

SUMMER 2000

Roger L. Firestien, Ph. D.



insights into innovation

A NEWSLETTER TO HELP YOU BECOME MORE CREATIVE

Innovation Resources, Inc., P.O. Box 615, Williamsville, New York 14231-0615 Phone 716-631-3564 Fax: 716-631-2610 www.RogerFirestien.com E-mail: Inov8Group@aol.com

New & improved attitude:

The real freshmaker against mistakes

Don't you just *hate* it when that happens?

You're all set for the crucial interview: crisp navy blue suit, shoes polished, clean hands—impeccable from top to bottom. You have a few minutes to kill and it's a beautiful spring day, so you sit down on a park bench just outside the company offices. You listen to the birds and enjoy the view—and only too late do you notice. Not that the bench is white; you saw that right away; but this is a particular kind of white bench.

A freshly *painted* white bench.

Yikes! One whopper of a mistake! What should you do? What can you do?

Well, if you're an advertising executive from Germany, you pop out some mints and start chewing. And maybe you call for a jingle or two:

*Doo doo doo doo,
doo-doo, do-Wah!*

It doesn't matter what comes, fresh goes better in life, and Mentos is fresh and full of life. Nothing gets to you, staying fresh, staying cool, with Mentos, fresh and full of life. Fresh goes better, Mentos freshness, fresh goes better with Mentos, fresh and full of life!

"Mentos, the freshmaker!" cries the breathless announcer.

Whether you care to admit it or not, there's something outlandishly funny about these television commercials. Just like the mint itself, they too, are quite delicious.

What makes this particular dilemma so charming is the manner in which our hero resolves his conflict. Psychologists have a name for how we respond to such dire circumstances: Fight or Flight. We either retreat from the scene or retaliate and push beyond our dilemma.

For our fashion-challenged victim, this unfortunate incident brought inspiration. With candy firmly planted in mouth, our hero proceeded to roll around on the wet park bench, creating an entirely new outfit and attitude.

Voila: Pinstripes!

No matter what you think of the commercial, it does point up an important fact about mistakes. You can either flee from them, or you use them to get fashionable (figuratively speaking). The choice is yours. You can let unpalatable circumstances squeeze the zest right out of your business, or you can use those very squeezings to make lemonade and savor the moment.

It all depends on your attitude toward mistakes.

Trial and Learn

In order to gain a fresh perspective toward mistakes, you'll have to rethink some things. To begin, look at those "errors" as



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When I was young,
I observed that nine
out of ten things
I did were failures.
I didn't want
to be a failure,
so I did ten times
more work.

George Bernard Shaw

You can't teach
anybody anything.
Success comes
only from
good judgment.
Good judgment
comes from
experience.
Experience comes
from bad judgment.

Arthur Jones,
Developer of the
Nautilus submarine

Never let the fear
of striking out
get in your way.

Babe Ruth

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opportunities for growth rather than as setbacks or obstacles.

Remember, whenever you do anything, you create a result.

A mistake is simply a result that you hadn't anticipated—much like the wet park bench. You need to begin by taking these unanticipated results and turn them into something meaningful, something of greater value, something from which you can learn.

I admit that I don't really like the expression "trial & error." Why not? Because it focuses on unanticipated results that failed. But if we choose to look at failures as learning experiences, they can actually help us to become more successful. Therefore it is probably advisable to change the idea of "trial & error" into "trial & learn."

Thomas Edison, it is said, experimented with about 6,000 ways to invent the light bulb until he finally came up with a filament material that worked. Was each one of those initial combinations a failure? No, they simply didn't produce the results Edison wanted.

In another round of experiments, Edison tried every conceivable method to improve the storage battery so he could stockpile electricity and power his light bulbs. Fifty thousand times he tried. Yet nothing worked.

A concerned investor gave the following account of his conversation with the perplexed inventor: "Isn't it a shame that with the tremendous amount of work you have done, you haven't been able to get any results?" Mr. Edison turned on me like a flash and with a smile retorted, "Why, Man, I have got lots of results. I know several thousand things that won't work."

