

ImproveWell.

The Improver Podcast | Episode 3 | Look for the Shining Eyes

Intro (00:00)

Welcome to The Improver, the podcast that explores ideas in healthcare improvements and participatory change, hosted by Dr. Na'eem Ahmed and Lara Mott.

Lara Mott (00:14)

Hello, and welcome to "The Improver". I'm Lara, CEO and co-founder of ImproveWell.

Na'eem Ahmed (00:20)

I'm Na'eem, consultant radiologist, and also co-founder of ImproveWell. We'd like to welcome Gerard Harkin. Gerard is the Head of Innovation at Roche Diagnostics in the UK and Ireland, and is a specialist in innovation. He has had over 28 years' experience in innovation, both in consulting and commercial roles, an MBA, and a degree in engineering. He's also the author of the ebook "Innovation Unplugged" and is passionate about bringing innovation to life in organisations, so that every employee is part of the innovation team. So Gerard, welcome to the Improver.

Gerard Harkin (00:57)

Well, thank you so much for inviting me. I'm really happy to be here. And I've got to admit when Lara sent me the invite, I went, 'YES!'. And then I thought, but I'm actually still learning about innovation. We've got to always remember that innovation is never just about one person. So hopefully we'll be co-creating some kind of content and knowledge as we go through this. And if I can put a bit of a disclaimer, or a little bit of legal text in the bottom to say; 'sometimes I change my mind!', you know what I mean? (laughs)

Lara Mott (1:31)

(laughs) No, that's not allowed!

Gerard Harkin (1:35)

People might say in a few years' time, 'I remember on The Improver you said this'. I'm actually still learning about innovation. So, but I'm really, really excited to be here.

Na'eem Ahmed (01:43)

Thank you. Thank you so much. I know you know Lara and it's great, as a friend of ImproveWell, for you to have made this time to speak to us. So, I guess it would be good just to get your journey itself in this innovation space. And if you could just give us some reflections and your journey so far to come here, we'd be so fascinated to find out more.

Gerard Harkin (02:12)

Yeah, sure. So, I started my career really in tech. So for me, and this is going back to the early nineties, innovation was just about technology. It was about R&D and it was about products. And then, every couple of years I got moved into a different kind of a role. And it went from R&D and product and technology to lots of different technologies and services, and then to business models. And looking into the future, ten years into the future, to understand what markets would look like in the future. And I realised over the years that, it's really about our customers. It's about people, it's about solving problems and it's about creating value from ideas.

Gerard Harkin (02:58)

So I started to think about innovation in a very, very different way. And it's also all about people. So I don't know if it's a spoiler alert, but I'm hoping we can talk about ours. It's people and it's excitement and it's about making a difference. If you're working in innovation and you don't get that it's about community and people are making a difference it's actually something that everyone in an organisation should be doing, then you're really missing a trick as an innovation manager. So keep on listening!

Na'eem Ahmed (03:33)

One of the things that comes across really strongly is your passion to make innovation accessible for everyone. And it's not something just for the enthusiast - I was reading your book, 'Innovation Unplugged', and I think it was just - number one, the thing that really struck me was the fact that you'd made it so - number one, it wasn't a long book. You could finish it in about 45 minutes. So it means that that is accessible for everyone to read, but you've condensed a phenomenal amount of knowledge. And we were hoping to talk about that today in terms of, in such a small book, which must've been a really tough thing to do. So can you tell me about even how you went about actually putting those top thoughts together, in terms of getting that into that book?

Gerard Harkin (04:36)

First of all, I'm so sorry you had to read the book! (laughs) In all honesty a couple of years ago, because I wrote the book five or six years ago, it was born a little bit out of frustration. People were talking about innovation in a different way than I actually knew it. So many business books nowadays are 240 pages long. I mean, they're actually all 240 pages long. And I, as a manager, I don't really have time to read those kinds of books. So, I wanted to bring it down to something that's 30-45 minutes long. For me, innovation is about creating value from ideas or making a positive impact with ideas. You can see from the ebook, ideas can be very, very small. They can be tiny little things, teams changing how they meet, how they talk to patients, how they talk to customers, tiny, tiny little things, or they can be the big, big things, or they could be tech and they can be kind of non-tech as well.

