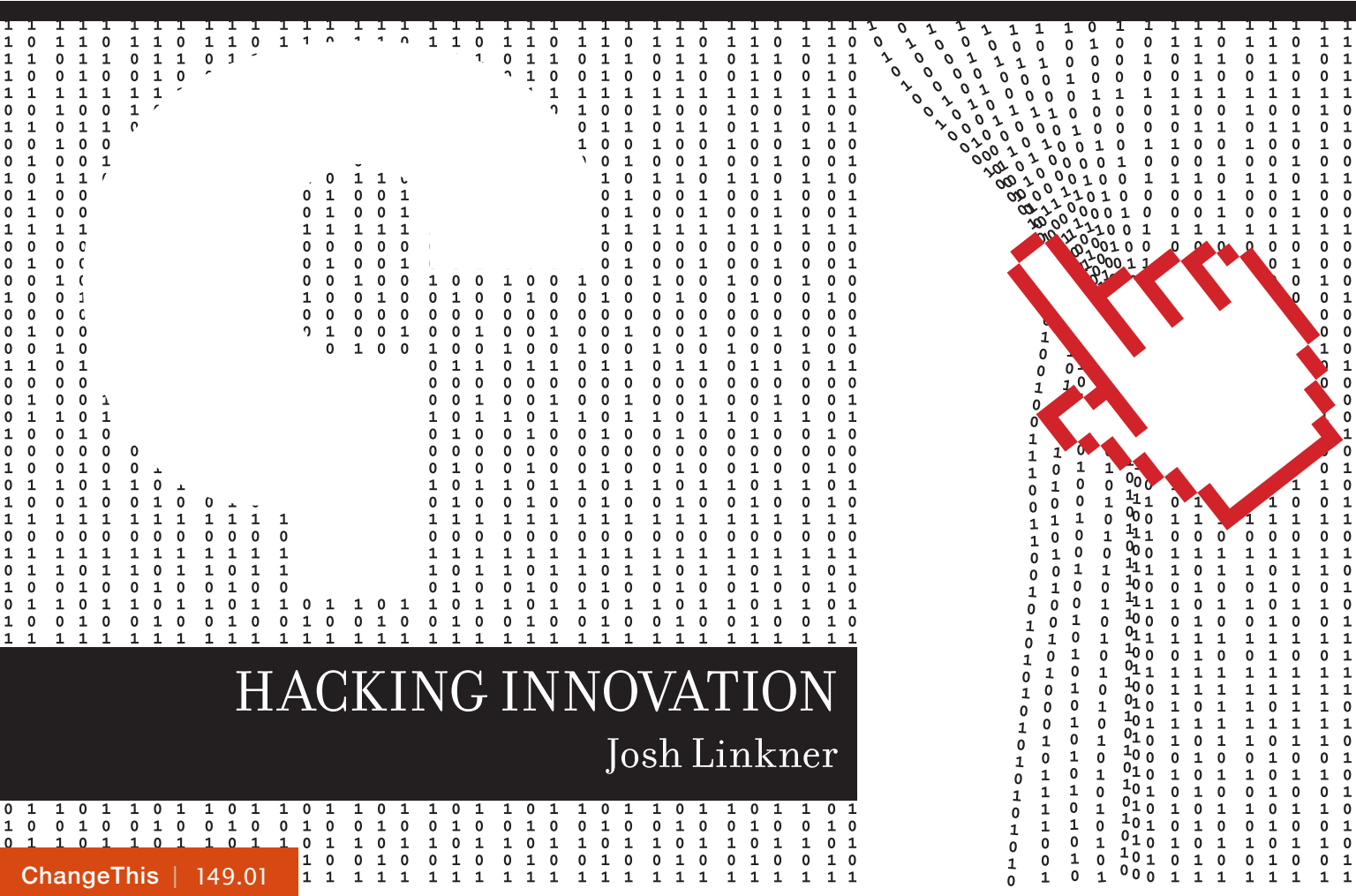

HACKING INNOVATION

Josh Linkner

ChangeThis | 149.01

Since the classic 1983 movie *War Games*, hackers have been a global fascination.

