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Slide 1

Heather McNamee: Supervising Librarian, Wallingford Branch Library, The Seattle Public Library, Seattle, WA

Sarah Hashemi Scott: Adult Services Librarian, Virtual & Instruction Services, The Seattle Public Library, Seattle, WA

Both members of the first cohort of SPL's Library Innovation Team (2012-2013)

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Slide 2

Objectives of our presentation: for attendees to walk about of the room being able to
- Be an innovator at any level of your organization
- Adopt an innovative mindset
- Understand that there is no one right way to innovate

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Slide 3

Skit

Sarah: Library Assistant with an idea about how to improve a library service
Heather: Sarah's supervisor

Sarah:
"Hi Heather, do you have a moment?"

Heather:
"Sure, what's up?"

Sarah:
"I have an idea I want to run by you....As you know, we register a lot of new patrons for library cards, and a lot of them have questions about ebooks and other digital resources. I was thinking, what if we started to incorporate a short orientation to our digital collections during the registration process for all new patrons? We could tell them about where to search for ebooks, information on how many ebooks they can have checked out and how digital holds work, where to find links to our online databases, and other information like that. I think this would be a great way to exceed our new patrons' expectations and anticipate questions that many of them are likely to ask anyway. A lot of patrons these days are signing up for library cards just to gain access to our digital collections, so this would really add value for those folks. So....what do you think? Is this something we could try out?"

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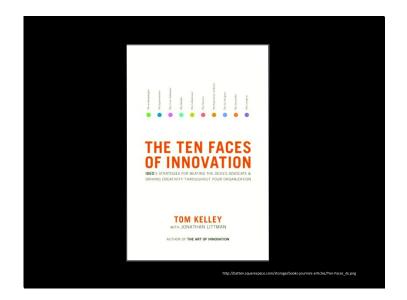
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Heather:
"Hmmm… That's an interesting idea, Sarah. I'm concerned, though, that adding more information to our library card registration script will make the process take too long. We already have a lot of information to get across to the patron about managing their account, fines and fees, check-out periods, etc. We are very busy and adding this information will only make the process longer. And, it might confuse patrons! It could also lead to questions that you aren't really qualified to answer. What if there isn't a librarian around and a patron wants to know more about one of these resources, and you can't answer them, and they get upset? And, what about those patrons that don't use computers? This information won't be helpful at all to them and may even make them feel bad. And anyway, the majority of our patrons will find out about our digital resources on their own when they sit down and explore our web site at home. It just doesn't make much sense to complicate the process, overwhelm our patrons, and possibly create a situation where staff are confronted with questions they can't answer."

Sarah:
"Oh, okay...."
(walks away dejected)

In this scenario, Sarah encountered a barrier--a human barrier--to innovation. This is just one type of barrier, and there are many other kinds. We'll be thinking of others and talking more about barriers later on. You probably noticed that as I responded to Sarah's idea, I took on the role of Devil's Advocate, assuming a negative perspective, focusing on the problems and possible downsides to Sarah's idea rather than on the problem she was seeking to solve and how we could make her idea work.

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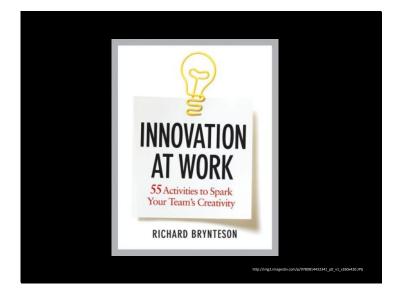@Sarah_H_Scott

Slide 4

The idea of the Devil's Advocate as a barrier to innovation comes from a book called *The Ten Faces of Innovation* by Tom Kelley. Kelley is a partner at the design and innovation consultancy IDEO. He says that the Devil's Advocate "may be the biggest innovation killer in America today." By playing the Devil's Advocate, I dashed Sarah's hopes and nipped her idea in the bud. Now, keep in mind that the Devil's Advocate can be found anyplace in an organization. In this example, I, as a supervisor, represented the Devil's Advocate who squashes her employee's idea by focusing on the drawbacks and downsides and reasons it won't work. But in another scenario, Sarah, the employee, might have been the Devil's Advocate resisting change initiated from above. The main point here is that people stop new ideas by playing the Devil's Advocate, and by focusing on the negatives and the reasons something won't work, they can stifle innovation.

