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AFJAGS Podcast: Episode 14

How to Innovate with (Ret.) Colonel Bill DeMarco – Part 2

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GUEST: COLONEL BILL DEMARCO, USAF (RET.)

This is part 2, of a two-part interview, with Colonel (ret.) Bill DeMarco, where we discuss "How to Innovate" from a personal level.

MAJOR RICK HANRAHAN:

Welcome to part two of our interview with retired Colonel Bill DeMarco on how to innovate. If you didn't get a chance to hear part one, please do. Here in part two, we explore how to innovate from a personal standpoint, including determining your innovative profile based on a four-color quadrant model. We also discuss the innovative life cycle curve and some leadership insights. Here's a clip succession discussing the four color quadrants from the interview.

BILL DEMARCO:

There's four basic quadrants, I would say, of innovation. The green person, the artist, think of an idea guy or girl. Next you've got the blue, the athlete. They wanna win. The red are the rule-followers, or the engineers. Next would be the yellow. That's your sage, that's the people people.

ANNOUNCER:

Welcome to the Air Force Judge Advocate General's Reporter Podcast where we interview leaders, innovators, and influencers on the law, leadership, and best practices of the day. And now to your host from the Air Force Judge Advocate General's School.

MAJ RICK HANRAHAN:

Sir, with your background, especially your experience in deployments overseas, you've been in a lot of what I would say chaotic environments, challenging environments. Is there a way you could take those experiences and apply those to what I would say would more of kind of the educational, or day-to-day, or even some people might classify it as a stagnant environment where you're not in an ops world. You're back at an office somewhere. How do you take those experiences, or can you take those experiences and innovate through them?

BILL DEMARCO:

Yeah, it's a multilayered question. Because when you're thinking about that, if you're in combat, the idea is you have to innovate always because the enemy is gonna always be innovating. So there's this **Boydian OODA loop** that you've gotta understand, you've gotta be able to work around. In a way, it's both easier and harder, I think, deployed to innovate. The appetite usually is bigger for innovation. But then again, you have to realize that if you're innovating, I was the 15th AMOS commander, so we spent a lot of time working in the AOC.

So we think about it as the air mobility division chief, my position and those of us who were in that position were responsible for all of the airlift and tankers that were out in the theater. We could do a lot of innovation, but then the fact is talk about failure, right? Failure's pretty big. So you have to really think through the innovation when you're in combat, because people's lives are on the line. But to your point about being here, and we'll say, as a quote, "stagnant" environment, this is the perfect place to innovate. Usually, lives are on the line. You usually have time to think it through. At least, that's what I've found here at Air University is that there's people that aren't gonna want you to innovate. That's true. There's some people that are very comfortable. And maybe we can talk about that in a little bit 'cause I do believe personality plays into innovation.

So the idea is there's always gonna be those people that want you to innovate. It's not the Air Force. We say a lot where we say the Air Force doesn't let you do that. The Air Force isn't a person. The Air Force is a culture perhaps, but there's a person somewhere that's not letting you innovate, and who is that, and why? And so those are things that you have to start kinda peeling back. And when I mention this idea of personalities, there's this book, "The Innovator's Code." Again, **Jeff DeGraff**, Michigan. But he gets into this idea of innovation is a mindset, and we all have a different mindset when it comes to innovation. And we can maybe put it in the show notes, but I can give you a link to an assessment.

The graph he's actually built that he's modified for the Air Force, which is pretty cool.

So we're using it in Project Mercury. But there's **four basic quadrants**, I would say, of innovation. I think most of us, we think innovator, we think of an idea guy or girl. And Jeff would call that a **green person, the artist**. The artist is wonderful. The artist, and I've worked with a lot of artists. In fact, some people say I'm an artist. I have a little bit of green in me, the artist piece, but I don't think that's my dominant maybe tendency. But the artist, the thing is they will have great ideas, but they have 100 and million great ideas. They're idea-holics. They need a 12-step program. These are the guys that they'll give you an idea, then they're off, and they've got another one, and there's a shiny penny rolling down the hall and they want that idea. It's one of these things that that's a great thing. They're great idea generators.

