Failure is not an option, it's essential

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A key ingredient for innovation that leads to prosperity is the learning that comes from making mistakes.   Because of those difficult lessons, we improve. Coupled with a drive to succeed, we flourish.   In this article, we look at fostering a culture that encourages risk-taking, stresses review of imperfect offerings, and insists on retrying with improved solutions.

In a previous article, it was proposed that certain questions asked early and often in a development cycle led to commercially successful products: [Build Products That Don't Come Back For Customers That Do](#).   In another, it was also suggested that the right mix of education, environment and execution could help retain innovative leadership: [Innovation: Our Bleeding Edge is Blunt](#).   In this piece, it is advocated that a culture of risk-taking and learning from mistakes is vital to successful innovation.

All product development companies, whether they make airplanes or adhesives, have a formalized engineering process. It starts with business requirements and concepts from a marketing department.   The process next travels through a development and implementation phase.   Finally, it enters a manufacturing and release-to-market phase. All companies implement checkpoints at various steps during this cycle to review and reaffirm the assumptions and product direction. This is a necessary and good practice.

Along this journey business judgment is called for to ask the question, "Is this good enough or should we make it better?"   In engineering circles an old cliché may be cited: "shoot the engineer and ship the product."   A product can always be made better with more resources and time, but risk is inevitable and the culture to accept this must be encouraged.   **We *must accept that shipping the product involves risk.***

Upon product release the innovation process should kick into a new phase; it does not end. Only when something of economic value has been created has the innovation process

been a success.   No matter how elegant or creative the solution, this is a commercial venture.   We must be rigorous as we continue to explore and evaluate the performance of the innovation.   Has the product solved the problem it was designed to solve? Is the customer buying it? Is the customer choosing our offering over the competitors? Is our product being used like we expected? The answers to these questions are rarely predictable and may be disappointing.   The answers are also some of the best lessons in innovation. *We must embrace our misses and learn from our mistakes.*

In sport, rarely is there a home run hit in the first at-bat, rarely does the rookie quarterback win the Super Bowl. In product development the initial success rate is also underwhelming. In our culture, we celebrate success, but don't give enough credence to the past failures, near misses, and hard lessons that led to the success. The last aspect to an innovative culture is to "go again" -- to persevere and to perpetually improve. *We must retry with the hard-earned wisdom of experience.*

How does your organization foster an innovative culture from risk-taking and learning from failure? As you think about this, consider closely your current product development challenges. Take action and call Egret Technologies. Our work with clients is about "Turning Innovation into Profit" and we look forward to hearing from you.

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