

What Innovation Means to Me

by Kerem Durdag

It is my humble belief that innovation, or rather the act of innovating, is the life-blood of the economic development ecosystem. It the life-blood of any economic development ecosystem, but perhaps much more urgently so in Maine, where the population is far more geographically dispersed and the cultural encumbrances to the past are far deeper, resulting in significant challenges adapting to a changed world. For Maine, with all due humility I submit, it is the only answer.

What is the act of innovating? Put aside definitions, books, the media, and talking heads. I urge you to listen to your inner self. Is there a push from within for you to create, to express, to bring to the external world your internal stories? Is there a desire to tangibly work with your hands to give birth to a real and functional thing that satisfies a need? Is there a forward-leaningness to bring to bear what your mind says should exist, and does it have value that is accepted by the world at large? If so, then you are innovating. If you are doing it with a group of people who have not only agreed to join you on this arduous, Herculean, and absolutely emotionally and financially draining adventure, but who also believe in you, then you are part of the innovation economy. And in that doing, you are doing something very real to move the Maine economy into the twenty-first century.

What the twenty-first century demands of us is our collective ability to not be chained to incrementalism, but to vault ourselves to solving important and far-reaching challenges. There is a dynamic

reason for this: the concurrent pace of human and economic development together with the increase of global socioeconomic differentiation is creating scalable opportunities. And therein lies the leverage for us in Maine. Whether it is exporting dairy cows to Turkey, enabling a more efficient delivery of medicine to the entire pet veterinary market, or manufacturing antibodies for the national R&D infrastructure, these activities that are being engaged in Maine propel us from what was to what is being. And at the end of the day, the act of innovating is an extension of your being, your soul.

For me, to innovate is to breathe. There is a certain elemental rhythm to it, a connectivity to what makes us human, a certain velocity of intent, and a manifest purity of the goodness in all of us. There is egalitarianism to it, wherein all of us are equal in the capability to voice what is important to us. Otherwise why do it? In this act of innovation we will fail, we will strain, we will tire, and we will encounter the darkness that accompanies all of us. But in doing so, we get to the light, and that light is the light of contributing to the movement of our lives from point A to point B, of teaching our children that in the doing of something is the doing of their lives, and that the love and support of our spouses, our mentors, our peers, our friends is one of the defining pillars of our lives.

The defining pillars of our lives...I say lives and not professional careers because innovation is not compartmentalized. It affects everything. Everything. It does so not only because it is incredibly important, but because it is born from something that

is not related to money or status. It is born from a redemption-seeking, willing-to-sacrifice soul. From what is true and right. From what is light.

At the center-line of that road that you and I are on is the quest for meaning. We all want to matter, to each other, to ourselves, to what comes next after us. A little ephemeral reach towards immortality. Grabbing possibility from the impossibility. This is what innovation is.

So innovate. For our lives. For ourselves. For all our sakes. 🐟



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