They are feared, glamorized, and hated. Rarely does a day go by without headline news coverage of the wreckage left behind by malicious hackers. They hack corporations, governments, and individuals. It's been said there are only two types of organizations: those who have been hacked and those that don't know they've been hacked.

Hacking is big business, and it's taking a big toll.

In 2014, the FBI received 269,422 complaints of cybercrime. The annual cost of hacking is estimated at over $100 billion in the United States, and more than $300 billion worldwide. Over 60,000 websites are hacked each day, and 47% of adult Americans had their personal information exposed within the last 12 months. MyDoom, the most expensive virus of all time, began in 2004 and has racked up an estimated cost of $38.5 billion. Cybercrime targets 556 million people each year, and 68% of funds lost to these attacks are deemed unrecoverable. No wonder the mere mention of hackers makes the hairs on the back of our necks stand up.

Yet their approaches are your best model for innovation, growth, and success.

I'm not endorsing cybercrime. But if you put their sinister motives aside and simply study their techniques, hacking is nothing more than an unorthodox problem solving methodology.

WHAT DOES HACKING REALLY MEAN?

We often define hacking as a criminal act using computer software to violate cyber-security defenses. We envision a pimple-faced young man in a hoodie, guzzling energy drinks in a dimly lit basement, perpetrating malicious deeds for illicit gain. While there certainly are individuals that fit this stereotype, hackers are a much wider and more diverse group than this unimaginative caricature.

Hacking does not ascribe a specific intent, and nothing about the skillset itself is right or wrong. In fact, hacking is a tool, an approach. In the same way a knife can be used for evil (to murder) or to heal (a scalpel used to perform a life-saving surgery), hacking can be used to destroy or rebuild. While hacking can clearly be used for wrongdoing, it can also serve as a powerful model of growth, innovation, and success.

YOU are a hacker. You have the ability to unlock potential and solve the most intimidating problems you face, both personally and professionally.

THE 5 CORE MINDSETS

Having studied all kinds of hackers—from the illicit exploits of cybercriminals to the kindhearted researchers who hack in order to eradicate disease—there are some common shared philosophies. Unlike the specific techniques we'll cover, which are used to solve particular problems, the hacker mindsets are the foundation to innovative thinking. This set of beliefs will serve as the underpinning for your own hacking exploits, and allow you to build a hacking culture in your own organization.

Hoodied criminals, lab rats, innovators, entrepreneurs, and business executives alike have embraced these five core philosophies in order to hack through their most difficult challenges:

Every Barrier Can Be Penetrated | Hackers universally embrace the belief that fortresses are meant to be breached, mountains are meant to be climbed. The fact that something has never been done or that the challenge seems daunting arouses the hacker rather than deters her. In fact, the more difficult a barrier appears, the more enthused the hacker becomes to rupture it.

Compasses Over Maps | This principle is based on a directional aim at a desired outcome rather than a focus on a specific route to the finish line. Hackers shun step-by-step directions and believe meaningful progress is achieved better and faster by a willingness to adapt quickly along

the journey. Hundreds of course-corrections, or micro-innovations, yield a better result than pre-programming a route in advance and mindlessly following directions.

A map is certainly a handy tool to help you reach your destination when the map is accurate, but what if the map is wrong? When conditions change, your GPS system no longer maximizes efficiency. Today there's no such thing as a map to success. When teams or organizations turn off their brains and simply follow the corporate GPS, progress shrivels. Give employees the target and resources and then let them use their ingenuity and judgment to find the best route.

Nothing Is Static | This is your primary weapon to fight the trend toward complacency. Hackers understand that the only constant must be our ability to learn, grow, and adapt. They understand that innovation is a continuous process, not a once-a-decade initiative. In these turbulent times, embracing this philosophy is no longer optional; it has become mission-critical to sustainable success.

Quantity Is a Force Multiplier | Ones and zeroes aren't the only numbers beloved by hackers. In fact, there's a core belief that bigger is better in nearly every aspect of the hacking process. A bigger target means not only more loot, but also a lower probability of being detected. A large quantity of small attacks (or ideas) generally beats a single attack (or idea), even if the latter is significantly better—more input from more people with more diversity of thought.