Next, you've got the blue quadrant. **So the blue quadrant is kind of what we call the athlete**. These are the guys that are maybe focused on short-term, but they wanna win. And that's kinda where I, and I say win not 'cause it's like you want the medal, but the idea is I want that idea to get traction. So that's kind of, I'm kind of in that blue-green quadrant. And so I get that.

The next is the red. The **red are the rule-followers**, they're the engineers. They're the guys that know the doctrine. They know the rules, the AFI, it's all memorized.

Next would be the **yellow, that's your sage**. That's the people people. The ones that understand, hey, what's in it for the people? And how will the people feel about this? So all four of those quadrants are really important. And the key is to understand which quadrant do we fall in as leaders, but knowing you need all four quadrants.

MAJ RICK HANRAHAN:

So yeah, we're talking here about kind of the micro at this point would be more of the personal innovation. And I think a lot of people might think of, when they

think of innovators, like people like Elon Musk, right, when they think of innovators. But in fact, I think you've mentioned this to me offline, that we **all** actually are innovators, right? And that we can all develop our innate innovative abilities. And you just mentioned these different colors and kind of understanding that. So is that the first step to understand where you fall as an innovator? That'd be first question. And then the second question, within the Air Force context, I think you've mentioned to me that a lot of people tend to fall into that red color, if that's accurate.

BILL DEMARCO:

So the first part, yes, important to know where you stand as an innovator. And honestly, know your strengths. And it's kind of like this idea of superheros. We all have a superpower. So even when people look at the reds, the rule-followers, to a green, there's a tension between the red and the green, obviously. The green is the crazy idea guy. And the red is the these-are-the-rules person. And there's a tension between those two. But you can see how you need both, right? 'Cause the green's gonna basically drive the Ferrari into the pool every chance he gets. The red's gonna be sure the Ferrari stays out of the pool. You need both these things. So it is very important to know where you stand on that spectrum, and that's why we'll put that link in the show notes, so people that are interested, I tell you, go take that assessment, understand. And then understand that's how you innovate.

So if you're a red, I think sometimes people say, well, those rule-followers, they can't innovate. Oh, they innovate. They just innovate differently. So if you want your AFIs redone, that's a red. You give it to a green, not gonna happen. But the red will know, hey, I can take all these AFIs. Think about LeMay and what they've done with doctrine. It's all online now. It's all this, and that is a very red innovation. The idea is we've taken all the doctrine, it's in one spot. We know where to get it. That's a red innovation. A green innovation is gonna be probably a little crazier.

The other side you asked about, the Air Force. If you think about this idea of those colors, it's not just the person. It's almost like Russian nesting dolls. So you would have you, that's a little bitty doll. And then over you, the next doll might be let's say your unit. So you're at the, I don't know, 16th Airlift Squadron in Charleston. So there's let's say Captain DeMarco. Captain DeMarco might be green, kinda blue. And then the 16th Airlift Squadron back in the day was a SOL II squadron, so special ops. They're pretty creative. So now you kinda live in this green squadron, but the wing might be very red, you know what I mean? So the 437th is a red wing. And then you kinda branch out from there all the way to the Air Force, and you could say, hey, well the Air Force is a pretty red entity. But then I would ask, hey, what's the United States of America? What color are we?

And it's interesting, I do a lot of work over in England and at Cambridge. We have just people from all over the world. And when you look at it through their lens, we're a very blue culture. We are a very we gotta win kinda thing. That's America. And you start thinking, oh, okay, so what's a red culture? Maybe Japan. The idea of Japan being very rule-following. You think about how things are done in Japan or Germany. And then you think about, well, okay, so what's a green culture? Well, maybe some of your smaller, I don't know, Northern European countries might be very green, very innovative. We hear about how happy people are in Norway. And then yellow, I'd say China's very yellow nation, very clan-centric, very much about the people and the family.

