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**THE IDEA HUNTER:
How to Find the Best Ideas and Make Them Happen**

By Andy Boynton and Bill Fischer
with William Bole

“The Idea Hunter is unique. It’s about curiosity, agility and perpetually ‘hunting’ for better ideas. It’s a must-read for anyone who wants to compete and collaborate more effectively each and every day.”

– **Greg Brown**, CEO, Motorola Solutions

It’s no secret that innovation is the lifeblood of our economy, and great ideas are arguably our most valuable asset. But how do you find the best ideas – the kind that can boost careers, improve organizations, and ramp up the value of projects?

In **THE IDEA HUNTER: How to Find the Best Ideas and Make Them Happen** (Jossey-Bass; hardcover; April 26, 2011), authors Andy Boynton and Bill Fischer,

together with William Bole, challenge many assumptions about how great ideas are discovered and who discovers them. Drawing on their extensive research and experience as both prominent scholars and consultants, the authors show that outstanding business ideas do not spring from innate creativity or even necessarily from the minds of brilliant people. Rather, breakaway ideas come to those who are in the habit of looking for such ideas – all around them, all the time. According to the authors, such people do not buy into the starry-eyed notion that the only great idea is a pristinely original one. They understand that game-changing ideas are “already out there, waiting to be spotted and then shaped into an innovation.”

Using a process they’ve developed called I.D.E.A. (Interested, Diverse, Exercised, and Agile), the authors outline the four key principles for developing the attitudes, habits, skills, and strategies needed to become a great Idea Hunter:

- **Interested** – We all want to be interesting, to captivate and enchant others with our wit, intelligence or charm. But in the Hunt for great ideas, being interested is far more important than being interesting; intellectual curiosity, together with an awareness that game-changing ideas can hit you at any time, is essential to the Idea Hunt. Take Clarence Birdseye, the “father of frozen foods,” who was on a fur-trading expedition in Canada when he discovered the concept of preserving foods by freezing them. Birdseye saw how freshly caught fish and duck, frozen quickly in the snow, retained their taste and texture. Because of his curiosity, Birdseye revolutionized the way we preserve and sell food in the United States. An industry was born.

- **Diverse** – The best Idea Hunters don't put themselves where all of the competition is – browsing the same publications, going to the same web sites, comparing notes with the same people, and winding up with variations (at best) of the same tired ideas. Instead, they make a point of broadening their intellectual bandwidth and scouting a wider array of sources, industries, and specialties. Founder of the global software company TopCoder, Jack Hughes looked to the tournament structure of the NCAA to figure out a system of organizing software competitions, in which coders compete to come up with creative designs and solutions. These competitions have produced a new way of identifying the best coders in the country, and many prestigious software firms now ask prospective employees to get a TopCoder rating before applying for a job. Great ideas can be found everywhere – from NCAA tournaments to local pubs and Shakespeare plays – but the big payoffs are frequently found in the sources usually ignored by colleagues and competitors.
- **Exercised** – All professionals today need to exercise their idea muscles. Idea Hunters don't wait for a problem to arise or for the monthly brainstorming session to seek out ideas; they search habitually and continually. One key to being exercised is to develop the skills of observation. Housekeepers at the Ritz-Carlton are constantly on the lookout for ways to improve the customer experience – including noticing that a guest's favorite drink is Diet Coke and making sure the minibar is stocked with the soda every time the guest arrives at a Ritz. Wal-Mart founder Sam Walton was also an expert observer – prowling through the stores of his competitors, taking notes, for example, on how frequently the

retailer ordered a certain kind of merchandise. Ideas are all around us, but they remain untapped unless we engage the world around us—and develop the habits of The Hunt.