Competence Is the Only Credential That Matters | From cybercriminals to biohackers, from software startups to multinational companies that choose to embrace the unorthodox, hackers of all types have a total disregard for authority. They believe respect and power must be earned, not issued. And that a person may have the best idea one day while having the worst idea the next. Merit is the only arbiter.

INTRO TO THE 10 TACTICS

With the primary objective of driving innovation and growth, we'll explore the 10 primary tactics of hackers. The same techniques used by villains can be extracted and applied for legitimate purposes. The 10 tactics:

1. Brute Force
2. Social Engineering
3. Crowdsourcing
4. The Exploit
5. Borrowing
6. Deconstruct
7. Agile Bursts
8. The Reverse
9. The Mashup
10. Working Backward

BRUTE FORCE

The Hack | For computer hackers, Brute Force is a method of trial and error, quickly and inelegantly trying multiple options to crack encryption or passwords. Using this technique, hackers overwhelm a target with a relentless barrage of attacks in order to destroy the barrier protecting what they desire. A common use of this technique is the Denial of Service (DoS) attack, when hackers flood a system with so much activity that the system is overwhelmed and crashes.

Legit Flip | Brute Force is also built upon the Nothing Is Static mindset—the best Brute Force executions involve lots of iteration and continuous learning. The two most common uses of this tactic by Innovation Hackers are Rapid Experimentation and Pivots.

Too often, we believe we must dream up a transformative innovation and then bet the company on its success. Innovation Hackers take a more effective and less risky approach: instead of thinking of innovation as a single gigantic effort, the best leaders are constantly running experiments.

Continuous Rapid Experimentation can apply to all aspects of our business lives—from product, to process, to leadership. Test how a new cold-call script measures up against the status quo in a quick, three-day experiment in one market. If the data is encouraging, expand the test. If not,

discard the idea and try something else. Running a high volume of controlled experiments is your best chance at driving growth while mitigating risk.

Hack in Action | Pivots often happen when a company discovers an opportunity to totally shift their business in a new direction. For example, Pixar went from creating animation tools to its own animated films; Instagram went from a check-in app to a photo-sharing platform.

Your Pivots don't have to be as dramatic. When looking to spur innovation, don't ignore opportunities for micro-Pivots. Innovation Hackers use a Brute Force approach, turning the barrage of attacks inward on their products, processes, and services in hunt of a better solution.

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SOCIAL ENGINEERING

The Hack | According to Kevin Mitnick, one of the most notorious hackers to use this method, Social Engineering is "using deception, manipulation and influence to convince a human who has access to a computer system to do something, like click on an attachment in an e-mail." In other words, using innovative approaches to enlist others to behave in a way that benefits the initiator. A well-known example of this tactic is phishing—calls and emails that trick the recipient into volunteering personal information like passwords or bank account information.

Legit Flip | Instead of hoaxing someone to perform a task that they'll later regret, the legit version has a happy ending. Positive Social Engineering must have three factors: a) truthful, and nothing misleading; b) a structure that is transparent rather than manipulative; and c) most importantly, the end result should be a win-win. Rather than gaining at someone else's expense, a positive outcome for all parties is the desired end-state. The challenge involves gaining leverage by recruiting others to help your cause. For business purposes, we can group those you're seeking to influence into two categories: internal (team members, employees, bosses, boards, investors, etc.) and external (customers, the media, competitors, governmental agencies, prospects, voters, potential employees, etc.).

Hack in Action | In an effort to raise money and awareness around ALS, and to provide a sense of purpose instead of letting the diagnosis defeat him, Pete Frates launched the "Ice Bucket Challenge." After achieving viral status, in less than three months there were more than 1.2 million Ice Bucket videos on Facebook, nearly 10 million more on YouTube, and more than 739,000 new donors contributed nearly $150 million. A formal email request soliciting funds would have likely generated abysmal results. In contrast, Social Engineering the Ice Bucket Challenge included a fun experience coupled with the social implications to each recipient if they complied or rejected the campaign. Participation was highly rewarded via social media and peer interactions. Frates did not create meaningful results alone, but by leveraging the power of others. The best part? In 2016, ALS researchers announced a breakthrough in the fight against ALS as a direct result of the funding brought in by the Ice Bucket Challenge.