So this expands all the way out I would say to nations and generations. What are the boomers? All this okay, boomer stuff out there. Boomers are what? I know that Jeff DeGraff's a boomer. He would tell you, "Hey, we invented the Internet. We went to the moon. What the hell have you done today?" (Maj Hanrahan laughs) So the boomers are very blue. And millennials, I would argue, are probably pretty yellow. They're all about relationships. They're all about community. They're all about being connected. And Gen Xers, we're just confused.

MAJ RICK HANRAHAN:

Wow, that was a lot, sir. (laughs) Great insights. So would you say kinda the first step for somebody's that's on this path to become a better innovator is to have that situational awareness?

BILL DEMARCO:

I think it's a great place to start, you know what I mean? Because you're gonna have somebody maybe listening to this podcast, they're just like, well, innovation's stupid. It's just a buzzword. I don't get it or understand it. That person might be a red, maybe a yellow, I don't know. I'm just saying just go check out that assessment and see where you fall. And the greens are probably just going, well, thank goodness. It's about time we did this in the Air Force. I just wanna do more of it. The blues are wondering like, okay, so how are we gonna get this so my unit can become the best squadron in the Air Force, or what have you, you know what I mean? So the idea is to probably understand where you're at. I'd also tell you that there's a million things. I'm pushing the graph thing just because that's part of this new Project Mercury.

But I would tell you MBTI is a good thing to look at, Myers-Briggs Typology Index. [16personalities.com](https://www.16personalities.com) is a great place to start. Go out there, take that assessment, look at that. Get an idea of who you are. Back to that thing we talked earlier about, leadership. Knowing yourself to lead yourself, then leading yourself to lead your organization. Once you know that, and you can find out that, hey, I don't get this innovation thing, well, then you gotta ask yourself is there value in innovation? And if the answer is yes, and you don't do that well, then can you find somebody who does that well, you know what I mean? And bring them onto your team, and then create an organization that can innovate, maybe do it rapidly.

MAJ RICK HANRAHAN:

So let's say a listener takes that advice. They do the assessment. They start to understand where they fall as an innovator, what color they may be, maybe even understand what their unit's color is and kind of their

wing's color. I would then presume that, for a leader, they would also need to know what all their people's colors are. And I think we've talked offline of that innovation requires cognitive diversity and teamwork. Can you speak to that?

BILL DEMARCO:

Yeah, if you just think about the ... I hate to make more of this competing values framework than what it really is, but let's just take that for a minute and just think about it. The idea of innovation happening kind of on a curve, if you will, if you think about this, the greens, the artists, are gonna be usually the first ones that come up with an idea. And they probably have a million of them. You just haven't asked them. You know what I mean?

So example I used, walking into OGC and saying, has anybody thought of how to fuel a plane better? And a guy raises his hand, yes, sir, I've been thinking about that for a long time. Well, he had been, nobody asked him about it. You know what I mean?

So the next would be the blue. So the blue then takes that idea. Or you think about, I'll use the example of Brandie Jeffries and I. Brandie is the idea person. So Brandie will come in and say, "Hey, I got an idea." And she looks at me to see what my reaction is as a blue. If I say, "That's a great idea," she's like, "Oh, good." Because now she knows, okay, as the blue, I'm gonna take that idea, and I'm gonna find the right people, find the resources.

But the problem is, is as a blue, it's a quick win, so you need a yellow. So the yellow is the people person, right, the sage. So then the blue, if you think about it, handing to the yellow. The yellow's gonna get people excited, get people around the idea. And eventually, the red, the red gets you the scale. So the red is the person that's gonna develop the processes and procedures to make this repeatable. So the idea is once we find out how to do that, the red will build the processes that'll get you to the next level.

But the problem is if we stay red, then we start squishing all the greens and all the blues. And there's not a lot of greens in the Air Force. And so if we tell them all to "shut up and color", what happens? Well, A, they'll leave, or B, they'll stay, and they'll be assimilated, and they'll learn to shut up. And they're not gonna bring you ideas anymore. So once you get red, you gotta start thinking about the next step, which is how do I bring the greens back into the next process?