So, given the fact that the Devil's Advocate is such a significant barrier to innovation, what is the solution? How can we guard against the harmful effects of the Devil's Advocate and counter naysayers such as a supervisor who shoots down our ideas or an employee who resists change? Kelley argues that overcoming the negative impact of the Devil's Advocate requires a change in our organizational culture. And that change requires new insights, new viewpoints, and new roles. As an antidote to the naysaying Devil's Advocate persona, Kelley proposes ten alternative personas. He argues that adopting one or more of these roles can help teams express different points of view and develop a broader range of innovative solutions--and put the Devil's Advocate in her place. 'So when someone says, "Let me play the Devil's Advocate for a minute" and starts to smother a fragile new idea with negativity, someone else in the room may be emboldened to speak up and say, "Let me be an Anthropologist for a minute, because I

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personally have watched our customers suffering silently with this issue for months, and this new idea just might help them."' And that one voice may give courage to others. Working in concert with one another, the ten personas can keep the Devil's Advocate at bay.

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Slide 5

Small group exercise: inspired by Kelley's book; designed to address precisely the type of situation acted out in our skit

We adapted this exercise from one in a book called *Innovation at Work: 55 Activities to Spark Your Team's Creativity* by Richard Brynteson.

Ten personas:

The Anthropologist: observes human beings
The Hurdler: overcomes or outsmarts obstacles
The Experience Architect: designs compelling experiences
The Experimenter: prototypes new ideas
The Collaborator: helps bring groups together
The Set Designer: transforms physical environments
The Cross-Pollinator: explores other industries and cultures
The Director: gathers talent and sparks creativity
The Caregiver: delivers care to customers
The Storyteller: delivers compelling narratives

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Slide 6

Part 1 of small group exercise

Think about which personas you identify with, how you play them out, and which behaviors you exhibit. Keep in mind that you don't have to choose just one. It's entirely possible that you may play more than one role depending on the situation.

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Part 2 of small group exercise

Now we want you to think about which roles are missing. How could you fill those roles? What kinds of people could fill those roles? How could an organization or a team, using a disciplined approach, fill those roles?

As we learned, there are a variety of roles that individuals can play in an organization, and different skill sets are necessary to be innovative. In many cases, no role is any more or less important than another role. Diversity is important to the innovation process. Each organization is different from the next, and each organization has to approach innovation in its own way.

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Next, we're going to hear from three library workers about their organizations' approaches to innovation. As you listen to these examples, please ask yourself: What are some of the barriers to innovation in this person's organization? Which personas would be effective in overcoming those barriers?

Sally: "I hear management talking about innovation but to me actions speak louder than words. When I started here I looked around for a Strategic Plan and couldn't find one. I asked around a little and was told by some of my colleagues that we didn't have one. I think we have one now but I haven't seen it. In my large public library system new projects are often created by a select few who seem to have the ear of the administration. Librarians can present their new ideas to administrators who will say yes or no. I prefer to fly under the radar and try things without asking first. I also like to collaborate with my colleagues because I know this makes my ideas stronger. Collaboration can happen if I initiate it myself."

Sally's barriers:
•No defined vision
•No clear mechanisms for staff to bring forward ideas
•Select few are heard

Sally's personas: Collaborator, Hurdler, Storyteller
•She is a collaborator; continue to collaborate
•Hurdler: she is already "outsmarting" and hurdling past barriers

•Storyteller: she could tell the stories of her successful innovations and collaborations to her colleagues, spreading the idea in her organization that developing new ideas is a good thing.

