported on the 2013 Detroit auto show and expressed disappointment about how this has affected the state of the industry. When the big breakthroughs that German automobile engineers report focus on the luminous efficiency of their headlamps, the reporter said, there’s something terribly wrong – especially when there are so many unmet needs if personal transportation to be a sustainable enterprise that enriches lives and does no further harm to the planet. Why are they doing the same-old-same-old, and leaving real innovation to start-ups like Tesla and Elio?

Boards, investors and CEOs say they want Brilliance from the people they rely on to secure their futures. But, in contrast to what they say, they often foster a culture that says, “Play it safe. Don’t make waves. Make no mistakes. Make people feel secure, comfortable and safe – rather than taking them somewhere they weren’t sure that they wanted to go.” With such mixed messages, how do you set your A-level?

Seeds and the empty pot: A Chinese children’s folktale

We first heard this famous Chinese folktale from Tuli Flint, an Israeli social worker teaching defence leaders to PowerUP Brilliance™. It introduces us to Jun, a luminary child-gardener known for growing the best biggest flowers, fruits and vegetables in his Province. When the King and Queen announced that they would select the best child-gardener to be their heir, everyone in the Province assumed Jun would win.

The King and Queen recruited high-potential child-gardeners from every Province in the Kingdom and brought them to the Palace. They passed around a basket of magic seeds and asked Jun and the other candidates to choose the ones they would plant. “In 3 months, we will tour the Kingdom to see the peppers you grow from our magic seeds,” the Queen said. “Our heir will be the child-gardener who grows their magic seeds into the tallest most prolific pepper plants.”

Three months later, Jun was the only child-gardener whose seeds had not sprouted. No matter how hard he tried, how he fertilised and watered the soil, how he gave his pots the right sunlight, nothing grew from the magic seeds. Every other child-gardener in the Kingdom grew incredible pots of pepper plants - with beautiful flowers and lots of large produce. There were red, orange, green, yellow, black and multi-coloured peppers in incredible designs - hot, sweet, fragrant, even sour.

It would be difficult for the King and Queen to declare any one to be the winner. Except Jun, who had nothing to show. One of the elders from Jun's village sent a message to the King and Queen, telling them not to come. To their shame and embarrassment, they Royal Couple came anyway – saying that they had promised to see what every single candidate had grown.

When the King and Queen arrived, Jun hung his head. “Your Highnesses,” he said, “I tried everything. I even thought about changing seeds. But your instructions were explicit - to use your magic seeds and grow peppers from those seeds and those seeds only. Sadly, I was unable to do honour to your seeds. The dishonour is mine, not anyone else's in our Province.”

The Royal Couple smiled and announced, on the spot, that Jun would be their heir. A gasp was heard in the crowd. Was this a trick? Was the contest rigged? A few people wondered - silently of course - whether the Royal Couple had totally lost their sanity.

The Royal Couple explained their decision. “This was a test of integrity. All of the seeds in the basket were boiled before the competition. None of them would grow peppers. But only one child played by the rules, told the truth, kept learning and controlled the Province's frustration. He showed us why he deserves our trust. So meet Jun, your next King.”

The A-level paradox – colour inside the lines AND think out of the box.

Everyone but Jun assumed that the King and Queen were willing to bypass rules, manners and do ‘whatever it took’ to achieve Audacious, Awesome pepper production – and reward the most productive gardener in the Kingdom. Were they wrong? Were they misled by a King and Queen who did not ‘walk their talk,’ when they said they would select the child-gardener with the most brilliant A-level performance – and were too conservative, rule-bound and risk-averse to reward luminary gardeners who used their ingenuity and imagination to think out of the box?

In far too many corporations and VC-backed entrepreneurial ventures, innovators like Jun and his fellow luminaries face this dilemma. They are told to think big, reach for the stars, PowerUP Brilliance™. Then, when they do, the portfolio review committees, boards of directors, regulatory and finance teams say, “Whoa. Not so fast,” and allocate investments to business proposals that are safer and more pedestrian. Like headlamps, rather than composite plastics, electric power trains or front-to-back rather than side-by-side seating arrangements.

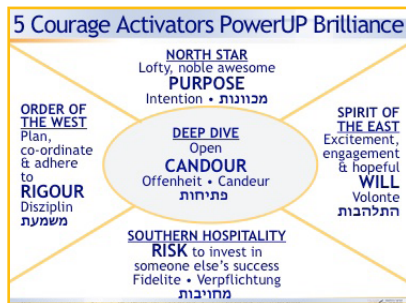
When your leaders get mixed messages like this – or are told, “that’s too risky for us,” after they PowerUP Brilliance™ and do their best creative thinking – how should they balance the priorities and navigate through the complexities?