If you think about the example of Apple computer, Steve Jobs, he took over. He's very green-blue kinda guy. You could argue maybe Wozniak was the green and Jobs was the blue. But the fact was they did amazing things through the '80s. Sculley comes in, the company turns very red. They were producing a lot of, I'll use air quotes and say, "interesting things", if you remember. They had all kinds of stuff that just wasn't selling. But they were red at the time. And then Jobs comes back, and he turns it green again, and then they start that sine wave again. So where are they at right now with Cook, you know what I mean? I would assume people would say, well, they're red. I don't think they're red. I would honestly, under Cook, maybe they're even yellow. But I don't know that they're red. But it's just something to ask yourself as you start thinking about your unit.

MAJ RICK HANRAHAN:

And is this what you discuss when we're talking about this kind of innovative life cycle or innovative life cycle curve, this sine wave?

BILL DEMARCO:

Yeah, actually, I believe it's a Schopenhauer curve, if I've got that right. And I'll get you the exact words, but yes. So there's this curve that it goes on almost like a S-curve. It starts with the green, green hands to the blue, the blue then brings the people on board, and then the red will get you the scale. You can't stay red. You know I mentioned Apple.

Let's think about the Air Force for a minute. Where are we at? Boy, our whole Air Force, if you go back to the interwar years, very green. The idea of what do we need an airplane for? Is an airplane even a thing? Is it just, I mean we're sitting here at Maxwell, right, where Orville and Wilbur Wright had their first flying school. The first flight went 120 feet. That's shorter than a C-5. It lasted like six seconds, yet we decided that was something worth investing in. So that was a pretty green thing, you know what I mean?

Now you roll into something like a World War II. Well, that's pretty blue, you know what I mean? We're taking this green idea, and we're talking about things like strategic bombardment. We didn't even know if that would work. This great movie, probably people have seen it, "Twelve O'Clock High," but there's a great scene in there where they're talking about it has to work. So these blues are like just thumping this idea of strategic bombardment.

So where do we become yellow? I don't know. You could maybe look at the '70s, or heck, maybe the '90s. The idea of after the Soviet Union's gone. And then in the '90s, we're out doing all these things in Africa and these other places, the Balkans. I don't know, but someplace, we became very red. And these ideas that we follow the rules, we do things by the book, and we'll only do it this way. And really, it's interesting 'cause you could probably argue that the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan made us even more red. So how do we get to be green again?

I think that **General Welsh** maybe started that. Maybe he was more yellow. I think **Goldfein** is blue, but he's really trying to bring back the green. You look at somebody like **Secretary Roper**, that guy, he's green. I love reading articles about Roper 'cause he's just doing all kinds of great stuff. But you can see we're trying to force our culture back into something that looks like a green-blue culture.

MAJ RICK HANRAHAN:

So I would presume that's a very difficult thing to do. That's what led to Apple's demise until Jobs came back. And now, like you said, so we're in this red phase, right? And by the way, this curve is a very long curve. It goes back decades and decades. So what are some things we could do maybe as an Air Force at large or maybe even individually to break through that, and get out of the red and get back into next stage of the curve?

BILL DEMARCO:

Well, I honestly think it's happening, I do. I look at what our senior leaders are saying, and it's gotta start there. And of course, then we talked about the frozen middle, and it's how do you break through that? Why is there a frozen middle? And I would argue I'm not sure there is. But let's just pontificate on that for a minute. Why is there a frozen middle.

It could be that the people in the middle, whoever they are, let's use quotes, are looking at people like our senior leaders and saying, "well, you didn't do it that way. So why should I do it that way? I don't know if I trust you. I don't know if I can buy into that."