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May: "At first I struggled with what seemed to be constant innovation. I am a new librarian in an academic library. I like order and knowing what to expect day to day. I'm learning how to deal with other people's innovation and how to be a change agent myself over time. In my organization faculty are charged with creating new projects and initiatives that further our strategic plan. Supervisors champion our innovative ideas to further our path to tenure. There is no formal group charged with innovation. Other staff can be involved but first need to be educated by being liaisons to other departments and participating in brown bag seminars."

May's barriers:
•Her own perception of "innovation"
•Her need for stability/resistance to change
•Hasn't realized/embraced the value of diversity

May's personas: Cross-Pollinator, Hurdler, Anthropologist
•Cross-Pollinator: she should explore opportunities to learn about and see the value in diversity
•Hurdler: she is beginning to overcome her barriers but should continue to hurdle past them
•Anthropologist : again, by observing a variety of people and how they work and learn, May can continue to work on her attitudes toward innovation and embrace diversity

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Tony: "My large state library has done a lot of work to develop a culture of innovation. Beginning in 2010 the library established a work group charged with developing a strategic plan *for innovation.* Out of this we have developed a 'creative precinct' that helps community members connect with our organization and bring *their ideas to our services*. We also have 'Connect' sessions regularly that bring together staff from different parts of the organization to meet and cross-pollinate. We are always looking for input from across our organization and continue to find ways to drive innovation."

Tony's barriers:
•How does his organization keep driving innovation?
•How do they respond to innovative ideas from staff and the community?
•How do they communicate success in these efforts?

Tony's personas: maybe all ten!
•All! Once you have an innovative culture in place these personas continue to be necessary to keep things moving forward.
•Experience Architect: design experiences from the ideas generated by staff and community
•Storyteller: relate how things are going to the community and internally, tell stories of their collaboration and how it is working
•Hurdler: keep moving things forward

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Finally, we'd like to share with you some background of our own library's approach to innovation.

The Seattle Public Library's Strategic Plan was adopted in 2011. It was the culmination of a process which invited all of the library's stakeholders to give input and help us pave the way for the next five years. The final product represents our aspirations as an organization, and provides a blueprint for taking the Library in new and exciting directions. One of SPL's five strategic goals is to foster an organizational culture of innovation.

In 2011, our Library's Leadership Team chartered a Strategic Plan Preparing Team with the broad goal of developing recommendations to support an organizational culture of innovation. The team considered these key questions:
How do we animate the Strategic Plan?
How does staff get heard?
How do we capture and cultivate good ideas?
Based on extensive staff input sessions and a survey we called "Taking the Pulse of Innovation," the team developed a number of recommendations based on its findings about the barriers to--and facilitators of--innovation in our organization. Some of the barriers we identified were lack of clarity around decision-making authority and processes, the need for better structures for communicating and tracking proposals, and lack of time and resources for innovation activities.

One of the primary recommendations of the Preparing Team was the creation of a

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Library Innovation Team, dedicated to supporting and promoting innovation at the Library. Our Innovation Team was formed in early 2012.
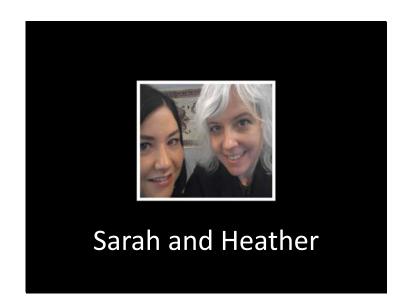
In our first year, the Innovation Team established idealab, an online forum for submission and discussion of ideas, and managed an "Innovation Campaign," which solicited innovative ideas on the topic: "How might we better understand and support our communities?" By the end of the campaign, 125 ideas were submitted. In September 2012, the Innovation Team sponsored an "Innovation Summit" at which library managers and staff identified 9 ideas for further development. Managers volunteered to develop pilot project proposals around those ideas.

In February 2013, the Library Leadership Team approved 7 of the 9 proposals and funding was allocated from the Innovation Fund to support those projects. Project teams are currently undertaking those projects, and the Innovation Team is setting the groundwork for new approaches in the upcoming year.