(05:31)

So you have this massive, big spectrum, and if you interpret innovation that way, everyone in the organisation can get involved and I've seen that where I've worked over the last year. So now working in healthcare diagnostics - and we've had COVID. We've had the killing of George Floyd, which has driven massive awareness in society about racism. We've had Brexit. We've had staff on the frontline and hospitals, we've had staff working from home, trying to teach. Everyone knows somebody who's had COVID and there's been that kind of worry. You're not going able to see them. So it's been this rollercoaster of a year. I think in most organisations, or in some organisations, management would freeze. Management would say we don't actually know how to address these kinds of challenges and this turbulence coming our way.

(06:24)

But luckily where I work, we've got - and this is part of innovation for me as well - we've got a very flat management structure, a highly collaborative culture, passion-driven people who want to help patients. When you have that culture - that is for me why culture is such an important part of innovation. When you have that, you get teams rising up to the challenge. So, although in the last year it's been a massive turbulence, it's created this swell of innovation where I work. It's crazy. Whenever I prepare a presentation on innovation at Roche Diagnostics UK & Ireland, where I work, by the time I've made the

presentation – it's out of date. There's more and more examples and we've seen that. I want to just pick out maybe a couple of examples.

(07:10)

Muna, who's a colleague of mine, she put together our Black Lives Matters and Black History Month, last year, and it had phenomenal success. I said to her a few weeks ago, Muna, do you know, you're such a great innovator! And she said, what do you mean 'I'm an innovator?' And I said, well, you were part of the team that came up with Black Lives Matters and Black History Month. And that was an idea - that didn't exist. So you came up with an idea, you made it happen and it had a positive impact. And she was like, 'Oh yeah, I guess I am an innovator!'. And I find myself saying that to lots and lots of people across the organisation who are doing things that they take for granted, or they don't connect with the fact that they are innovators. We've done this amazing thing for our work.

(07:56)

We've captured all of these stories, these almost that could be lost stories of great innovations across the organisation. We share them across the organisation. So we get more and more people, we bring more and more people into the community. We're heading to a place where everyone in the organisation, whenever they see a problem or an opportunity or a frustration, they think of ideas and, and they think about things that they could do to make a difference. And it's amazing. And to me, that's a big part of it. It's human potential. It can be really, really powerful when you see innovation that way. And not just R&D and tech.

Na'eem Ahmed (08:42)

I mean, that thing, this idea that some organisations have about needing permission to innovate, and that, like you've mentioned, only a business unit or a special ops needs to be able to innovate. And what you've said is that there's a power of social movements, which we've seen through things like Black Lives Matter, but also, during the pandemic, we have seen people just really rise up to challenge. We had the unfortunate death of Sir Tom Moore. And we saw actually one person standing up and saying, you know what, I'm going to take the lead and try and make a difference. And the ripple effect that that has had across the whole country...

(09:39)

So, I really buy into that thing that you're saying, about everyone has that potential to really make a difference. So over the last 12 months, it's obviously been an extremely - you describe it as being turbulent, we've seen some fantastic and some really unfortunate things happening. What, in terms of the innovation space, and particularly your time at Roche, what are the couple of things that have really piqued your interest? And again, looking forward, what are you really excited about?

Gerard Harkin (10:17)

It has been incredible really in the last year at Roche where I work. We are a 125-year old company - amazing investments in science and R&D and tech. So we were first with the antigen tests, we were first in the world with the antibody tests. We've launched at least 13 products in the last year as well, addressing the COVID challenge. We've seen a lot of innovation in that space. We've seen people thinking about how to diagnose our testing equipment remotely, how to service machines remotely. So we've seen a massive amount of innovation in that space for customers. But then we've also seen a lot of innovation because staff have been working so hard. So how do we actually keep an eye on staff and

make sure - so we've had, mental health and wellbeing ambassadors put together, trained across the organisation, different ways that we're kind of helping our staff and managing their health and wellbeing, flexible working hours.