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CROWDSOURCING

The Hack | Crowdsourcing for computer hackers is pretty similar to how it's used for Innovation Hacking. Computer hackers are big fans of democratizing information. As a result, they openly share ideas, resources, and tools. So if a hacker is up against a problem, instead of slaving away fruitlessly, they will readily reach out to the crowd to get lots of different ideas on how to overcome the obstacle. They will get input from across demographics, around the country or the world, and from people who have faced this problem or just have a new idea about how to tackle it.

Legit Flip | The essence of Crowdsourcing is to seek a wide array of input and ideas from as many people as possible. The core tenet is that the combined power of many minds is better than the paltry output of one. With diversity of thought, culture, and experience, a group of dozens, hundreds, or thousands of people pecking away at a problem uncovers more compelling results. This can mean reaching outside a team or department for insights, or even reaching outside the company to customers, competitors, and the Internet.

Hack in Action | When Mick Ebeling first set out to cure some of the world's most vexing problems, he knew he and a small team couldn't do it alone. There are already many well-funded research labs taking on many of the same challenges in a traditional way. Deciding that big problems needed a wider and more diverse set of answers, Mick built Not Impossible Labs on the foundation of Crowdsourcing.

Fueled by a sense of urgency, the Not Impossible team attacks some of humanity's greatest challenges by releasing the problems to the world, instead of trying to solve them alone. Crowdsourcing is not for the faint of heart, however; it requires a serious ego check. Ebeling explained to me that he actually seeks to not be the expert, "Surround yourself with people that make you feel stupid. When you're the dumbest guy on the team, you know you're going to end up with a killer solution."

They've certainly disregarded convention so far—from devices that use eye movement to draw or help a man say "I love you" to his wife for the first time in 15 years. And now, taking on perhaps the most grandly absurd challenge yet, the team is setting out to "hack water." To take on such a meaningful and difficult task, they are Crowdsourcing a worldwide network of scientists, software engineers, artists, statisticians, architects, musicians, and philosophers. They are tapping into a robust community of hackers in many fields, who love to use their skills for something good. Innovation is at the intersection of a diverse set of thoughts from a wide group of contributors. As large problems go unsolved with insular approaches, Not Impossible Labs is forging new ground by leveraging the power of the crowd.

THE EXPLOIT

The Hack | This hacking technique is finding a small opening and subsequently expanding it geometrically. It's that single loose string in a sweater that unravels the whole garment when pulled. Since the initial breach is small, attacks can be executed over and over, right under the target's nose, going unnoticed until it's too late. In the same way a single cancer cell begins unseen and then replicates quickly, Exploits are a dangerous and highly effective tool of hackers.

Legit Flip | Too often, innovation efforts are conceived of as the corporate equivalent to a military shock-and-awe assault. Innovation Hackers, on the other hand, are constantly on the prowl for little openings, little threads that can be pulled and pulled. They prefer dozens or hundreds of small tests to massive and risky bets, and only double down when they've been successful in one of these endeavors. For Innovation Hackers, a great Exploit often comes as a second step to another tactic, the Brute Force method of Rapid Experimentation. As you seek to tackle your own innovation challenges in any aspect of your business, run as many experiments as possible, find your opening, and then exploit the hell out of it.

Hack in Action | In 1964, Amar Bose and his fledgling company released the 2201 Bose speaker. It sold alright, and was enough to put Bose on the map. Rather than sitting back and enjoying the spoils from his one innovation, Bose used the hacking technique of the Exploit to make

history. Building off of his first product, he further refined the concept to launch the Bose 901 in 1968. This model became a commercial hit and is still manufactured today, nearly 50 years later.

The Exploit continued as Bose released the industry's first custom-engineered automotive sound system in 1983 for several General Motors vehicles. A host of other products followed that leveraged the same opening Dr. Bose discovered when founding the company, including noise cancelling headphones and the wireless Bose Mini. Bose systems have been used at the Olympics in Canada and France, and are at the Sistine Chapel in Rome and the Great Mosque in Mecca. With over 11,000 employees and $3.4 billion in revenue, the Bose Corporation continues to Exploit an innovation that was born from the frustration of a grad student.