So...to recap, some of the barriers in our own organization include lack of clarity around decision-making, the need for better structures for communicating and tracking proposals, and lack of time and resources for innovation activities. What personas do you think could help us overcome those barriers?
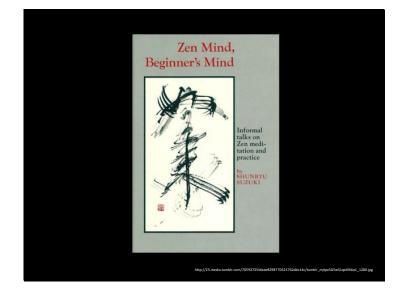
> **Storyteller**: to clarify decision-making
> **Experience Architect**: to create internal structures for communicating and tracking proposals
> **Collaborator**: to bridge gaps between departments and teams and build channels of communication
> **Cross-Pollinator**: to explore both internally (other departments and teams) and externally (other organizations and industries)

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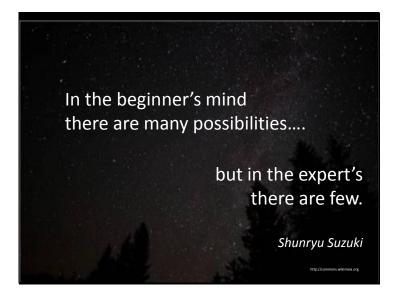
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Last year, during the time that Sarah and I served together on our library's innovation team, we began meeting to discuss our plans for creating a session for WLA/OLA based on our experiences. During these meetings we did a lot of debriefing about the work of the innovation team and how we were feeling. We kept coming back to how we were feeling a little exposed and afraid. We also felt a loss of control over what was happening at times. We talked about the need to be brave, to be open to a diversity of perspectives, and to be transparent as individuals and as an organization. We agreed we needed to adopt a certain kind of "mindset" as an important foundation for us to be successful innovators and noticed the similarities of this mindset to the beginner's mind concept in Zen Buddhism.

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Slide 13

We decided to explore this idea further and learned more about the concept of beginner's mind through Shunryu Suzuki's book, *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*." In the 60s and early 70s, Shunryu Suzuki continued the work of Daisetz Suzuki, the man credited with bringing Zen to the West. Shunryu created the first Soto Zen monastery in the West. A disciple of his organized and edited some of his recorded talks after he died, resulting in this book. One quote in particular captures the wisdom contained within this book:

Slide 14

"In the beginner's mind there are many possibilities, but in the expert's there are few."

Because there isn't one single approach to innovation, it is important to adopt a mindset of openness - beginner's mind - laying the foundation for what we are calling an innovative mindset.

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Slide 15

Next: our top key qualities of an innovative mindset. These qualities stood out to us based on our own experiences.

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Slide 16

Openness
and
Acceptance

Being open and accepting realities is a primary state of the beginner's mind. We found that being open and accepting also takes a lot of courage. We needed to be ready to accept failure, accept that our ideas would not be adopted, accept that we would be exposing ourselves, and accept that we could not quickly change our organization; that there were still barriers to innovation in our organization in spite of the great strides SPL had already made toward an innovative culture. All of this generated a lot of fear, but by accepting these realities we were able to move past our fear and get to work.

Shunryu Suzuki provides a great analogy for this type of acceptance. He suggests that by being empty, like the dark empty sky, nothing can faze you:

"Sometimes a flashing will come through the dark sky. After it passes, you forget all about it, and there is nothing left but the dark sky. The sky is never surprised when all of a sudden a thunderbolt breaks through. And when the lightning does flash, a wonderful sight may be seen."

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We quickly realized that communicating information across our organization about decisions being made and why was essential to creating a culture of innovation. This became more apparent when we held our "idea campaign". Many ideas that came forward had been put forward before, or, were being worked on right then by a work group or team in our organization. There was an obvious lack in transparency going on at SPL. Communicating across a large organization is not easy but it something to strive for so that everyone has the opportunity to build on existing ideas, create new ideas, and gain understanding about the organizational history. We also saw that on a team and individual level that transparency in communication was vital to encourage participation and create an environment where everyone feels they can share their perspectives. As Suzuki says, "You should be true to your feelings, and to your mind, expressing yourself without any reservations. This helps the listener understand more easily."

