

## Advancing A Culture of Innovation

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For 80 years, The Henry Ford has documented and presented the stories of innovation. Those stories give us the roadmap to help shape a better future.

And it's never been more critical that we in Michigan focus intently on what that future might look like.

While it cannot and should not look like the past, our state's future will be built on time-tested characteristics of innovation from earlier visionaries.

Current circumstances give us an opportunity and a responsibility to re-examine and re-invent how we invest, how we work, and how we teach our kids. This isn't unique to Michigan, but the need is especially acute here. For the better part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Michigan was a hotbed of innovation and a powerhouse of progress that inspired the world.

And then, we became too comfortable and change resistant.

I believe we can regain our competitive edge if we understand why we succeeded in the first place.

History teaches us that from every major economic crisis, America has emerged stronger, smarter and more innovative—it's in our DNA.

Throughout the 19th century, our country faced several financial crises. Each were followed by bursts of innovation. In the 1840s, we saw the rise of steam power and industrial production, the 1870s gave us electric light and the telephone and in the early 1900s we saw the mass production of the automobile.

It's that time again. We must write a new chapter in the story of American innovation.

And because The Henry Ford has the nation's best archive of innovation, we have a vital role to play. As a catalyst for innovation and change, we are finding new ways to innovate too.

I'm proud to announce that, this coming fall, our institution will launch our new educational initiative called OnInnovation.

We have been interviewing and filming dozens of leading, contemporary innovators. We have been to their workshops, in their laboratories and in their homes for the sole purpose of documenting their creative process, the way they work, the way they think and how they translate their ideas into reality. We will share their inspiring stories with the world and give them historical context made available through our new website, [OnInnovation.com](http://OnInnovation.com)

By showcasing these stories, we will ignite the imagination of a new generation of thinkers and we will advance a renewed spirit of innovation. We want people to dream.

To date, we have interviewed more than 30 innovators. Let me name just a few:

- Steve Wozniak, co-founder of Apple
- Pierre Omidyar, founder of e-Bay
- Dean Kamen, the inventor of Segway and
- Elon Musk, commercial space flight pioneer

There are many characteristics of innovation. Our research helped us identify five common themes that came up in conversation over and over again. These “keys to innovation” can be applied by everyone here, one way or another.

First, **innovation starts with curiosity**. If we want to cultivate innovation, we need to encourage a culture of curiosity. Think of all the questions that kids ask us. From an early age, it’s a constant stream of why, why, why?

Virtually all of the innovators we talked with spoke about their early, insatiable curiosity. For example, Charles Elachi grew up in a small village in Lebanon, the son of parents who never finished high school.

He told us he used to look up in the sky, see the stars, and wonder if there were people looking back at him. Today he’s at Cal Tech, sending spacecraft into the far reaches of our solar system.

How many other Charles Elachis are out there today? Let’s encourage curiosity at all ages, because curiosity evolves into ambition, and ambition into vision.

The second key to innovation is this: **break the rules**. Innovation requires the courage to be different.

Elon Musk, the champion of commercial space flight and chairman of Tesla Motors, said that people too often think “nobody’s ever done that, so it must not be good.”

Let’s not forget, however, that accepting no boundaries takes courage. Rosa Parks broke the rules. Her determination and courage defined a new world. Visitors to Henry Ford Museum have an opportunity to sit on the bus and hear her voice as she describes that historic day in 1955.

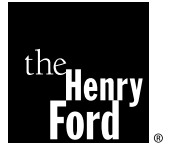
Ultimately, this social innovator, sparked the Civil Rights Movement. Let’s empower people to challenge convention and to do things differently.

The third key to innovation is that **collaboration is power**. Most modern innovations are the product of intense collaboration. The myth of the lone genius is just that, a myth. Edison and Ford both employed teams of talented specialists to explore possibilities together, because they knew that no single person had a monopoly on good ideas.

Our fourth key is: **meet true needs**. Generally, the most successful innovators are those who recognize and solve the problems that address real needs.

Henry Ford set out to build and market a simple, strong, reliable car that every working person could afford.

Most recently, the founders of Google re-imagined the relationship of people to information, and ended up revolutionizing global access to human knowledge.



The fifth key to innovation is perhaps the hardest: we need to **embrace the risk and the lessons of failure**. Through the ages, the lessons learned from failure form the foundation of innovation. And they still do.

Thomas Edison and his team tested thousands of filaments before he found one that lit his famous light bulb.

Buckminster Fuller set out to re-invent American housing, but sold only a single prototype of his Dymaxion House, which currently resides in Henry Ford Museum. This is the perfect example of an innovation that was deemed a failure but in reality, led Fuller to invent the geodesic dome, which had and still has a major impact on architecture and design around the world.

That willingness to fail is absolutely critical to innovation. Too often, we're afraid of failure. But if we hope to make Michigan a hotbed of innovation again, let's be fearless in the face of risk.

As Dean Kamen said, "If I were given the choice of failing trying to do something really big, or succeeding at something that's no big deal, I'd much rather go down in a ball of flames."

Of course, these keys to innovation—be curious, break the rules, collaborate, meet true needs and embrace failure—are easier said than done. But here in Michigan, we face a stark choice: We can make history, or we can become history.

Many people around the country think that our state is broken, done-for, intellectually bankrupt. We all know otherwise.

History teaches us that our future will depend on how quickly, and how well, we innovate and adapt.

At The Henry Ford, our OnInnovation initiative will help to foster and advance cultural change by teaching all of us about innovation, by promoting the emergence of a new talent base of innovative thinkers and by encouraging creative problem-solving.

I invite you to think big.

Now, in this time of reinvention, let's use the stories of innovation to fire up a new generation of innovators and together, we can advance America's culture of innovation.