(11:19)

And I'm highlighting that because it's so easy for us to think just about the tech stuff. And actually when you look at all these different examples of innovation that's happening and it's really people saying, I see a problem or frustration or opportunity, I'm going to do something about it. I'll have an idea, I'm going to make it happen. I remember, Lara, a year or two ago, you were sharing with me some of the ideas from ImproveWell? So some of the ideas that come into ImproveWell from frontline staff - and it's, some of them are small things and if they need start asking for permission to spend ten pounds or to prototype, the enthusiasm was going to get zapped. It's just not going to happen. Whereas if they just start saying, I'm going to give it a go, let me give it a try. What's the worst thing that could happen. Give it a go, tweak the process, make the change, bounce it off people, do a trial, do a pilot, whatever it might be. You've seen that in ImproveWell, the difference that a lot of those ideas make, but also, the people, they're excited! It changes people when you have an idea and you make it happen, it makes a positive impact.

Lara Mott (12:33)

I also read your book, full disclosure (laughs). I feel like it was ahead of its time because, talking about innovation not just being about tech, and one of the sections that resonated with me was customer experience and how you can do things differently, delight your customers, think of doing something in a new way and solve a problem that isn't necessarily related purely through technology. And I think that's something that we've certainly seen in the pandemic. One of the questions I wanted to ask you is, it's very easy for us as a small startup being able to embrace change. We do it every single week. We look back at the week before and we think, how can it be better? And we're very nimble. We can move quickly. But how do big organisations embrace that culture to say: 'Yeah, it is okay to give it a go. What's the worst that can happen?' That's easy for us to say, we fully believe that, but realistically in a big corporate environment, for example, it's not, it's not that easy.

Gerard Harkin (13:34)

Yeah. You know what? I've actually learnt a lot because I wrote the book five or six years ago. So I've actually learnt a lot in the last few years because you really learn by doing this stuff. You can learn the theories, but it's actually when your sleeves are rolled up and you're trying to make stuff happen, that's when you learn, and I've been doing a phenomenal amount, so thanks to everyone at Roche, who's helped me learn over the last couple of years! (laughs) There's a couple of tricks! So having as a company mindset - I'll just headline a couple of things that we're doing - having as a company mindset really helps, so at Roche Diagnostics globally, 'We experiment and learn' is now one of our five global mindsets.

(14:15)

Everyone has permission to experiment, to help improve the business, to help customers. So that's one of the things. I always think starting with telling people that you're already an innovator or an experimenter and proving it to them. So it's not something they need to change. That's who they already are. And we do this, because at the moment, I'm talking to everyone in the organisation about experimenting and I kind of start off by saying, 'tell me something new you've done in the last year

outside of work, where you've experimented and tried something new'. And everyone's like, 'I did this, I did that.' Then I say, 'so look, you already are an experimenter. Bring that more into the work environment' because it's getting the message across to people that you've got permission to try new things.

(15:05)

And we then also spotlight all of these examples or these hidden small little gems of experimentation or innovation that are happening. And we create stories out of them. We start telling stories across the business. We start highlighting people that are doing all these small little things. It might be we're in a meeting in a different way, or it might be recycling in a different way, or it might be servicing a machine in a different way. It might be virtual training of customers, might be the Black Lives Matters month. Spotlighting innovators and experimenters that need to be noticed. And that has this magical effect of inviting more people into the community. And you start to bring more and more people to the community and you highlight more and more of what they're doing.

(15:53)

You reframe the F-word, the failure word, you work with teams and it's about trying new things. It's about learning. That's the starting point. We could talk about this a lot, but what that starting kernel is, it's something people are already doing. They're already innovating. They're already experimenting. Find examples, share those examples, create the community, ignite interest, pull people into that community and get management to walk the talk as well. Get management to talk about what they're innovating, what they're experimenting.

Na'eem Ahmed (16:29)

Gerard, on that, do you think that - Lara spoke about us being a small organisation, but for example, in healthcare, there are obviously very big organisations. Do you think the rules of engagement are different for them? And secondly, healthcare is a high risk environment where a lot of pushback will be that, it's all well and good doing it in the tech space or any other space, but when there's patients involved, it's a whole different consideration. How would you respond to those two challenges?

