



Brewing Up a Storm

--- Dr. Liam Pender

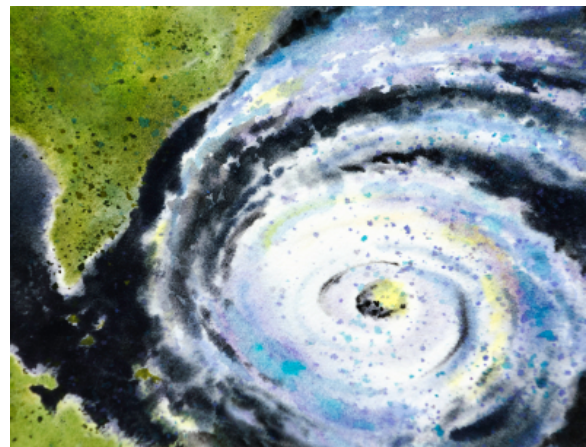
Some of the reasons behind successful innovation are logical and understandable. Others are subtle and difficult to quantify. Some are just dumb-founding. My recent experience with clients and successful entrepreneurs reinforces the notion that we must recognize these facts and focus on those aspects we can control.

It is early fall here in South Florida; hot, humid and almost tourist-less. There is a very good reason why the local residents have the place to ourselves -- we are at the height of our hurricane season. Anybody who doesn't need to be here is waiting for the winter weather to return to our paradise.

At this time of year, we residents turn into amateur meteorologists. We watch the tropics for formations that start to show signs of structure. Our hallway conversations cite expert opinions on El Nino ocean currents, calculations of upper atmospheric wind shear, and the relative storm intensity of a track across the flats of The Bahamas or over the mountains of Hispaniola. After weighing all those gems of wisdom and science, we make our judgment on the strength and path of the storm -- and then keep our fingers crossed. While not wishing any misfortune on our Gulf Coast or other neighbors, we hope that the latest alphabetically-named weather tempest visits anyone but us.

There are many aspects to the process of storm- formation and subsequent storm-

tracking that remind me of the innovation process.



Like a hurricane that requires a precise set of environmental conditions to form, successful innovation occurs under specific conditions.

This first factor is the most obvious. For successful innovation you must have **passion** and you must surround yourself with people who share that passion. Research has shown that autonomy, mastery and purpose are key drivers of human motivation. When engineers can exercise these fully, the passion needed for huge technological advances is possible. This is practically stated as "give them the goal and

then get out of their way.” Passionate innovators will bulldoze through corporate norms and legacy processes so the best work gains momentum. Like a rapidly brewing storm, the formation of a solution born out of innovative passion is a thing of beauty.

While passion is the engine for innovation, the rudder is **objectivity**. It is vital that each innovation be critically evaluated with data, not just opinion. There is no room for bias in asking how the innovation compares against its competitors on key performance criteria. Would a customer choose it over another offering? How can its shortcomings be addressed? How is it the best?

Objective analysis is often in conflict with the passion that drives the innovation. An entrepreneur’s gut feeling cannot solely drive the direction of product development. It is essential to gather real data, analyze it and iterate the product. Repeat ... analyze and iterate, each time getting closer. Like the hurricane prediction models that forecast a common direction for a storm, one model predicts its path and intensity most accurately. Unbiased innovators seek to improve their model after every storm season -- they analyze and iterate, each year getting closer.

The most elusive and final ingredient for successful innovation is simply **luck**. While rarely acknowledged publicly, highly successful developers and entrepreneurs often speak of

this in private conversation. In an inspiring presentation at a recent BioFlorida technology meeting, luck was named as the most important factor to innovation.

Accepting this can make it tempting to give up and leave all to lady luck. Not so fast. While luck is a factor, we must also be prepared to take advantage when good fortune deals us the hand we desire. As year-round Florida residents we may stock up on batteries and canned food, but it is better to enjoy the luck when the season’s storms are heading elsewhere.



As you chuckle at the musings of a Florida storm-dodger, consider passion, objectivity and luck in your legacy product successes and your present development challenges. Take action and call Egret Technologies. Our work with clients is about “Turning Innovation into Profit” and we look forward to hearing from you.

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