

The Ten Faces of Innovation

By: Taylor Hoover

Author Tom Kelley and his brother, David Kelley, built their company, IDEO, from the ground up in Palo Alto, CA (1991). IDEO is an international design and consulting firm that employs over 600 innovative employees. Their job is to create innovative ideas and make them a reality. The book “Ten Faces of Innovation” by Tom Kelley describes the ten types of personas necessary for an innovative company to succeed. Kelley believes it is important for any innovative company to have these types of personas within, however it is very likely that more than one (likely all) persona can be found within a single person. It is up to that person to recognize their abilities and know how to utilize them for a more innovative perspective. The “ten faces” are categorized into three different types of personas: the learning personas, the organizing personas, and the building personas. Kelley backs up his personas with success stories from many different innovative ideas; from the invention of scotch and masking tape to how the successful stories of large companies such as Baskin Robbins, Cold Stone, M3, BMW, and many more.

The Learning Personas

The Anthropologist

Kelley describes the anthropologist role as one who is capable of stepping back from a situation and learning from outside observation and perspective. Anthropologists are those that are sent to spend time with people in order to gain a better understanding of how they think and feel. The anthropologist should be able to make non-bias, third party observations in order to gain a new perspective on any particular topic. Anthropologists spend most of their time observing and talking with people while maintaining an open mind. This persona allows one to see things with a new light, making the problem solving aspect of innovation a key component to their job at IDEO.

The Experimenter

The experimenter is one who is responsible for making innovative concepts a reality. This person is not afraid to try something to see if it would work or not. The experimenter enjoys the process of innovation more than the tools. This persona allows a company to take some risks, within reason, and try something that has never been done before.

The Cross-Pollinator

The Cross-Pollinator is good at taking an idea or concept from one thing and applying it to another. These people can take broad ideas and narrow them, and narrow ideas and broaden them. The cross pollinator can bring a concept from one field and find an application to another field. Kelley related this persona to that of a bumble bee, flying in different directions and “accidentally” bumping into one thing or another along the way and taking the ideas and concepts with them to be dropped at a different location.

The Organizing Personas

The Hurdler

The Hurdler is the problem-solver. This persona is not afraid to bend the rules to make something happen. Even though the man who invented scotch tape was denied funding for his project from his company, he found loopholes and utilized his \$100 per day spending limit to fund his project with payments of \$99 per day. He managed to stay under the companies radar and invent one of the most successful and widely used office supplies on the market today. His ability and willingness to know when to not take “no” for an answer is a perfect example of an ideal hurdler.

The Collaborator

The collaborator is exceptionally good with people. This persona can take a group of co-workers and make them a functioning team. They have the ability to work with clients to successfully identify what their needs are, gather a team, and recognize and utilize the strengths of each person in that team to meet the needs of a customer.

The Director

The director is an opportunist and a motivator. The director is able to see a good idea when presented to them and motivate the team to make it happen. The director is an essential persona for a leader. This is the person that organizes ideas and distributes jobs based on a person’s ability to get it done.

The Building Personas

The Experience Architect

The experience architect is keen to marketing to people’s wants and needs. The experience architect is the one that takes a product and makes it a service. These are the people that come up with the ideas that convert a store into an experience. They are all about taking the next step in making a company or product stand out over all others.

The Set Designer

The set designer sets the stage for innovation. This is the persona that sets a persona or company up to succeed. This person understands what type of environment promotes innovative thinking and productive behavior. These are the people that are making cubicles into collaborative work spaces; painting the bathroom vibrant colors and placing abstract or otherwise interesting art on the walls. The set designer takes an uncomfortable environment and makes it more comfortable. This is the person that might bring puzzles to a think tank in order to get the innovative ball rolling.

The Caregiver

The caregiver is the heart filled, empathizer. A caregiver has the ability to identify the needs of a customer before they are even able to express it. They create relationships with their clients in order to better understand how to make their lives easier. These are the people that do their due-diligence to find out what a client’s favorite food is so they can serve it at the meeting. They are essential to the company-client relationship.

The Storyteller

This persona tells the story of the company or product. This is the persona that feeds off other people's experiences. You might find a storyteller selling a product by taking facts and painting a picture through whatever means possible: words, drawing, comic strip, video, etc. This is the person that identifies the connection of a product to the consumer and builds a story to make that connection obvious. This is the person would sell a seatbelt design based off a story that explained how the seatbelt saved a life.