- **Agile** – Ideas are worth little unless they're in motion, shifting in response to fresh data and conversation, evolving through stages of reflection and routine prototyping. For that reason, agility is required. In the early 1950s, Mary Kay Ash was in the business of selling mops and other household cleaning products at house parties, but at one party, she noticed something – the remarkably smooth complexions on the faces of the women there, which they owed to a homemade facial cream offered by their friend, the hostess. Ash's agility – her willingness to keep an idea in flow, to let it stretch and ripen in combination with other ideas – spawned a new market for home-based sales. The result: a cosmetics empire of more than two million sales people worldwide

Ripe with case studies of success idea hunters – from Walt Disney to Jim Koch, founder of the Boston Beer Company – **THE IDEA HUNTER** unveils a strategy for unearthing new ideas in whatever industry or organization you operate. The authors also include “IdeaWork” sections throughout the book, with specific recommendations on how to become an idea hunter, such as **selling the best hour of the day to yourself** for continued learning, **how to take on the characteristics of a generalist** rather than a specialist, **developing and maintaining a portfolio of idea sources** and **how to launch a fully developed idea**.

In a time when innovation and idea flow are critical, **THE IDEA HUNTER** provides the framework for finding great ideas and harnessing them to create industry change and drive progress in your business, career, and personal life.

THE IDEA HUNTER:
How to Find the Best Ideas and Make Them Happen
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Boynton and Fischer's current and past clients include Fidelity, Cisco Systems, Johnson & Johnson, Nokia, Nestle USA, Deloitte Consulting, Cigna Insurance, Pfizer, British Air, British Telecom, IBM and Bank of America.

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Advance Praise for THE IDEA HUNTER

"The Idea Hunter is unique. It's about curiosity, agility and perpetually 'hunting' for better ideas. It is a must-read for anyone who wants to compete and collaborate more effectively each and every day."

- Greg Brown, CEO, Motorola Solutions

"Humans make progress by discovering new ideas, but also, to a very important extent, by re-purposing the ones that already exist. In The Idea Hunter, Boynton and Fischer show how each of us can get better at this critical second

skill, identifying and reapplying existing ideas.”

- Paul Romer, Senior Fellow, Stanford Institute for Economic Policy Research

“The Idea Hunter upends a number of persistent myths about innovation and what it takes to be an ‘idea person.’ It shows that what’s required is not spectacular creativity or remarkable IQ, but curiosity. Not innate genius, but a genuine desire to engage in a daily search for ideas. The Idea Hunter will help advance your projects, career, and organization.”

- Jay Hooley, President & CEO, State Street Corporation

“Boynton and Fischer get right to the heart of what it takes for people to create a superb idea – the first step to any successful innovation. By describing the characteristics of successful idea hunters, they provide guidance and tools that can improve the ability of each of us to find great ideas and put them into play in our organizations.”

- Michael Raynor, Director, Deloitte Consulting LLP, Author, The Strategy Paradox and The Innovator’s Manifesto

“‘Hunting’ is an apt metaphor. Ideas exist everywhere. The trick is knowing where to look for them and how to capture them. Boynton and Fischer tell us how.”

- Ron Sargent, Chairman & CEO, Staples, Inc.

“Ideas are the lifeblood of innovation and innovation is the key to growth. Boynton and Fischer have some powerful and practical advice on how to jump shift the flow of ideas in your organization. It is a must-read for any leader intent on shaping a high performance organization.”

- Michael D. White, Chairman & CEO, DirecTV

“In my company, I ask all of our team members to be business owners. Doing things in a better way, at lower costs, and in a more member-friendly way requires ideas from everyone. Those ideas come from great idea hunters throughout the company, regardless of rank and title. The Idea Hunter is not only an enjoyable read, but it offers a practical method so that anyone or any firm can learn the secrets of harnessing the power of ideas to drive success.”

- Laura J. Sen, President & CEO, BJ’s Wholesale Club

“Observe, ask questions, be curious, dare to throw odd ideas into a group’s conversation to make it better: These are all ways to ensure that the “blind-spots” that we all are threatened by do not stay “blind.” Be an Idea Hunter!”

– **Ton Büchner, CEO, Sulzer, Ltd.**

“My Company aims for adding about \$4billion in new sales every year. This won’t be possible without everyone in the organization contributing new ideas. The Idea Hunter is a great guide on how to systematically develop this critical capability.”