Failure Is Not a Four-Letter Word

You might as well change your attitude about mistakes, because in this world, mistakes and errors are going to multiply like rabbits anyway. Failed college entrance exams, failed sales records, failed credit checks. Everywhere failure seems to be lurking in the brush, hiding in the shadows, hovering above like one big, dark cloud.

But shift your outlook for a moment. Dark clouds often bring rain, don't they? And the

downpours that make crops grow (and thereby put food in our stomachs) don't descend out of bright, sunny skies!

So change your attitude about failure. Don't look at it as a disappointing end, but as an unexpected beginning. Where would we be today in the United States of America if one man hadn't done exactly that?

When he was seven years old, his family was forced out of its home on a legal technicality, and he had to work to help support family members.

At the age of nine, his mother died.

At twenty-two, he lost his job as a store clerk. He wanted to go to law school, but his education wasn't good enough.

At twenty-three, he went into debt to become the owner of a small store.

At twenty-six, his business partner died, leaving him a huge debt that took years to repay.

At twenty-eight, after courting a girl for four years, he asked her to marry him. She said no.

At thirty-seven, on his third try, he was elected to Congress, but two years later, he was turned out of office.

At forty-one, his four-year-old son died, and it broke his heart.

At forty-seven, he failed again, this time as the U.S. vice-presidential candidate.

At forty-nine, once more he ran for the Senate, and lost.

At fifty-one, he was elected president of the United States.

His name? Abraham Lincoln, a man many consider the greatest leader this country has ever produced.

Lincoln teaches us that failure can actually be good. Failure is a vitally important function of the success curve (look it up in the economics books—similar to a Bell's Curve, only a little off to the right). Without failure, we have no need to rethink our steps and re-evaluate our shortcomings, and we might miss the really big payoff.

If Edison had designed a successful light bulb the first time around, he might never have discovered thousands of other ideas—more than a thousand of which he patented, including the phonograph and the motion picture projector.

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Another satisfied customer (even if she didn't attend the workshop)

In every issue we strive to bring our readers the finest, most inspiring success stories from those lucky individuals who have attended one of Dr. Roger Firestien's seminars or workshops.

But not this issue.

In this issue we thought it would be interesting to hear why someone would continue to tap the fevered brain of Dr. Firestien, year after year—even though she's never attended a single one of his seminars.

Why would anyone do such a thing? A number of possibilities suggest themselves:

- She's Roger's mother and needs to check up on her baby boy
- She's really into psychedelic experiences—but without the expense
- She's stuck in a really bad time-warp episode of *Star Trek*

Actually, it's none of these. As Dr. Linda Winner explains, she's just doing her job.

Linda is the Director of the Center for Executive Leadership at the Federal Executive Institute in Charlottesville, Virginia. This thirty-two-year-old organization provides professional development for senior-level career government civil servants. Think, *NASA. CIA. Department of Treasury*; the muckety-mucks of federal government. Linda works closely with these groups to custom-design training that helps ensure their goals and outcomes are accomplished.

Linda's role is unique. The continuing executive education programs she oversees are not limited to a single company or department, but impact every one of us. "What we're trying to do is enhance the leadership of the people who run our government, who make democracy work," she says.

So how does someone with such great responsibility go about choosing those who will help empower the leaders of our great nation?

Every year the Federal Executive Institute invites workshop facilitators and instructors from all over the country to submit proposals for upcoming training events. The candidates' proposals are

supposed to reflect the materials they use, course structure, sample curricula, along with letters of reference, experience in working with senior level executives (both in the public and private sector), and cost. Linda makes no bones about the difficulty in coming on board with the Institute: "We have a panel that competitively selects the ones who most nearly meet our stringent criteria for teaching here."

One applicant who made a great impression was Dr. Roger Firestien. (Oooo, look! Can you see him blushing?)

"Roger's very unique in the way that he combines creativity as an important factor in leadership," Linda said. "There are a lot of people who do really great creativity workshops, but the focus seems to be on having people think differently or getting them to come up with new ideas.

Roger is able to set his creative problem solving approach in the context of the organization's needs."

The selection panel also was impressed with Roger's preparatory work, like calling participants and leaders ahead of time to better understand their work environment.

