

# NEW INNOVATIONS



## The Biggest Threat to Innovation

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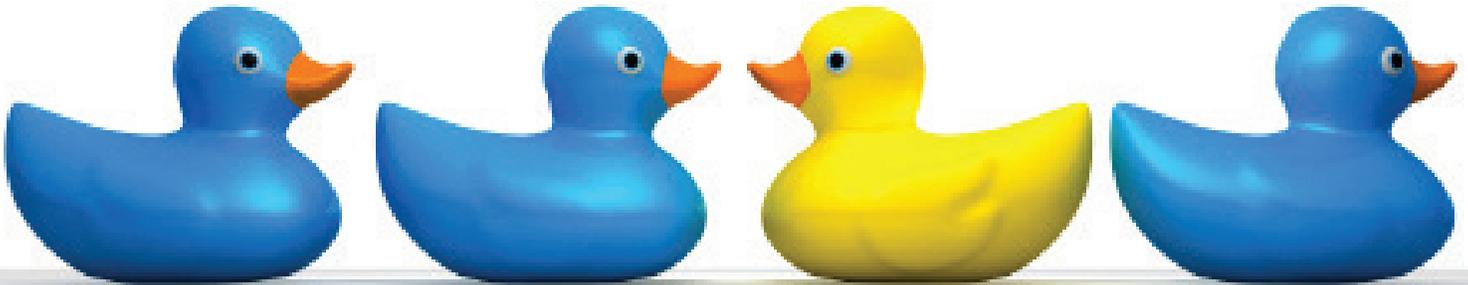
I made a rookie mistake. One evening, two time zones away, the other end of the phone went silent. Well, almost silent. This conversation had not gone the way the client or I had expected. We both began the discussion with anticipation of great things to come. Our trusting relationship led to the client's request for this idea. I worked hard on it and made a great pitch. But I hadn't adequately prepared the client for the concept, nor anticipated resistance. Now, in the background I heard crickets on the phone. Literally, crickets. This was not therapeutic silence. It was a

business client, a therapist in fact, and their business was about to take a turn based on this conversation.

As I saw the doors of opportunity closing before me, I continued, hoping to squeeze the concept through before those mental doors were completely shut. This too had a predictably painful outcome. Instead of slowing down I pressed on and prayed for an open mind on the other end. I explained how we could use text messaging in a unique way to create a new referral stream and attract new telemental health clients. There

were therapeutic possibilities too. The technology was ready, the concept was sound, but the client wasn't ready. The response, more crickets. I laughed a little inside. Rookie mistake. In my enthusiasm for the new idea, I hadn't made sure he was ready. Fortunately, the relationship and trust was strong enough to make up for it.

Working in any aspect of online counseling will create the need to innovate. While many have gone before you, there will be times when you will have to create new methods or procedures. Innovation



is dangerous, messy and wonderful. It is accomplishing what others think is impossible and therefore is typically met with skepticism by those who hold a death grip on the status quo and are late adopters to technology. Looking around and seeing that no one around you is interested or in pursuit of these ideas can cause you to wonder if you're crazy or a genius (or both). It can be rather lonely at times. Since there is natural resistance of change, we can expect the wary eye from colleagues and clients. Resistance is the biggest threat to innovation. Don't let them discourage you.

Try some new tactics and focus on the willing.

Innovators are rarely appreciated until their ideas are working perfectly or they're dead. On that happy thought, consider the light bulb. You'll recall that it was actually invented about 80 years prior to Edison by Humphry Davy in the early 1800s. Edison improved upon the idea to make it sellable. Online counseling is in a similar phase. Today the key ingredients exist and the adopters are growing daily in numbers and clout. We just need to refine and persist to reach full potential.

The concept of telemental health existed years ago; however the conditions that will make telemental health the norm are just coming to fruition. Momentum is growing in the United States, Canada and around the world. There is growth in professional trainings and certification for distance counseling. The technology is ready. Over one hundred different technologies are specifically designed for telemental health. New Apps are developed just about every month for therapeutic intervention. Third party payers are funding online counseling, and many states

are now mandating the same payment for video counseling as face-to-face care. The number of clients served is rapidly increasing as well. The U.S. Department of Defense, for instance, is on course to perform over 200,000 online therapy encounters in 2012.

It's easy for early adopters to get intoxicated by the ability to provide services to people in rural settings, in prisons, and on military bases across the world, without leaving the office. New innovations like the texting idea will arise with each new technology on the market. For innovation in any practice to work, it must be aligned with felt needs and solve problems clients and colleagues have identified. To overcome resistance to change and become the new norm, innovations should be delivered at a pace that can be embraced. The client may need to step slowly towards these ideas. They may need

trial runs and easy exit plans to feel comfortable using the innovation.

Fair warning, sometimes, even the best presentation will not open the mind of the person who has determined to keep it shut. Dichotomous thinkers will predict doom and dissuade you without experiencing the innovation or reading the research. Innovating in telemental health can be a frustrating a lonely experience as you wait

patiently for colleagues and clients to catch up. At the same time, the potential impact is so big and so important, we cannot help but try.

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