> *“With diversity of thought, culture, and experience, a group of dozens, hundreds, or thousands of people pecking away at a problem uncovers more compelling results.*

BORROWING

The Hack | As you've probably noticed, computer hackers have pretty fluid ideas about personal property, especially of the digital and intellectual varieties. As a result, hackers are willing to use their own ideas and those of others. Some of those ideas are sought out in places like chat forums, other times they duplicate methods they saw used elsewhere, and they even take inspiration from unexpected sources like movies. One of the most-publicized and first hacking groups—the 414s—were a bunch of teenagers from Milwaukee who were interested in the challenges posed by advanced computer systems, and they borrowed their methods from the blockbuster, *War Games*.

Legit Flip | Borrowed ideas are not only a technique of hackers, but have been an important source of innovation throughout history. The basic premise begins with observation in a situation outside your specific challenge.

You may gain inspiration from the arts, nature, other industries, or related problems. After a pattern or concept is recognized, it is then Borrowed and applied to the task at hand.

Hack in Action | Dr. Jörg Gerlach created the revolutionary Skin Gun. After years of treating burn victims with painful, slow-healing, infection-prone skin grafts, he Borrowed an idea from a spray gun for spray paint. He found a way to spray the patient's own stem-cells and a saline solution, reducing the risk of infection and reducing recovery time from six months to a couple of days.

DECONSTRUCT

The Hack | This tactic is exactly what it sounds like—taking a tool, solution, or problem and taking it apart, down to its most fundamental pieces. From that point, you can use the additional tools of Addition, Subtraction, and Substitution to alter the original and come up with new and better options. Hackers do this with their physical tools—taking computers apart to improve them with new configurations—as well as by re-tooling old solutions for better results.

Legit Flip | The Deconstruction approach is a powerful tactic, especially when you think you're close. When you already have the tools, systems, or ideas that you need, but they're not quite right or not performing at their best, starting with Deconstruction allows you to honestly assess all of the pieces at your disposal. Then, working through possible solutions using Addition, Subtraction, and Substitution, you can harness the raw potential of your original idea in a new, unimagined way.

> *“ Borrowed ideas are not only a technique of hackers, but have been an important source of innovation throughout history.*

Hack in Action | Jerome Hardaway, a combat vet, started the program #VetsWhoCode after his own battle with PTSD and seeing the toll it took on the lives of fellow vets. He took apart the existing solutions for PTSD, particularly ineffective government and NGO programs which required vets to completely fall apart before they could receive the help they needed and deserved. Research combined with personal experience told him he could combat most of the long-term PTSD problems by providing transitional assistance when vets were the most vulnerable. So he took the best pieces from existing programs—job training and placement, and help with social re-acclamation to integrate into the civilian workforce—and combined that with something new, his own interest in computer programming, to create a coding-specific program to provide vets with the help they need, while helping employers find much-needed talent for these important positions.

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AGILE BURSTS

The Hack | Hackers foster the notion of time-constrained creative bursts by embracing the Agile software development method, which was drafted by 17 developers. The new model uses short sprints involving quick bursts of effort followed by numerous, smaller launches. Ranging from 48 hours to two weeks, developers work fast to ship code that must be tested, evaluated, and adapted many times along the way.

Software engineers found that short, focused bursts under the umbrella of a ticking clock delivered more creative output and fostered better overall quality, as they could course-correct early on if things went wrong. The bursts also helped recalibrate resource needs along the way, delivering a more efficient project in the end. Having to quickly ship working lines of code forced the developers to get scrappy and find creative workarounds to obstacles and challenges.

Legit Flip | "I don't need time, what I need is a deadline," legendary jazz composer and bandleader Duke Ellington famously said. Ellington's counter-intuitive message is clear: time-constrained environments can actually foster creativity rather than restrict it. Innovation Hackers—from startups to corporate giants—leverage the method of Agile Bursts primarily through Hackathons. With a fixed, short window of time, teams are focused on a desired outcome and then throw everything they have at the problem in a flat-out sprint. Hackathons have been

used to invent new companies, cure disease, reimagine organizational structures, and craft new solutions for customer engagement. Some Hackathons are internal, focusing on specific or company-based problems, while Hackathon events are independently-hosted gatherings to create new ideas, companies, and products from scratch. The intensity and focus, along with a ticking clock, can truly lead to breakthrough creativity.