"I can always count on Roger to tailor the course to the particular audience so it's not just a canned program that's the same for everybody, because that just wouldn't work with our agencies," Linda declared. "They want to be able to make the material applicable to them, and they want to think that the instructor knows something about them. Roger will take the time to do that."



This gem sparkles just as bright

Hundreds of years ago Mr. Shakespeare reminded us that "A rose by any other name would smell as sweet." We think that, were the Bard still alive today, he'd also agree that "a gem in any other language would sparkle as bright."

Literary allusion too much for you? You want us to get to the point? Sheesh, can't you handle a little culture? We struggle enough just trying to convince *The Error Transformer* that *Mad* magazine doesn't qualify as highbrow literature—give us a little leeway, would you?

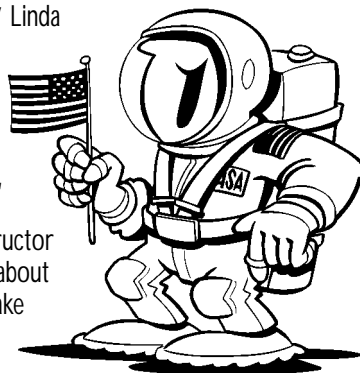
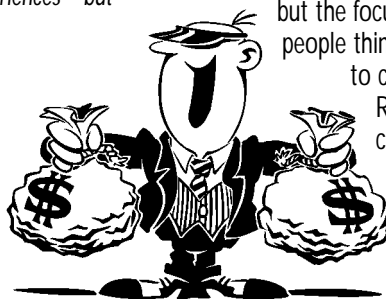
Anyway, all that stuff about smelly roses and blinding gemstones is just our way of announcing that Roger's little book, *Why Didn't I Think of That?*, has just been translated into and published in modern Hebrew. So you see, we could have made this announcement with a flurry of Hebraic phrases like *shalom* or *la haim* or even *bereshit bara elohim et ha shamayim vet ha aretz*.

But we didn't.

We stuck with roses and gems.

Aren't you glad?

Mazeltoiv!



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A simple solution for a mistaken delivery

Mistakes come in all shapes and sizes: big ones, little ones, odd ones, funny ones. Sometimes, believe it or not, even the U.S. Postal Service makes a few mistakes. In fact, you may be convinced that the post office erred in delivering this rag to your door. If that's your conviction and you're certain you'd rather not be blessed with your own free copy of *I³* each quarter of the year, here's a creative two-part response to our mistake:

Contact us by phone, fax, mail or e-mail (information at the bottom of each page of this literary offense) and ask us to keep our mistakes to ourselves.

Then, toss the offending waste of paper into the nearest circular file;

Do that, and we'll be sure to immediately correct the delivery error and spare you any more newsletter angst. If our absence would make your heart grow fonder, just let us know!



There's no mistaking new friends

You can never have too many friends.

We disagree strenuously with the crabby old Frenchman, Voltaire, who once grumped, "May God defend me from my friends; I can defend myself from my enemies." No, we like making new friends and we delight even more in welcoming them into the growing circle of Official *I³* Readers. So a big, exuberant, WELCOME to our newest creative acquaintances and good buddies:

- PaineWebber
- ESPN Magazine
- Federal Executive Institute
- United States Army, Navy, Air Force Software Technology Conference
- Times Mirror—Leadership Institute for Managers



- United States Overseas Private Investment Corporation
- United States Agency for International Development (USAID)
- General Mills
- United States Defense Commissary Agency
- Leadership Erie
- American Consulting Engineers Counsel
- United States Department of the Treasury

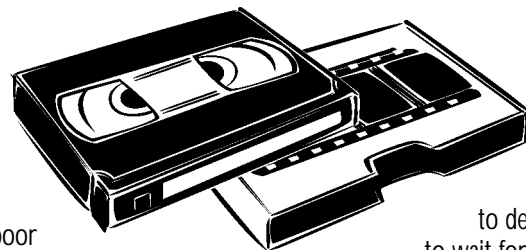
Well met, our new friends, whether Romans or countrymen. And pay no attention to that other grump, George Ade, who once said, "A friend who is very near and dear may in time become as useless as a relative!"