– **Werner Geissler, Vice Chairman, Global Operations, Procter&Gamble**

“Thrilling, fun, and inspiring, The Idea Hunter tells stories and discerns patterns of behavior and habits shared by the great innovators of the past century. It finds similarities among the greats ranging from Warren Buffet to Steve Jobs, and even going back earlier in the century to Walt Disney and Thomas Edison. Through brief stories and simple self-reflection exercises, this book distills the quirky essence of leading imagination in a way we can consume it, and hopefully aspire to become one with it.”

– **Aaron C. Sylvan, Serial Entrepreneur and Technologist (One Technology, TrustWorks, LemonadeHeroes, Sylvan Social Technology)**

**An interview with Andy Boynton and Bill Fischer,
authors of THE IDEA HUNTER**

Q: What is an Idea Hunter?

A: An Idea Hunter is someone who recognizes that great ideas matter – in their job, in their daily lives and in their communities. Idea hunters devote a significant portion of their time to finding and developing new ideas. They have a voracious appetite to learn and have mastered the daily habits and the skills necessary to discover new and valuable ideas all around them, all the time. In addition, they are skilled at putting new ideas into play so that they improve the fortunes of the organizations and teams of which they are a part.

Q: How do you become a great Idea Hunter?

A: First, by realizing that your contribution to others is largely based on the ideas you have and your ability to put them into play effectively. Second, by hard work; working smarter and knowing that underlying great Idea Hunting are habits and a method that can be learned, improved, and used each day. After all, becoming a great idea hunter is really more about behavior than brains.

Q: Why would anybody aspire to be a great Idea Hunter?

A: Naturally, people who actively look for ideas in different, unique places in an effort to improve their business stand to not only reap the benefits of a better product or offering, but also a significant competitive edge over their competitors. Most often, Idea Hunters are not so much inspired as they are drawn, almost gravitationally, to ideas that they can apply to their own industry, profession or daily life. What they recognize is that they can accomplish more by virtue of employing better ideas than they had before. By creating new approaches to products, processes, business models and the way we work together, Idea Hunters fuel the future. They are the ones who push us, and enable us, to move beyond where we are today.

Q: Why are ideas so valuable anyway?

A: Ideas do nothing short of driving how progress is made, in society, organizations, teams, or at home. Ideas are the heart of innovation. They are the raw material that fuels the knowledge economy. Countries that generate more ideas win. Firms that generate more ideas win. And people that find more ideas win.

Q: You talk in the book about knowing your gig. Can you give an example of someone who really knew his or her gig and used it to excel?

A: The great trumpet player Miles Davis realized that people turned to him for the avant-garde in jazz, and he needed to be constantly thinking of new ways to take his music to the next level. In fact, his stated goal was “to play one new idea each evening.” This was all about knowing what he loved to do: revolutionizing his craft. More than trumpet playing, Davis’ ability to reinvent himself and to assemble new teams to accompany his next new idea and to recognize the audience for this new idea was where he really excelled; it was always about ideas. Whether it was “cool,” “hard bop,” “modal” or “fusion,” Davis was always hunting for new ideas to take his music to the next level.

Q: You say that to be a truly great Idea Hunter you need to fail. Can you use an example of someone who failed a lot who went on to find a great idea?

A: When you think of “world-class failures,” two names that immediately come to mind are Steve Jobs and Thomas Edison. Both are renowned for their successes, but both are also the authors of a considerable number of failures as well. The key to their failures was that they were able to reduce the time and cost-loss associated with each failure to the point that it was really inconsequential; then they could use failing as a learning device. This is not about celebrating failure, but about making failure so insignificant that no one cares; it's about building failure into the innovation process. How to do this? By prototyping, setting up experiments, trying things out and being willing to fail. Without prototyping or running experiments, we are using judgment to hope a solution will work. Hope isn't a strategy. Learning and calibrating risk through idea creation vis-à-vis failure is.

Q: The book makes the point that good ideas are everywhere and that you must have your mind open to see and find them. Can you give us an example of someone who had an open mind and recognized a great idea when he saw it?