But like I said, General Welsh, I think, started this movement. General Goldfein has continued it. Who knows what CSAF next will do? But I really think that if CSAF next buys into what General Goldfein and General Welsh have done, we probably will start turning the corner. I think we've turned the corner. Maybe we'll start accelerating out of the corner is a better way to say that. I think it comes down to this idea of trust. Is it safe, can I do it? And it sounds like everything I'm hearing from General Goldfein and, like I said, Secretary Roper is yes, trust us.

MAJ RICK HANRAHAN:

Why is it important to do this?

BILL DEMARCO:

Yeah, there's this idea with innovation. And I went to the Stanford D school, which I love everything about Stanford. But I will call it, and I think other people call it

the same thing, it's innovation theater. This idea of let's have fun, let's innovate. Yay, get your Play-Doh out! How many LEGOs do you have? And that's all good because that stuff, the idea of playing with LEGOs or what have you is to get you in a mindset to innovate. But what I'm more concerned about is why. Why are we innovating?

So when we start our Innovators by Design course, Brandie Jeffries is very much a yay let's innovate person, and I love her for that. And they look at me like I'm the curmudgeon. I'm the retired colonel. And I say, "Why are we innovating?" I go, "Look at every piece of strategic documentation we have from the NSS down. It talks about how important innovation is." Well, then you ask yourself why. And I don't know if I can say ass, but because we're gonna get our ass kicked.

You look out at the global, where are all the lines heading right now? You look at China, what China's doing. They're doing a lot of interesting things. What is Russia doing? What is Iran doing? What is North Korea doing? All these different things that are out there almost on every quadrant, and what are we doing? Are we stuck flat-footed, or are we on the balls of our feet in a fighting stance? And that's why we have to be able to innovate.

MAJ RICK HANRAHAN:

Is it a necessity at this point to innovate?

BILL DEMARCO:

Necessity, it's an interesting word. That's why I had to think about that. For me, in my biases, I would say yes. But then again, I'll go back to the fact that I'm a blue-green. So I'm saying, yes, it is a necessity. If it's not a necessity now, when will it become a necessity? It's interesting, my paper I did at Stanford was on strategy and the idea of trying to connect leadership with strategy. And had a lot of conversations with some pretty famous people, [Ed Meese](#), [Victor Davis Hanson](#).

One of the things they would always talk about is America needs a death sentence. So you think about Pearl Harbor. And the fact is, or 9/11, or what have you.

The fact is have we had the death sentence? Is it gonna take us getting kicked in the privates before we go, oh, we need to do something? My biggest concern with that is the speed of technology, the speed of change, the speed of information, all the things happen so fast today. Could we withstand a Pearl Harbor? Because Pearl Harbor happened, then we had time. You had the Doolittle Raid, we had Midway. And you could argue that Midway, heck, it's in the movie theaters right now, a very near run thing. It was a lot of great leadership, a lot of innovation, a lot of luck involved in Midway, you know what I mean, to get to a place where we were able to push into the Pacific. Can we do that again? I don't know. So is it an imperative? Yes.

MAJ RICK HANRAHAN:

One area that's receiving a lot of interest is in the area of cyber, artificial intelligence, and other types of tech like that. And like you said, sir, if we're not innovating maybe in these realms, it's not gonna be like 1941 at Pearl Harbor. We're not gonna even have time to catch up. Would you say that's accurate? And that maybe in these realms, in the tech world, it's a necessity to innovate?

BILL DEMARCO:

Well, that's what I'm getting at when it comes to speed. How much time do you really have? And I think time is getting increasingly compressed. You can look at, I'll mention the paper again. I was looking at, what I was interested in was Eisenhower. So when President Eisenhower inherited the Cold War from Truman, the idea was he had to develop a strategy. He decided that he would basically, it became containment. But the idea was he inherited an incredibly high price tag from Truman, the idea of the Soviets. They were our allies, right? Now they're the enemy. So we can't match them toe for toe, boot for boot. What do we do? And of course, we decided to go nuclear. And the idea was mutual assured destruction, so forth and so on.