It's no error to hook up with brilliance

Too often we spend days and weeks, even months and years in mental debates about whether it might be a mistake to follow a certain course of action. And even then, after waiting so long, some of us still make poor decisions:

- Our grandparents waited for decades to take a vacation—and then booked passage on the *Titanic*.
- Our ancestors waited for months to get the Greeks to leave their fair city—and then brought inside a lovely wooden horse.
- Our friends waited years before registering to vote—and then had a choice between George Bush and Al Gore.

People, people, *people*—what are you waiting for? It's never a mistake to send for Dr. Firestien's exciting video, *Brilliant, Simply Brilliant*, a delightful five-part creation designed to jump start the



creative urges in each of us.

What's to debate? What's to wait for? In this eye-

popping video, five brilliant ideas are thought-provokingly presented to show how the creative process can work for you, right now, where you sit. The five installments—*Over & Outta Here*; *There's Something About Judy*; *Plastic Gold*; *Play It Again, Vin!*; and *Thinking Inside The Box*—are drawn from widely differing sectors of business and industry and demonstrate how the creative process can be applied to benefit *your* bottom line. Each installment lasts approximately six minutes and is perfect to open or close meetings (even snoozemakers). Each segment is instantly applicable to real-life situations you may be facing right now.

It's no mistake to stop waiting and immediately order your own copy of *Brilliant, Simply Brilliant!*

The real freshmaker

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If Lincoln had become a successful shopkeeper or U.S. Senator, he might never have landed in the White House—and today there might not be a United States stretching from sea to shining sea.

The truth is, "failure" may be just the ticket to a better idea.

Sticking To It

Ever heard the classic story of the invention of the Post-It® note? It's a great story and a great example of a wonderful failure.

Why a failure? Well, what is glue supposed to do? Keep two things together, right? Not let them separate with little effort. Why would anyone want a glue that didn't really stick?

That's precisely what the marketing department at 3M was asking the day Arthur Frye, a chemical engineer, proposed a new product.

"What? A glue that doesn't stick all the time? What on earth for?"

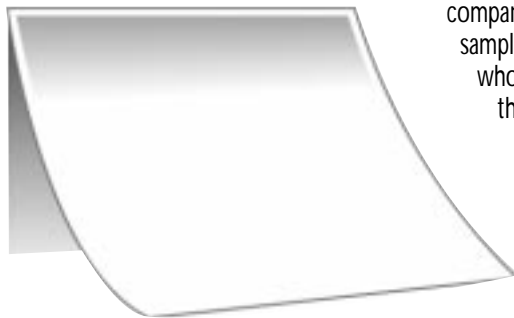
Well, for starters, for Frye himself.

Frye, who sang in a church choir, became frustrated with the small slips of paper he had to place in his hymnal to mark the tunes his choir was to sing during Sunday services. When he learned that another 3M researcher, Spencer Silver, had created a semi-sticky adhesive, Frye asked him to apply some of it to a few slips of paper. Frye found the new invention worked marvelously well for holding his place in the hymnal. The slips of paper stuck as long as he needed them to, but they would pull off without damaging the paper.

Brilliant, so he thought.

Not so, according to the majority.

But Frye remained undaunted. He decided to distribute sample Post-its® to the people with the real power and opportunity to influence others:



secretaries. Secretaries, he figured, could demonstrate the utility of the notes, and thus the need for the product. He began with the chairman's secretary. Soon other secretaries began calling her, asking about the handy little notes. Before long the requests became overwhelming. When the secretary called Frye for more, he directed her to the marketing department. Of course, it didn't take many requests from the chairman's secretary for marketing to catch on. They changed their minds and suddenly became interested—very interested.

And the rest, as they say, is history.

Marketing at 3M, by the way, took a lesson from Frye. When Post-its® were finally introduced into the marketplace, the company began by sending samples to the secretaries who served the CEOs of all the Fortune 500 companies. The strategem worked.

We can all learn a valuable lesson from Mr. Frye, Mr. Lincoln, and even from the Mentos-

chomping Mr. "I'm wearing a freshly-painted suit and nothing's gonna stop me now" businessman:

Mistakes are in the eye of the beholder.

Yes, some mistakes can clearly change your life. They can cause such havoc that you might wind up with a successful invention, a successful presidency, or an incredibly gaudy suit.

So what's holding you back from your fresh perspective?