Hack in Action | Estonian-based startup, Sorry as a Service (SaaS) is changing how businesses do customer service. They help companies make it right when they've screwed up, going the extra mile to keep their customers happy. SaaS is one of the few successful companies born out of a Hackathon event, but their hacking connections don't stop there. SaaS runs their business like a Hackathon. On Mondays, their international team checks in via conference call, they address the biggest problems and set the goals for the week, after they assess how they did on last week's goals. The same thing happens every afternoon around 4, they quickly touch base to make sure things are on track and everyone has what they need to get the job done. These short bursts keep everyone accountable and thinking creatively.

> *“ Time-constrained environments can actually foster creativity rather than restrict it.*

THE REVERSE

The Hack | Doing the exact opposite of what's expected is a hallmark of hackers. Since hacking is nothing more than a methodology for creative problem solving, taking the Reverse approach is a powerful framework to unlock fresh ideas and foster innovation. Since hackers enjoy being contrarian and unexpected, this is a favorite tool. And like many of the other techniques, it can be combined with other tactics to maximize efficacy.

Legit Flip | To deploy the Reverse in your own Innovation Hacking, force yourself to explore the complete opposite of what's always been done. When facing a challenge or new opportunity, I like making a list of how all the 'experts' would generally attack it. I list what I've done in the past, what the industry norms are, and how everyone else goes about facing the same issue. Then, I draw a line down the page. The Reverse Line. On the other side of the line, I force myself to write the exact opposite of the list I just created.

Hack in Action | Chad Price and a few buddies wanted to start a business. Unlike many budding entrepreneurs, they didn't have a particular industry or product in mind. So where did they start—a trendy product or service, an Uber-of-something, an industry that would allow them in easily with their relative inexperience? No, they did an epic Reverse by looking for an industry with huge barriers to entry and a few mammoth incumbents. Even though this sounds like a

recipe for disaster, it was actually genius—they managed to identify an area (medical laboratories) that was essentially asleep at the wheel. That allowed them to innovate an entire sluggish, out-of-date industry with Mako Laboratories. They're changing that industry, giving back to the community, improving quality, and they did $51 million in revenue in their first year alone.

THE MASHUP

The Hack | I interviewed a head security professional at a major company, with over $13 billion in assets, and he listed examples of hackers trying to use many of the tactics I'm talking about here. But the one that he fears the most? The Mashup—an unexpected combination of other approaches that blindsides you.

Legit Flip | While a hacker may Mashup multiple tactics or pieces of code to launch a smarter attack, you've been benefitting from Mashups for most of your life. From Reese's peanut butter cups (peanut butter + chocolate) to La-Z-Boy chairs (char + bed), some of our favorite products began as once unfathomable combinations of two things. Some of the most famous Mashups are products, but you can work to mix all kinds of elements (trends, experiences, ingredients, technology, people) to innovate.

Hack in Action | Prezi, the Budapest-based startup that is taking on giants like Power Point and Keynote, is itself a Mashup. Frustrated by the linear limitations of existing tools, Adam Somlai-Fischer created the first version of the presentation software as a combination of an artist's canvas and the zoom feature on a camera. Eventually, the company would also become a personnel Mashup, as Somlai-Fischer, an architect, joined forces with computer science professor and software developer Peter Halacsy, and entrepreneur Peter Arvai. To date, they've attracted more than $72 million in capital and their tool has been used to create more than 1.6 billion presentations.

WORKING BACKWARD

The Hack | For hackers, this tactic is about reverse-engineering their plan based on the desired outcome. It may sound obvious, but when creating a plan, many of us think first about where we're at, and then plot how to move from there. Hackers love to do the opposite: they start with their end in mind, and then, by imagining a path backward, they're able to come up with innovative methods to reach their eventual goals.

Legit Flip | Most of our mental energy is spent on incremental change to existing products, services, or processes. This is especially the case in more established organizations. It's much easier to consider small changes than to ask fundamentally different questions. We toil away at making small tweaks to what already exists (working forward) as opposed to beginning with the vision of an ideal state and reverse-engineering from there (Working Backward).

