Stanford eCorner

Shaping Serendipity

John Seely Brown, *Deloitte Center for Edge Innovation*

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Video URL: http://ecorner.stanford.edu/videos/2429/Shaping-Serendipity

Success is based on more than just luck. By choosing the right kind of environment and cultivating the practices that will help find new ideas, one can take inspiration from unlikely sources. Furthermore, deep listening with reciprocity - meaning not only digging for good ideas from others, but offering them back in return - is a valuable skill to nurture. John Seely Brown, Independent Co-Chairman of Deloitte Center for the Edge, believes that this is the way that powerful and valuable relationships are built.
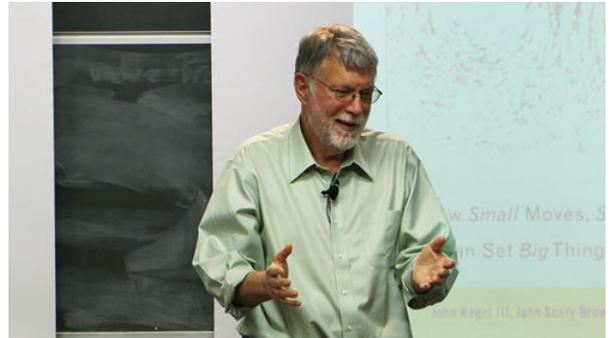
Transcript

Question: Serendipity is not a bad thing. Serendipity sounds to most people like luck. Question: Might it be possible to actually shape serendipity? And basically in the world that's rapidly changing, it's an interesting issue. We don't even know the questions to ask or whom to look for. In a stable world, I use Google. You know the kind of question that doesn't work too well in Google is, "Please tell me what I need to know that I don't know I need to know yet." It turns out that not many interests come up. But shaping serendipity, if there is a way to do that, a way not to just count on luck but to think about how you may be able to choose the right kinds of environments. By the way, you saw that in spades if you follow Dusty around the world, choosing the right kinds of spikes to visit. What are the practices that you want to develop so you have a better chance of picking up new ideas, as you encounter them? And, how do you actually prepare yourself in order to be able to receive very strange ideas that you have to do a lot of thinking about how to appropriate in this context? I want to go through some of these practices. You're seeing some of them as they laid out in Dusty.

But the bottom line here is that all these encounters involve deep listening; that's not a big deal, but deep listening with reciprocity. That's to say, "What do people get out of talking to you as well as what do you get out of talking to them?" Because if you're doing always the take, guess what, and pretty soon you'll find people don't people really like to spend that much time talking about new type of stuffs. So, one of the questions is, "How do you think about this and how do you move from an initial transaction-interaction to actually start building relationships based around this notion of actually reciprocity and deep listening?"