Carpe mistakem.

The only bad mistake is not visiting

Sometimes, the best creative solution to a mistake is to stop making it.

That's especially true if you've not yet visited our slam-bang terrific website at www.RogerFirestien.com. On-line you'll find noteworthy descriptions of the seminars and programs offered by the Great Error Transformer himself, Dr. Roger Firestien. You'll also keep up on the latest news about other valuable resources (videos, books, assorted goodies)—all of which are available to you at the touch of a mouse button.

So if you've mistakenly neglected to visit our website, do the creative thing and point and click your way there, without delay!



Book it, Dano!

Start making plans now to attend a unique three-day event called *Unleashing the Power of Creativity*, to be held October 17-19, 2000, and again on April 17-19, 2001, at the Garden Place Hotel in Williamsville, New York, just ten minutes from the new Buffalo Niagara International Airport.

Dr. Roger Firestien will lead the first two days of the workshop (8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.), while faculty members from the Center for Studies in Creativity will lead the programs on the third day (9 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.). In this interactive program, participants will learn the Creative Problem Solving process and how to apply it in order to solve actual problems encountered in their professional or personal life. This program has been delivered in both North and South America, where it has trained work groups and entire divisions and organizations. The program has consistently exceeded participants' expectations in terms of financial gain, time savings, and organizational effectiveness.

Cost for the program is \$895, which includes the following:

- Breakfast and lunch for three days

- The book, *Creativity Unbound*
- All instructional materials
- Lifetime subscription to *Insights into Innovation*
- And other lovely gifts and gadgets

The program is presented by Dr. Roger Firestien, in cooperation with the world-renowned Center for Studies in Creativity at Buffalo State College in Buffalo, New York—the only university in the world that offers a Master of Science Degree in Creativity and Innovation.

To register call Lois or Gary in Dr. Firestien's office, 9:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Eastern Standard Time, Monday through Friday, at (716) 631-3564. Registrations will also be taken 24 hours a day, 7 days a week on voice mail. Visa and MasterCard accepted, or make checks payable to Innovation Resources, Inc.

Another satisfied customer

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While Linda has known Roger for only about four years, she says her relationship with him feels more like a "long-time friendship."

"His personality is so dynamic," Linda said. "The groups sense a sincerity in him, that he really believes in what he's teaching and that he exudes a sense of mission about helping other people develop these skills. When he walks into the room, he brings so much energy and commitment that participants can't help but get engaged in the work."

For Linda and her constituents, news like this can be very refreshing. Senior executives work under enormous pressure, day in and day out, and they need something that will recharge their batteries.

"I want them to leave our program with a renewed sense of commitment and empowerment," Linda said, "and working with Roger certainly helps them to do that."

Whether it be teaching seminar participants the "brainwriting" method, ways to generate more ideas, or introducing them to other elements of Creative Problem Solving, Linda said Dr. Firestien gives executives various skills and tools centered "around their real-world problems."

Which is why Linda couldn't be more pleased. She points to some recent comments by seminar participants to explain her satisfaction:

"This course confirms the validity of leadership practices I believe most/all of us are using at NOAA's senior management levels. I got the most out of Roger Firestien's version of problem solving."

"Roger's course offered extremely useful techniques, broadly applicable to work and personal life. Almost certain to benefit organizations to which seminar participants return."

"Great seminar. We should find ways for more people to get this experience."

"Through fun and serious exercises, we explored the creative problem solving process. Lots of take-away benefits."

"Well put together and very useful. Outstanding, quick pace."

So with glowing recommendations like these, is Linda likely to attend a Firestien extravaganza any time soon?

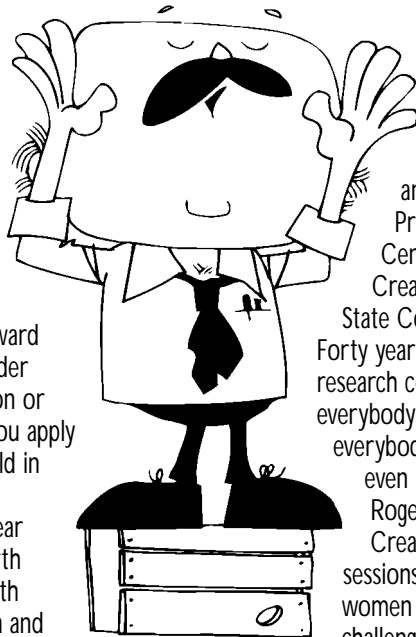
Not likely. Why not? Well, so long as Roger does his job, she's doing her job. And that makes her a very happy Winner, no matter how you slice it.