Hack in Action | Working Backward is not only helpful when looking to drive growth and innovation—it can also help you get out of a jam. All of the Innovation Hacking techniques are applicable to both positive change and overcoming adversity.

As I was building ePrize, I instituted a company-wide bonus program to give everyone a stake in the outcome. But the plan had a whopper of a flaw: the bonus was completely tied to our sales target. If we hit the target, everyone got bonuses; if we missed it by a nickel, no one got anything. On December 31, I got a call from my head of sales that we'd made the goal; ecstatic, I notified my employees.

Based on the expected bonus, team members booked trips and planned their financial lives accordingly. Then I found out that there had been a miscalculation and instead of just hitting, we had just missed the target.

I went to my Board and explained the situation. Realizing we had no contractual obligation, they emphatically refused to pay any bonuses. How could I tell the team they were losing a promised bonus based on a technicality? Sure I cared about the money in the short term, but I cared more about our value and legacy in the long-term.

Working Backward, I played out each scenario in my mind. If I didn't pay the bonus and saved a million dollars, I'd undermine the trust I'd built over the last seven years. I determined I'd lose more than that amount in the form of apathy, employee attrition, broken trust, and damaged morale. I determined the money was already spent, no matter what I did. On the other hand, if I had already spent the money in one form or another, I might as well put it to good use. An investment in our team and culture was better than the penalty tax of perceived betrayal.

I told the team that though results are paramount, I couldn't expect them to run through fire for me if I wasn't willing to do the same. You could hear a pin drop until I announced that we were going to pay the bonus. In full. Every penny. On time.

Because of my demonstration of trust and commitment, the team paid it back ten-fold in the coming months and years. Morale was sky-high, turnover was low, and we over-delivered as a family. The story became known in the community, and was often told back to us by new people applying for a job. I'm convinced that my million-dollar payout that day was one of the best investments I ever made.

ADVANCED HACKING IN ACTION

I was talking about hacking with Samir Kapuria, Symantec's Senior VP and GM of Cyber Security Services. He summed up a hacker's outlook this way, "Hackers fundamentally examine a system or process to look for ways to make it do things it was never intended to do. They refuse to live within the confines of what something is supposed to do. Instead, they look for novel ways of transforming the ordinary."

Fundamentally, that's what this manifesto is about. In these challenging times, we are all looking for new models to enable growth, innovation, and ultimately sustainable success. The hacking mindset and subsequent tactics are simply a framework for complex problem-solving—a methodology for creative disruption.

Your competition certainly has time and intent. You must proactively choose to outwit them, to be the source of disruption rather than having it thrust upon you. Hacking has become our most potent tool for growth, and our most powerful system of defense. Your job is to protect much more than your data files; with the velocity of change at unprecedented levels, the job has been elevated to protecting our very existence.

The art of hacking is our primary weapon to surviving the dramatic shifts of the modern business climate. As change and complexity increase, we need a system as fluid as the competitive environment itself, and to that end, Innovation Hacking is our collective imperative.

Now is the time to embrace this new model of growth.

Now is the time to reimagine what's possible.

Now is the time to stretch the boundaries of our imagination and ring in a new era for ourselves, our companies, and our communities.

Now is the time to hack innovation. Hack away... 

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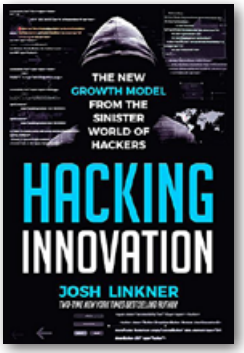

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR | Josh Linkner—who started his career as a jazz guitarist—personifies creativity, entrepreneurship and disruptive innovation. Josh is the author of two New York Times Bestsellers: *Disciplined Dreaming* and *The Road to Reinvention*. He is also the Founding Partner of Detroit Venture Partners, investing in and mentoring over 100 startups. His newest startup, FUEL Leadership, is shaking up the boring, old-school world of leadership development. Josh has twice been named the Ernst & Young Entrepreneur of the Year and is a President Barack Obama Champion of Change award recipient. And yes, he still plays a mean jazz guitar.

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