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We have already discussed the importance of creating a team comprised of a diversity of roles: having different people using their particular skills, or adopting the missing skills needed for success. In our experience we saw that having a diverse group of frontline staff and managers from various departments in our organization at the table in our innovation team meetings made for a more complete picture of the current culture in our organization and informed ideas brought out by members of the team. Again, it is important to adopt the mindset of the beginner in these situations, being open to the possibilities that are generated when a diverse group of people join together to create something.

Remember: "In the beginner's mind there are many possibilities, but in the expert's there are few."

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These are our top qualities of an innovative mindset. What else would you add to this list? And, you can think about this both on the individual level and on the organizational level--qualities that an individual can cultivate on their own, and qualities that an organization can adopt.

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We've talked about the importance of diversity to the innovation process, and we've talked about a number of different approaches that an organization might take to innovation. We've also talked about how one's mindset can help or hinder the innovation process and highlighted some of the key qualities of the innovative mindset. Now we are going to talk about how anyone at any level of your organization can play a role in fostering a culture of innovation. This goes back to our point about the importance of adopting a beginner's mindset which is open, courageous, and flexible. Innovation requires a willingness to think expansively about your role on your team or in your organization. It requires flexibility and being willing to take on new roles, challenges and responsibilities. Innovation requires having courage and being willing to take risks. For frontline staff, this might involve being willing to volunteer for special projects or playing the role of the Experimenter when you might be more comfortable playing the role of the Caregiver. For managers, this might involve approaching recruitment, hiring and team-building with the ten personas in mind. Now we are going to talk more about some specific things that both managers and frontline staff can do to foster a culture of innovation. Heather's going to start us off by sharing some examples for what managers can do, and then I'll share some things that frontline staff can do. And in just a few moments we'll ask you to add to this list by sharing what is working in your organization, so be thinking about that.

Here are some examples for managers that relate back to the key qualities of an innovative mindset that we shared with you:

My first example is the idea of Incorporating "off desk" time for all staff as part of their

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regular work duties. Activities like exploring library resources, working on projects that benefit the team and participating in system-wide discussion and projects. At SPL, staff can participate in discussions on our intranet, or spend time contributing to our library blog. Staff can catch up on the latest board packet, read and contribute to kudos for their colleagues and have the time to work on stretch goals laid out in their work plans (that is if their manager has helped to develop a good work plan for them!). All of these contribute to staff development and engagement, and the diversity of the voices heard in an organization.

Next, foster transparency by getting really good at relating the "why" about decisions being made in your organization to your staff. If you yourself haven't been given this information try to find out. Be prepared to provide context for staff about decisions being made. Listen to and acknowledge staff objections and concerns about decisions and be brave enough to bring these to appropriate stakeholders. Often communication seems to only go one direction in organizations, and managers can communicate up and advocate for staff.

Finally, Let Go. Be open and accepting of staff ideas. Let staff explore and execute their own ideas even if the product doesn't exactly fit with what you had in mind. Of course, your input to the process can be invaluable to keeping things in line with your organizations mission and goals, but don't sweat the small stuff.   Keep the bigger picture in mind while allowing staff to actualize their ideas their own way. You don't have to own everything!

There are many things that frontline staff can do to foster a culture of innovation in their organization. First, familiarize yourself with your library's strategic plan, goals and mission. These are areas where original thinking can add real value, and ideas that are aligned with the library's mission and strategic plan are more likely to be championed by management than those which may not directly relate to strategic priorities or which may not be clearly related to the mission of the organization. Also, ask questions. If there's something you don't understand or aren't familiar with, take it upon yourself to find out the answer or to learn more. Explore the resources that are available to you to learn more about your organization, including the library's website and intranet. Another thing frontline staff can do: share your ideas. Don't keep them to yourself. It's common to feel fear that an idea is too small or unimportant to even bother to mention, but small ideas can have huge impact. Ideas pertaining to seemingly mundane tasks such as shelving can often bring about new efficiencies. What else can frontline staff do to contribute to innovation? Be willing to stretch and grow in your work, to learn and step outside of your comfort zone. Be willing to take on new challenges and responsibilities. Doing so will not only benefit you by helping you to develop new skills and experience, build relationships throughout your organization, and gain a broad perspective on how your organization functions, but they will also benefit your organization through the wealth of experience and insight you will bring to each subsequent project you work on.

