



## INNOVATE OR EVAPORATE.: Necessity is the Mother of Invention...

*But Whose Necessity?*

George Westinghouse is known primarily as an innovator in the power production industry that, armed with his alternating current (AC) electricity distribution system, squared off against Thomas Edison and his direct current system, and won.

In 1867, however, George Westinghouse had a life changing event that led to a lesser known innovation. He witnessed a train accident where two trains were unable to stop because the "brakemen" had to run from car to car to apply the brakes by hand on each individual train car. Less than two years later, he patented his compressed air driven, fail-safe railway braking system.

It allows the engineer to apply the brakes to all cars simultaneously. It also included a redundant, fail-safe design whereby any interruption in the air supply would cause the application of the brakes, thereby stopping the train for repairs.

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This brilliant design is essentially much the same today as it was when invented. The system is also used on heavy duty trucks, including the beautiful red ones with "B.R. Williams" on the sides.

This invention has saved countless lives since Mr. Westinghouse invented it in 1869.

*What was the necessity for which this invention was born? The necessity of the preservation of human life.*

When we think about innovation in our organizations, churches and businesses today, the tendency is to think about what it is that WE need to improve. How can WE become more efficient? How can WE improve our attendance on Sundays? How can WE better reach our target market?

The problem is not that we are asking the wrong questions. The problem is that we have not first posed the most important question, the answer to which should always serve as the foundation for the answers to the latter questions:

"How do we best SERVE others?"

Others may benefit from our internally driven innovations, but by default rather than by design. Thus, this is a call to arms. Consultative arms. Unselfish arms.

If our innovation is to be driven externally, by the needs of others, how do we acquire that information? It's easy to spot problems and needs in our own organizations. How about spotting those needs and problems in other organizations?

*We ask. That's how.*

If we ask open questions of those that we serve, determine their "wins" and what obstacles they face in accomplishing them, are intuitive, capable and honestly motivated, **WE WILL INNOVATE FOR THEM...** and there will be no greater loyalty, nor satisfaction for ourselves.

Mr. Westinghouse understood that in order to serve himself, he must first serve others... and he served mightily. Innovation born out of the necessity of others has historically yielded far better results than innovation born out of greed.

Mr. Westinghouse's inventions are still... living proof.