He helps you turn a failure into a future

We're not really sure what this headline means—unless it's about how to transform annoying errors into successful new business approaches—but whatever the case, you're reading this article, and that's good for you. How else would you get to better know the man who can help your business soar to the next level?

If you're ready to make the next leap toward increased profitability and innovation, consider scheduling Dr. Firestien for a creative session or two. The Error Transformer longs to help you apply your innate creativity to your business world in order to create results. Roger is a noted speaker, author, and consultant who each year trains thousands of people throughout North

and South America and Europe in the highly effective techniques of Creative Problem Solving. His interactive programs help participants to harness and utilize the creativity that lies within each of them.



Roger is President of Innovation Resources, Inc. and Associate Professor at the Center for Studies in Creativity at Buffalo State College in Buffalo, NY. Forty years of personal research convinces him that everybody is creative and that everybody can learn to be even more creative. Roger delights in leading Creative Problem Solving sessions that help men and women learn to solve such challenges as:

- Strategic planning
- How to see mistakes in a new way
- New product development
- Problem solving
- Marketing planning

Dr. Firestien also assists business people to:

- Generate lots of innovative ideas that create results
- Understand and clarify problems to solve the right problem
- Strengthen solutions and plan for implementation
- Make efficient and effective use of meeting time
- Lead teams and groups creatively and effectively

For more information, call 716-631-3564 (e-mail: Inov8Group@aol.com).

The Error Transformer, face-to-face!

You haven't really failed if you have yet to experience a professional, face-to-face encounter with The Error Transformer (otherwise known as Dr. Roger Firestien)—you just haven't really lived.

Don't believe us? Then send for your free copy of our preview video tape featuring the Doc as he delights and informs audiences at one of his popular seminar presentations. Just write or call one of the numbers listed in the copyright line at the bottom of the page, ask for a preview video tape, and quick as a flash, you'll have in your hot little hands a no obligation videotape of the man Clorox calls "the gold standard" of the world's creativity experts.

We think this little taste of Roger's World will have you salivating for more. So don't fail yourself! Ask for the preview tape and see how your business could take flight by booking The Error Transformer for a seminar geared to your own organization's needs!



**Creativity is inventing,
experimenting, growing,
taking risks, breaking rules,
making mistakes,
and having fun.**

Mary Lou Cook

Credits:

Who to blame

Roger L. Firestien, Ph.D.: The Error Transformer

Steve Halliday: The Editor of Errors

Lisa Halliday: She who keeps the Editor from errors

Shane Ewald: Error-free designer

Lois Donovan: She who keeps the Error Transformer from making too many

Gary Gorski: Who to turn to when one's computer errs

Blair Miller: Chicago associate of The Error Transformer

Sara Thurber: Manual manipulator, minus mistakes

Bruce Kratzenberg: Cleary and Company Travel: they'll get you where you want to be

Tracey Jung: Errorless errand runner

Jerry Mach: Mistake-immune melodies

Gordon Mathers: Booboo-less body guard

Steven Fox: Blunderless barrister

Jonathan Vehar: West Coast associate of The Error Transformer

Peter Liberti: Eats his errors

Sharp Printing: Publishes perfectly

Dave Schutte: It's never a mistake to visit Creekview Restaurant

Does Summer bring bulbs or blubs?

- Discover how to use mistakes to increase your bottom line!
- See why a non-attender thinks Roger's seminars are great!
- Test your knowledge of Hebrew!
- And *still more* goodies from The Error Transformer!



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It'd be a mistake not to dive in!

With summer here, a person's fancy often turns to thoughts of diving into a nice, cool, luscious swimming hole. But not so fast! NOT SO FAST! Instead, we recommend that you *first* dive into this amazing edition of *Insights Into Innovation!* By the way—running allowed!

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