What does that look like today? And I'm not saying the answer is nuclear. Lasers, AI, I don't know. But I'm just saying that these are the way we have to think is what

is the answer today? What is that offset? I don't see anything. We talk about AI, we talk about computers. General Kwast always talked about space. Maybe it's all those things. But this is why we have to get out of this idea that it's all about B-52s or F-16s. I would argue, today, that's true, but is that true 10 years from now?

MAJ RICK HANRAHAN:

One other topic that I found very interesting when we were talking offline, sir, was you made a distinction in the innovation space between excellence and perfection, which you, I think, labeled that could be something that slows down that innovative cycle. Could you speak to that?

BILL DEMARCO:

I think that goes back to culture, right? And we're very, very concerned with perfection all the time. We want things to be perfect. But the fact is so many times, especially innovation, it's not perfect. If you think about one thing we've done with our courses, even, is in the leadership department, everything is labeled with a number. So the first time I launched Leaders by Design, it was LBD 1.0. And now I'm on LBD 6.0. The problem is that none of them have ever been perfect. But I probably have some students listening, so maybe I shouldn't stretch this. I think they've all been excellent. You know what I mean? The idea is that we've done the best that we could with what we had at the time, but then the idea is you can't sit back and say we're done.

Every single one of those six years has been different than the year previous. And I hope they've been better each year. So that's the idea, I think, of excellence is the idea of always striving to be better than what you were. However, perfection is something we know we can't attain, but we probably can attain excellence. So in innovation, the idea is trying to do the best we can knowing we'll fall short of perfection.

MAJ RICK HANRAHAN:

Sir, any resources or references you might wanna offer to our listeners on this topic today about innovation?

BILL DEMARCO:

Yeah, first of all, **Project Mercury**. That's something that we were able to launch with AFWERX and A8 here. The idea was before General Cotton left, what he wanted to do was make Air University the center of gravity for innovation education. So we're working with the University of Michigan and Jeff DeGraff to put this program together. So over two years, we're gonna train 150 innovators. And of course, we are focused on Air University. However, I would argue that the idea if somebody wanted to join into a Project Mercury cohort, that would be amazing. But we also have the curriculum, we have the books, and things like that.

Jeff DeGraff's book, "**The Innovator's Code**," I think is a great place to go if you're interested in this idea of the colors that we talked about. Jeff explains it in the book very, very well, and it's an easy read. Jeff has a textbook, also, that I love. He says he hates a textbook. So "Innovator's Code" is very much an easy read. It's, I don't know, a couple hundred pages at the most.

One of my absolute favorite books about innovation is "**Orbiting the Giant Hairball**" by Gordon MacKenzie. And I think it just, it resonates. The hairball is the bureaucracy. So how do we orbit the hairball as innovators? And the problem is that the people want to orbit, but sometimes they don't orbit responsibly, and they get shot out of orbit, and then they complain about it. So the fact is how do we stay in orbit, but not get sucked into the hairball?

So Gordon MacKenzie has a great book. We use that in Innovators by Design. We also use it in Leaders by Design. What I found is half the class hates the book and half the class loves the book. Why do they hate it? 'Cause he changes fonts throughout the book. He has drawings in the book. It's like his own personal notebook that he authored. It's a great book. However, I do know

some people read it, and they're like, "You've gotta be kidding me." I find it, it's like the angels singing to me when I read that book.

MAJ RICK HANRAHAN:

So sir, kind of in conclusion, any final thoughts today on our topic of innovation and how that also relates to leadership?

BILL DEMARCO:

Yeah, to quote Nike, "Just do it." It's one of those things that if you think I'm not an innovator, try something. Take a baby step, do something. We talked about it doesn't have to, you don't have to swing for the fence. Just do something today that will be innovative tomorrow.

MAJ RICK HANRAHAN:

Sir, thank you so much for your time today. We really appreciate it. I know it's gonna add a lot of value to our listeners. And that'll be it for today, sir. Thank you.

BILL DEMARCO:

Thanks, Rick, I appreciate it.