Multiple metrics to optimize – not one VERSUS the other

In our research on innovation, we’ve discovered 5 Courage Activators – the leadership practices that PowerUP Brilliance™. It’s easy to get 3 or even 4 out of 5. But firing on ALL 5 cylinders is tough.

North AND South – not North versus South.

Most savvy investors can tell you when they threw caution to the wind and lost everything on breakthrough possibilities. If you look North – at noble breakthrough game-changing **PURPOSE** – there’s no limit to imagination. But it’s more difficult to optimize up-side potential and combine it with a hard-nosed **RISK** assessment – that wins trust by showing investors you are aware of what could go wrong, you have a plan to mitigate the risks.



East AND West – not East versus West. Most savvy investors can tell you when they got caught up in an innovative luminary’s energy, excitement and uber-confidence, and were surprised when plans failed to materialize. If you look East – at **WILL** – there’s no limit to can-do optimism. But it’s more difficult to renew your spirit and energy when you look West – as you persevere with attention to detail, pressure-tested logic, tracking mechanisms and contingency plans that give you the **RIGOR** to deliver the goods.

Candour – the deep thinking that pulls it all together

In the Chinese children’s fable, the King and Queen were unaccessible. Jun and the other high-potentials were left on their own to decide what to do, when the boiled seeds failed to sprout. They received advice from friends, family and others in their respective Provinces, who stood to profit if they were selected as heirs and prevailed over other high-potential child-gardeners.

But imagine what might have happened if there had been a dialogue, a feedback loop and open **CANDOUR** when problems started to appear. If they had run a few experiments and learned from the data? Or had asked the Royal Court's C-suite for clarification – when the so-called “magic beans” underperformed local improvised resources? If they had a system and incentive for knowledge-transfer and knowledge-sharing, with other child-gardener luminaries in other Provinces?

Investors want to know that their luminaries and champions are coachable – that they are open enough to say, “Houston (or Paris or Tel Aviv), we have a problem.” They want luminaries to be generative and adaptive enough to learn from robust criticism rather than defend their preconceptions and early positive indications. They want leaders to think both about colouring within the lines that must be respected – the laws of physics, laws of the land, safety and ethics – and about thinking outside the box, to incorporate insights and ideas from other disciplines with conflicting perspectives. None of this happened in the Chinese children's fable – but this is what should happen in due diligence and in monthly and quarterly portfolio reviews and in the work of product, design, regulatory, launch and account teams.

At each defining moment, when the answers are not simple or obvious, Investor-Sponsors want to know that Leader-Orchestrators of innovation will grapple with and not ignore the complexities. They want to see teams lift themselves above a debate about who's right and who's wrong and a fight for hegemony amongst finance, QA, safety or regulatory versus marketing, design, R&D and engineering. They wish to see teams optimise rather than compromise or appease two (or more) conflicting or contradictory sides. This can only happen if leaders orchestrate a robust open creative generative data-driven dialogue that covers the blind spots – looking at innovation from NORTH and SOUTH, EAST and WEST – with the DEPTH of Candour to put forward a coherent and elegant plan.

Put it all together: All 5 Courage Activators PowerUP Brilliance™

In our innovation leadership workshops, we have a simulation that gives teams a start and finish-line, an investment budget and impatient investors who want to see a ROIC in less than a year. Virtually every team in the simulation succeeds – at an Adequate or Average level. But some succeed BIG.

The Audacious performers look lucky. But, in less than 10 minutes, we see them set goals and define what is possible – in very distinctive ways. They start at the end and work backward. They face dangers straight-on and get the resources they need to power through. They get market intelligence rather than convincing themselves that it costs too much and takes too long. And they use that intelligence for scenario-building. All with a sense of urgency and with debates that ask, “What have we learned and how do we use it?” not “Who's going to prevail and prosper like Jun?”

Then after the simulation, we apply those success behaviours to real goal-setting dilemmas. And to the innovations that are big and bold – and far more than a “me-

too.” With a plan that investors will accept because it makes sense, not because it’s a throw-caution-to-the-wind leap of faith. And will engage leaders – with bonuses and careers on the line – because they see how to make a difference.

Want to know more? See if your luminary high-potentials can fire on all 5 Courage Activator cylinders with our assessment @ www.powerupbrilliance/assessment

Then, let’s talk about the Courage to PowerUP Brilliance™ with your leaders. So they define how high is up – in a way that gives you a dramatic competitive edge. And that makes a real difference for the customers who buy your products or services – and the users or patients they serve.

To start a dialogue, contact us @ info@courageadvisors.com



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