A: Jim Koch, the CEO of the Boston Beer Company, talked about ideas being everywhere and not seeing them until he figured out what his “gig” was: “It's sort of like radio frequency. You're surrounded by radio waves, but if you're not tuning into them, you're not going to receive them...My sense is that once I started looking for business ideas, they were everywhere.” Jack Hughes, founder and CEO of TopCoder, got his idea to develop his revolutionizing software from watching baseball, chess, and March Madness. Miles Davis would spend much of his free time going to clubs to scout out the next new sound

and recognize the talent behind it. Good ideas are everywhere; you just have to hunt for them.

Q: The argument behind this book is that behavior is more important than intellect when it comes to spotting ideas and that these behaviors are learnable skills. Can you give us an example of that?

A: If you want to increase the probability of getting a new idea, you should take the initiative of going to whatever “neighborhood” or source that idea is most likely to be found. The idea will not find you; you need to find the idea. We refer to this as “agility,” but what it really means is being thoughtful about where ideas are and realistic about where they are not, and then moving accordingly so that you have a better chance of running into a good idea. In some cases, this might be as convenient as having lunch more often in the cafeteria, where there is a chance of having a conversation with a colleague that might otherwise not have happened; in other instances, it’s deliberately making the effort to go closer to “where the action is” in order to bump into someone outside of my own organization who could have a different idea than we are currently working with. Former Nokia CEO, Jorma Ollila, for example, would spend three months a year in Silicon Valley looking for new ideas because, in his words, “that’s where the future was being born.”

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Uncover Great Concepts

By GLORIA LAU, Posted 3/22/2011 01:43 PM ET

You've been doing well for a while at work, but that next promotion doesn't seem to be coming. What can you do to continue your ascent? "New ideas will take you further," Andy Boynton, dean of the Carroll School of Management at Boston College, told IBD. "You're associated with the quality of your ideas — when you propose changes or different ways to approach problem solving."

How and where do you find new ideas? He says it's not a matter of genius, but about developing the right habits.

- **Put them on trial.** "Test your ideas early and often," said Boynton, co-author of "The Idea Hunter." "Never sit on them. Let yourself fail frequently in a controlled setting. Learn from (mistakes) and try again."

Take Thomas Edison, a famous inventor by the late 1800s. When journalists asked how he achieved success, he led them outside to a pile of garbage, the result of all his experiments. "Nothing is more valuable than testing ideas," said Howard Weinberg, a principal at Deloitte Consulting in New York. "You can test

ideas in conversations with experts, friends, colleagues, and you almost always get valuable feedback."

Weinberg, who leads Deloitte's growth and innovation strategy practice, advises writing down new proposals.

"Put down your idea in three sentences or draw a diagram," he said. "Make it concrete. People can't test an idea unless it's down."

- **Manage risk.** If you wait until the end of your project to unveil your conclusions, you won't know if your answer is on target until it may be too late, Boynton says. Reveal early, seek feedback from experts and calibrate your solution.

- **Seek new outlooks.** "If you're an investment banker hanging out with bankers all day, you're just cycling the same ideas over and over again," Boynton said.

Instead, schedule lunch meetings with people outside your business once or twice a month. Go to each event with a purpose. Ask for opinions on the issues you're facing.

"Get their perspective on all sorts of things," he said. "What do they do in their organizations? What do their customers care about?"

- **Open your mind.** Look for lessons in other fields.

Warren Buffett knew early on that he wanted to be a great investor. He was a baseball fan, so he studied Ted Williams, the great hitter.

"Williams systematically divided home plate into 40 blocks," Boynton said. "He only swung at the middle spaces, where he had the greatest chance for success. Buffett decided to do the same — to only consider investments in the middle. He doesn't invest in any technology he doesn't understand."

- **Set aside time.** "Invest in your own future by selling yourself the best hour of the day for reflection and idea hunting," Boynton said. "Don't wait until the end of the day when you're exhausted."

Read often and mull over what you've learned each week.

- **Map the flow.** Figure out how good ideas enter your organization and how value gets added to them as they move from concept to moneymaking products.

"A lot of times good ideas die," Boynton said. "They don't go anywhere. They're often carried by people no one pays attention to. It's worth thinking about if you're a manager: Who can move good ideas?"