

Inspiring Innovation

Life on the planet Earth is dependent on each individual plant and animal's ability to compete, with its surroundings, for the necessities that it needs to stay alive. Every living organism on this great planet competes with something else in order to survive, and this type of competition has been the difference between the plants and animals that survive and those that die. Plants compete with each other for nutrients and water, animals compete with each other for food, water, mates, etc., and modern day humans compete with each other on so many different levels that it would be impossible to state. The point is that competition is a healthy part of life despite what some people may think, and it is actually the driving force that helps to spark innovation.

So that the true benefits of competition can be realized, let's provide a modern day example of something that most people use every day that would not have been created without a little bit of friendly competition. Cars are so common place in our society these days that it is hard to imagine back, a little over a century ago, when barely anybody owned a motor vehicle, except for the upper class. Without the competition between Ford Motor Company and other car manufacturers, such as General Motors, the automobile industry might have still been focused entirely on the wealthiest citizens. The innovation created by a little competition between many fierce competitors drove Henry Ford to create a process and a vehicle that could be mass produced, and would be cheap enough for the average person to purchase.

These days people and companies are trying to inspire innovation to help improve different issues and problems that are occurring around the world. An organization known as the X Prize Foundation has created several competitions to help tackle current issues, and all of these competitions provide a healthy cash reward for the competitor with the most innovative idea. Some of the current competitions include:

- **The Progressive Automotive X Prize:** There is a \$10 million dollar prize awarded to anybody who can create a car that gets at least 100 miles to the gallon, gives off low emissions, offers the highest standard of safety, and can be purchased by the "average Joe." According to MSNBC, 60 teams have already signed up to compete in this competition.
- **The Archon Genomics X Prize:** A cash reward of \$10 million dollars will be awarded to the first team that creates a device to sequence 100 human genomes within 10 days at a cost of no more than \$10,000 per genome.
- **The Google Lunar X Prize:** For the first team that creates a robot that can land on the moon, travel 500 meters, and transmit this video back to Earth, will receive a cash reward of \$30 million dollars.

- **The Northrup Grumman Lunar Lander Challenge:** The team that can create a vehicle that takes off and climbs up to fifty meters, then lands on a pad 100 meters away, before returning to its original location, will receive \$2 million in prize money.

Friendly competition like this is a great way to spark and drive new ideas that could help to change the world, and it might help to make your company some money as well.

In the future, it will be likely to see many companies begin to use this as a way to create innovation from within the walls of their own organization. Competitions will be set up to help both create new products for companies as well as creating new processes to improve efficiency within the company. For example, a company that is currently working on creating a cure for a disease like AIDS may try to offer extra encouragement to its scientists by offering a large cash reward or an extravagant vacation for the scientist that is able to develop the cure. This will help to provide extra motivation for each individual because an individual reward is offered to the winner, and it will also encourage everybody in the organization to “think outside of the box.”

This idea could even be taken a step further to include the general population of the company, when trying to create a competition for innovation. Companies will begin to hold competitions to see who would be able to think of the most innovative and creative idea to help improve the processes or products of an organization. For example, the X Prize Foundation is creating a contest to create new contests. The winner will receive a \$25,000 reward for coming up with the most creative idea for a contest that falls within the limits of the title “What’s Your Crazy Green Idea?” This type of process will help to increase the involvement of everybody in the company and allow everybody to feel the satisfaction of being a part of inspiring innovation within their organization.

After taking a look at all of the benefits that competition has to offer, it is very easy to see why a competitive atmosphere is so important to the growth of society. Although there is no way to come up with a solution for every problem that this world has to offer, competition creates a driving force to help speed up the process. Competition helps to scare away characteristics that might drive a company into the ground, such as narrow mindedness and a lack of creativity. So as we move into the future, begin to notice how companies are encouraging innovation within their organizations, through in house competitions and other driving forces. The competitive spirit that is created within the walls of a company could help to create “the next big thing.” Whether it is the cure for cancer or a car that gets over 100 miles per gallon, the real culprit behind all of the luxuries of the future will be competition!