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Finally--and I can't emphasize this last point enough--assume positive intent. This applies to both frontline staff and management. Even when you don't understand why a decision was made, or don't agree with it, assume that it was made with positive intent. Operating out of this assumption will help to maintain a positive organizational culture in which staff at all levels are trusted and respected and can feel confident that they are involved in a truly collaborative effort to achieve positive results.

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Now we want to hear from you. What are you currently doing to foster a culture of innovation? What is working or has worked in the past?

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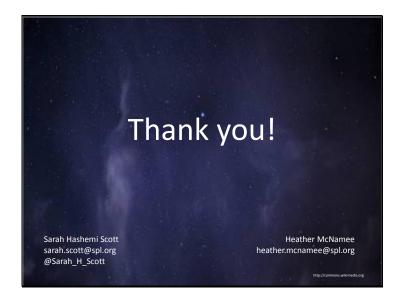
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Slide 22

We hope that our session today has given you some tools to be an innovator from anywhere within your organization, and to adopt an innovative mindset to help you along the way, all the while understanding that there is no one right way to innovate.

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Slide 23

Remember....in the beginner's mind there are many possibilities and success in innovation begins in the mind.

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Zen and the Art of Innovation

Suggested Readings

Bason, Christian. *Leading Public Sector Innovation: Co-creating for a Better Society*. 2010. Reprint, Great Britain: The Policy Press, 2011.

Bason's well-researched book posits a public sector "innovation ecosystem," encompassing "the *what* of innovation (consciousness), the *where* (capacity), the *how* (co-creation) [and] the *who* (courage)" (p. 20). Taken together, the four dimensions of the innovation ecosystem constitute a "blueprint for action" (p. 22). Included are case studies from institutions across the public sector, including libraries, schools, and universities.

Brynteson, Richard. *Innovation at Work: 55 Activities to Spark Your Team's Creativity*. New York: AMACOM Books, 2013.

Brynteson's book includes 55 activities designed to immerse participants in the practice of innovation, to build innovation skills and capacity, to build a culture of innovation, and to develop innovation processes. Included alongside the activities are worksheets, questions, case studies, and assessments to use in settings ranging from small team meetings to large training sessions and everything in between.

Kelley, Tom. *The Ten Faces of Innovation: IDEO's Strategies for Beating the Devil's Advocate & Driving Creativity Throughout Your Organization.* New York: Doubleday, 2005.

Kelley, a partner at renowned design and innovation consultancy IDEO, wrote *The Ten Faces of Innovation* to beat "the Devil's Advocate," which he says "may be the biggest innovation killer in America today" (p. 2). According to Kelley, the Devil's Advocate is the person who squashes new ideas, concepts and plans by "[assuming] the most negative possible perspective, one that sees only the downside, the problems, the disasters-in-waiting" (pp. 2-3). Because innovation is recognized as "a pivotal management tool across virtually all industries and market segments" and even, according to *The Economist*, "the single most important ingredient in any modern economy" (quoted on p. 3), it is imperative that organizations guard against the harmful effects of the Devil's Advocate. So how can organizations succeed at innovation and beat the Devil's Advocate? According to Kelley, they need "new insights," "new viewpoints," and "new roles" (p. 3). Thus, Kelley sets out to put a "human face" (p. 6) on innovation. As alternatives to the innovation-killing Devil's Advocate persona, Kelley offers "ten people-centric tools developed at IDEO that you might call talents or roles or personas for innovation…[which] can help teams express a different point of view and create a broader range of innovative solutions" (p. 7).