TAKEAWAYS

MAJ RICK HANRAHAN:

My top three takeaways from the interview with Colonel DeMarco include, **one, determine your innovative personality profile**. Personality plays a large role in understanding both your innovative abilities and those around you. Defining your personality profile is likely the first step in becoming more situationally aware of how to innovate. While there are many types of personality assessments and classifications out there, Colonel DeMarco discussed the **four-color quadrant model** that includes the colors of green, blue, red, and yellow.

Green represents the idea person, the artist, the visionary, the Elon Musks of the world. Greens are necessary in any organization as the cauldron of new ideas. However, greens may become idea-holics and may not be able to execute on those ideas or relate well to other colors.

Next comes blue, or the athlete. Blues like to win, and not necessarily for winning's sake, but to see the ideas gain traction and come to fruition. Blues are go-getters and work to bring those ideas into reality. But blues may be hard-pressed to recognize the value that other colors bring.

Next comes red, the rule-follower, the engineer, the individual who implements the idea, replicates the idea, and ultimately takes the idea to scale. Colonel DeMarco mentions that organizations like the Air Force tend to have a lot of reds. Red and other colors like green often have friction, especially in the way they approach and resolve challenges. They don't, quote, unquote, speak the same language at times. But this is exactly what innovation requires, that constant good free-flowing friction, without which, the best ideas will never materialize.

Last is the yellow, the sage, the people person. Yellows value relationships above all else. Yellows seek the buy-in of everyone and to find harmonious win-win situations. However, a yellow's desire for total group buy-in can also be their biggest weakness, especially when that buy-in is not achievable or realistic given the situation and a decision must be made.

So consider taking a personality assessment either with the ones mentioned throughout this interview, which we'll put in the show notes, or another one that interests you. This should help you on your first step toward greater innovative situational awareness. I also note that for the four-color quadrants that we discussed, you may very well fall into more than one color, but most don't have more than two color quadrants that define their personality type, usually with a dominant and secondary color.

Number two, innovative situational awareness is like Russian nesting dolls. Once you determine your personal innovative style, your next step is to better understand the personalities of those around you, your unit, and larger hierarchy. Colonel DeMarco analogizes

this to Russian nesting dolls. Assume you're the smallest doll with a certain color or personality. Next, you are housed in your unit with its own unique color personality. Then you and your unit are housed in a larger structure such as a wing, which is housed in the Air Force within the Department of Defense within the United States. In other words, each layer has its own unique color personality. Once you have some idea of the structure, then also consider the historical landscape of these colors, i.e. the innovative life cycle curve in which they currently reside. For example, Colonel DeMarco believes the Air Force is most likely in the red state of its innovative cycle.

Last and number three, find a safe harbor to test your innovative ideas. The first two steps center more on understanding, i.e. understanding how you and others, including your unit and organization, think and work, which sets you up for this final step of action. In other words, how do you beta the idea? Or how do you find a safe harbor or space to test the idea without mission failure? Colonel DeMarco stated that the vast majority of a test are recoverable. They weren't swinging for the fences on the first go. Rather, they micro-tested each iterative process and eventually build up the know-how to bring their idea into the operational theater.

Think of some of the greatest inventors. Thomas Edison, who reportedly took 10,000 tries until he discovered the exact filament and composition for the incandescent light bulb. Or how about our Air Force forefathers, the Wright brothers, who tested over 200 air wing shapes with unparalleled precision in the world's first wind tunnel that they built, which modern computerized wind tunnels are only able to improve upon by a few percent.

As Colonel DeMarco states, the best leaders live at the nexus of leadership, strategy, and innovation. In other words, leadership and innovation go hand in hand. Leadership without innovation is like riding a bicycle in a motorcycle race or like bringing a knife to a gun fight. Leaders that remain ignorant to innovation will eventually be left behind. So get out there and innovate.

Make mistakes in your safe harbor. Test and iterate until you find your prototype solution. Then let us know how you innovated a new solution, and we'll bring you on as a guest of the show to let us all know about it. Thank you for listening, and we'll see you on the next episode.

ANNOUNCER:

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