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Five Tips For IT Innovation

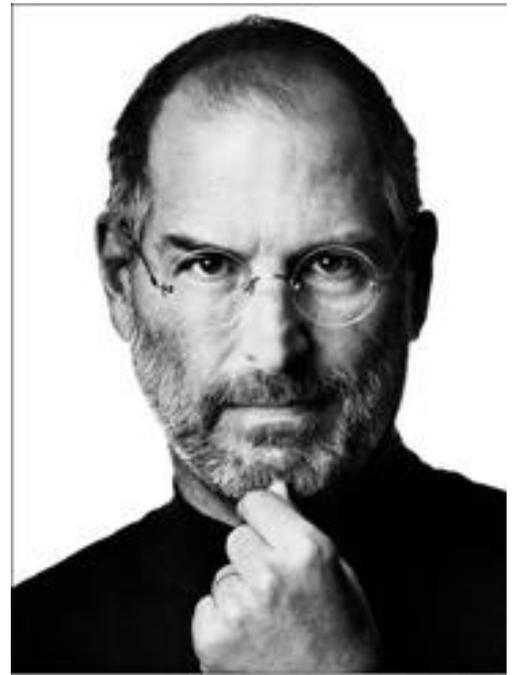


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Innovation isn't easy, but based on some of these recent stories about the topic, it can indeed be done. It requires shifting, tweaking, or flipping your perspective so that you see things you don't normally see.

Tip No. 1: Look where you don't normally look. In this interview this week with *Computer Weekly*, McKinsey CIO Mike Wright said that he looks for innovation in small companies: "Most innovation is happening within the smaller organizations with specialist capabilities." It's easier to get straight answers faster from small companies, he adds, though it's important to take time to look for such companies, especially when so many CIO have constructed administrative barriers to keep from being bombarded by sales calls.



Admittedly, this guy knew something about innovation. (Image via CrunchBase)

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Tip No. 2: Look for connections that others don't see. This one is really simple. It comes from a short piece David Brier wrote for *Fast Company* this week, in which he cited wonderfully synchronous advice from the likes of Steve Jobs, Richard Branson, and Seth Godin, all of whom talked about "connecting the dots." That's really the key element of the CIO's role, and very few people in an enterprise have the opportunity or the perspective to connect those dots.

The dots, in the CIO's case, are the business needs on one hand, and the available technologies on the other. Bringing them together to create something that is greater than the sum of its parts is the heart of innovation.

Tip No. 3: Don't be afraid of chaos. Elsewhere in *Forbes* this week. [Ekaterina Walter](#) cited the book *The Chaos Imperative: How Chance and Disruption Increase Innovation Effectiveness and Success* by Ori Brafman and Judah Pollack. "Chaos creates urgency, and, with it, an invaluable opportunity for us to redefine success and question our current structures," wrote Walter. "It forces us to seek an unusual and diverse perspective, and it pushes us out of the comfort zone and creates white space to imagine something potentially breath-taking."

Tip No. 4: Even innovation needs some structure. At the same time, though, you must invoke structure at some point to be successful. Former CTO for the city of Seattle Bill Schrier [blogged](#) about what went wrong with the Affordable Care Act website and why the "other Washington" did so well with its site for the state's health care exchange. He compared what happened in the nation's capital to a poorly run baseball team, one without a strong general manager, without a coach, and without any quality assurance.

As Schrier noted, "Another principle of project management is having 'one throat to choke,' a single person or entity responsible for making the project happen. A baseball team can buy a lot of highly skilled players and put them on the field, but unless the coach gets them to work together, the season will be a disaster." On the other hand, while the Washington state exchange hired consulting firm Deloitte, the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) hired 55 contractors to build different pieces of healthcare.gov. CMS taking on the role of system integrator and making all the pieces work together was the equivalent of a general manager "and his whole front office coaching the team themselves."

Tip No. 5: Focus on what's real. Isaac Sacolik, CIO of McGraw-Hill Construction [blogged](#) about [successful CIOs](#) and noted that CIOs who "talk innovation" need to do so not with dry expressions of definition of process, but rather with real-world accomplishments. In other words, talk about innovation in terms of specific value propositions for the business – not just productivity and efficiency.

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I am the community editor for Data Driven Business at Forbes. I have worked as a writer and editor since 1977. My articles have appeared in Stanford, MIT Technology Revi... **Read More**