

Wynne Leon (00:00)

Thomas Edison gets a lot of credit for being a trier. In fact, we made the light bulb to be synonymous with having an idea. One of my favorite quotes about Thomas Edison comes from the Book of Awakening by Mark Nepo. When Edison was discovering the light bulb, he first engaged in a process of envisioning how an unseeable current of energy could be harnessed and turned into light. Like most of us, the vision came first.

Once he understood what came to him, it took quite some time to find the precise material that would work as the filament in the bulb itself. Later, when asked if he ever grew discouraged or thought he was wasting his time, Edison said no. He learned something important each time he tried. He learned there was another material not to be used. Inspiring? Yes. Believable? Well, I did some reading and research.

and found that he generally did hold that attitude. In the biography Edison by author Edmund Morris, he talks about his work improving rubber later in life and notes that Edison typically regarded every failure as a step toward success. So here are five things that I learned about Thomas Edison and trying. Number one, he was systematic and listened to his ideas.

Quoting again from the biography Edison, On a single day, when he was 40 and full of innovative fire, he had jotted down 112 ideas for new things. Among them, mechanical cotton picker, a snow compressor, an electrical piano, artificial silk, a platinum wire ice slicer, a system of penetrative photography, pressaging radiology by 12 years.

and a product unlikely to occur to anyone else except perhaps Lewis Carroll, ink for the blind. Writing down our ideas, especially when we're on fire, of that list I just quoted, I don't think that Edison made any significant inventions in those areas. He was granted 1,063 patents over the course of his lifetimes. So it's certainly possible that he contributed. But I think the point is that he took his ideas seriously enough.

to write them down. Edison is often quoted for his saying, 1 % inspiration and 99 % perspiration. Even if the bulk of the effort in trying comes in the perspiration category, you have to honor your ideas and cultivate your dreams in order to have a list to work against. Number two, he didn't do it alone. He was a professional trier. He had a company.

and employees dedicated to doing it. But even when we aren't doing it professionally, we know that accountability partners help, as do the people that we brainstorm with.

Number three, Edison was iterative. When it came to the light bulb, he got a patent based on his initial results. He applied for it in 1879. It was granted in 1880 and then kept improving it. He got a new patent in 1889. It wasn't a one and done kind of thing. My hometown team, the Seattle Seahawks recently won Superbowl 60, yay. And coach Mike McDonald talks about stacking wins.

When you talk about stacking wins, which is one of our core philosophies, you have to believe and have faith in the power of doing that over the course of time, McDonald said in a post-game press conference. Quoting from an article in Inc. Magazine, to stack wins means to focus relentlessly on winning the next controllable moment, then to repeat that process. These small wins or successful moments compound into meaningful results over time.

and help you and your team build momentum.

So you can try one thing and then build on it or try it 1,000 things like Edison did and continue to improve.

That brings us to point number four. He wasn't limited to just one pursuit. His willingness to try carried to many different areas. It wasn't just the light bulb. It was the phonograph, lighting and electricity, mining, cement, batteries, motion pictures, rubber, the stock ticker. But he didn't like being called a genius. In one response, he said, you know well enough.

I am nothing of the sort," he remarked to an old associate, Walter Phillips, unless we accept Disraeli's theory that genius is prolonged patience. I'm patient enough to be sure. I love that hint that genius might lie in the patience to nurture our dreams and ideas.

Number five, he took naps. Edison was notorious for working 18 hour days, six days a week, sometimes seven, but he did rest when he felt like it. There's a great picture of him napping in front of Harvey Firestone and President Harding. It reminds me of the meditation joke that everyone should meditate for 20 minutes a day, unless you're busy, and then you should meditate for an hour.

I like this particular point because I'm a great fan of naps. When I've stirred up the water of my mind for too long, I'm unable to try anything. But taking a nap and starting again with calm waters is extremely helpful and restorative to me, especially when it comes to trying. Okay, I have one last bonus point that I observed when researching Thomas Edison. There's a difference between creativity and control.

Edison invented the phonograph. Biographer Edmund Morris noticed that it might have been his favorite invention.

But this is what struck me about that difference between invention and control. He invented it and then for almost 40 years personally controlled the artists for whom they'd released records.

We can chalk that up to a business decision. But what struck me was the great difference in the energy between when we create versus when we control. Two opposing modes

when it comes to trying. For me, I have to loosen the reins on controlling the outcome if I'm going to have any chance at trying at all. So there you have it.

Five ideas to electrify our efforts to try. Be systematic. Don't do it alone. Keep improving. Apply lessons learned to other areas and disciplines. Five. Take naps. And the bonus point? Ease up on controlling the outcome. Thank you for listening. I hope this profile of Thomas Edison on The Life of Try is useful and energizing.

as you think about your own light bulb moments in your life.