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Ideas For Success | *March*

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Clean and Green

A few weeks ago I traveled to Fort Myers, Florida, to facilitate a peer group of business owners. When our work was complete, our host took us to tour the Edison & Ford Winter Estates, where Thomas and Henry "spent many winters working, talking and even relaxing together" in the early part of the last century. Their refurbished homes transport you back in time, while the gardens – highlighted by a ginormous banyan tree – are memorable.

What sticks in my head is the number of ideas these two developed. Edison created the first motion picture... and had at least one patent granted for 65 consecutive years. I was unaware Ford worked for Edison Illuminating Company in the 1890s. On a chance meeting, he was introduced to the founder as "the young fellow who's made a gas car." Ford explained his invention and Edison responded, "Young man, you have it, a self-contained unit carrying its own fuel. Keep at it."

Edison, Ford and Harvey Firestone were good friends who often went on 'vagabond journeys' with naturalist John Burroughs. They were green long before it was popular. "I like to get out in the woods and live close to nature," Edison wrote. "Every man does. It is in his blood. It is his feeble protest against civilization." Ford, in fact, spent years attempting to make automobile parts from soybeans to reduce the impact of steel on the environment.

Their winter retreat became the site of the Edison Botanic Research Foundation, where the octogenarian sought a faster-growing plant to overcome the rubber shortage. Despite the trio investing much money in the project, Edison failed to solve that challenge before his death in 1931. The real motivation was likely for Edison to find a way to make cheaper rubber to sell to Firestone who would convert it into tires to sell to Ford. "Anything that won't sell, I don't want to invent," said Edison.

Forever Young - Demand for rubber soared during World War I, which began in 1914 following the assassination of Archduke Ferdinand of Austria. The United States held a policy of isolationism until 1917. In the year-and-a-half of U.S. involvement before Armistice, 4,734,991 Americans served and 116,516 'doughboys' died. A single veteran remains alive today.

Frank Buckles turned 109 last month. He served in England, Germany and France during the Great War, then was a POW during World War II. You may be thinking about living a life of leisure someday. Not our Mr. Buckles. Last December, he appeared before Congress to plead for federal designation and a facelift for a deteriorating WWI memorial in an overgrown, wooded area of the National Mall. He's made many trips to D.C. in pursuit of this cause, saying it's his duty to represent fellow

A new car wash opened around the corner from us recently. It's a hybrid of the coin-operated wand and the hand over your keys, pay the cashier and watch through a big window locations. At this one, you stay in the car to enjoy the colorful ride through the suds, then do your own vacuuming.

Quick Quack Car Wash – with locations in Texas, Colorado and California – distinguishes itself from others here in multiple ways: 1) a polite person in a dress shirt and tie greets you and accepts payment; 2) purchase the top wash, which is less than \$15, and come back anytime within five days for a rewash; and 3) monthly memberships are available for those who really like a clean car. Quick Quack says each cycle uses as little as eight gallons of water, compared to 100+ for the driveway do-it-yourselfer. That's good news for streams and rivers.

This may be a better business model than the competitor that had 11 people working the last time I visited. Quick Quack even has a catchy slogan: "Friends don't let friends drive dirty." I e-mailed to find out if they franchise. They don't. Perhaps they should.

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soldiers. "Time has passed quickly to me," he said. "I've had a lot of activity in the last 90 years."

The next time you're having 'one of those days' when everything seems to be going against you, and you're feeling, "This is really getting old," remember Thomas Edison in his eighties toiling to produce latex from the Goldenrod weed. Think about Frank Buckles at age 109 speaking out on behalf of his fallen brothers. Consider all the greatness you still have left to achieve. That should change your perspective.

Words of Wisdom - It would be neat – and lucrative – to patent an innovative product people desire. Yet every time I think of something potentially impactful, a quick bit of research reveals someone beat me to it. Still I keep writing down things that pop into my head. Perhaps one day a thought will be unique.

"I would like to live about three hundred years. I think I have ideas enough to keep me busy that long." ~ Thomas Edison

As Spring blossoms around you, go for a walk with a pen and paper in your hand. Let your mind wander to what you could create that's really needed. You may not discover the next big invention, but you'll be surprised how refreshing it feels to think about the possibilities. At the least, you'll enjoy some glorious time outdoors, which Edison and Ford understood is essential to being productive on the other days.

Simple Reminder - When you're the one in charge, it's easy to fall into the trap of thinking others don't care as much as you about the end results. As I conduct feedback interviews with direct reports of my coaching clients, one of the most recurring themes is he or she 'occasionally forgets the rest of us are trying hard too.' I've heard it so many times, I'm convinced it's one of the biggest blind spots in leadership. If that thought ever jumps into your head, consider this:

The trash truck pulled up to my house last week
Inside, the driver, enviously at our yard did peek
Outside, the collector, effortlessly dumped our cans
I watched from my window, just sitting on my hands

On a list of the best jobs you'd wish to pursue
Garbage man wouldn't be there for me or for you
Yet without them jumping on and off every day
Those smelly piles would forever be in your way

So the next time that truck arrives at your door
Take a pause and let your knees drop to the floor
Offer a prayer for all who do what you'd rather not
And be grateful for the position in life you've got

OK, it's not Carl Sandburg. I get that. Just remember it takes a lot of people to make this world go 'round. Some are famous. Some are anonymous. Be sure to appreciate all those who help you in your pursuits... regardless of the role they play.

Until next time, continued success in all things.

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