Gerard Harkin (17:09)

You're right, actually. It's not like you're going to go from Post-It notes to pushing something out on patients. A lot of startups will approach me and they'll send me presentations. And I often struggle to understand who's the customer? Who's the patient? What's the need? What benefit are you actually delivering? All I'm reading is 20 pages of technology. So I think there's working that early piece to understand who is the patient, who is the customer, what is the need, what benefit do we imagine we're going to be delivering to them, and then start building what evidence, prototyping, the MVP kind of language, but rapidly prototyping, getting their early feedback, getting evidence. People want to scale really, really quickly, but you do need to grow with evidence. And I think there are stages, and this is a good conversation because obviously there's a lot of innovation. I have a big igniting passion and getting everyone involved, and there's also structured processes as well. So, let's be clear about that, going from idea to concepts and get early feedback, getting people on board, having clinicians who are early ambassadors for the idea before you spend too much money, before you fall in love with technology.

Lara Mott (18:30)

That's actually a really important point, and Na'eem, I know back in the beginning, before we started this business, I mean, Na'eem saw the problem and he got the beta MVP off the ground with junior doctors. And then as a business, it's chicken and egg, how do you get the evidence base if no one's willing to try it first? I say we were lucky; we worked hard to leverage our network and seize the opportunities, and learn and learn and listen and partner with the right organisations and look at the data coming in. So our entire business has been founded on the evidence base. I mean, actually being evidence-based is one of our core values. Because I completely agree, you can have ideas coming in from your team, from your colleagues, from stakeholders, across the spectrum, small things through to the large things.

(19:27)

And there has to be process where process is needed in some of those, but without the evidence base, I think people can get lost. You can get overexcited about something and really over-engineer it. And actually it was probably okay in the first place. It might've needed the little tweak or -

Gerard Harkin

Absolutely!

Lara Mott

And I think, particularly in the world of tech, you can get super excited about, □ I mean, Na'eem and I always have conversations, don't we, about different new things that we could do and, it's addictive! Sometimes you just have to think, actually we've solved this problem really well now. Now we're going to move on to something else.

Gerard Harkin (20:05)

Yeah, absolutely. And it's, and it's that thing as well, Lara. We might think that we need 100% of the evidence, but actually maybe 60-70% is enough at that point in time just to make the idea even better. And yeah, I listened to the first podcast you did as well. And your idea, it's changed, it was called something else right at the start, Propeller.

Lara Mott

Propeller! Yeah, I'm impressed (laughs).

Gerard Harkin

So there you go. And it's changed, the team has changed and everything, and you built it on evidence and it's one of the things we say to teams as well. And it's really as simple as, what assumptions are you making about customers, about manufacturing, about value, and what evidence do you have that those assumptions are true? Whenever there's a gap between an assumption and evidence, that's when you, you need to get the evidence, you need to dial up the evidence, and that could be something quick and easy, like focus groups.

Na'eem Ahmed (21:04)

On that. The second part of that question was, does the size matter? Does it mean that you can only do these types of changes in small organisations? And I know you refer to it in your book, but do you think that large organisations can do this or, is it this whole thing about being disrupted and moving too slowly? Or can organisations actually get it right?

Gerard Harkin (21:34)

Yeah. So it's like, that's a big question, you know what I mean? That's what that occupies the minds of academics...

Na'eem Ahmed (21:42)

There were no easy questions to me....(laughter)

Gerard Harkin (21:45)

Yeah. You know, the tanker versus the speedboat and can big corporations change? And yeah, I think big companies can change. Some examples, and in the last few months I've been exposed to ecosystem and platform thinking. Looking at companies like Haier who, I don't know if you've come across them, but they were a near bankrupt Chinese fridge maker 30 years ago, and now they're the biggest appliance maker in the world. They acquired GE Appliances. And as a case study Haier is an amazing, amazing company to look at, because they've spent 30 years innovating how they actually operate as a business, in kind of micro-enterprises. And it's absolutely fascinating to see what they've done. So they're an example of the biggest appliance maker in the world, who are, very, very, very lean, dare I say, agile. All of their product areas of business, they're all like startups are all entrepreneurial businesses.

(22:53)

So yeah, I think big companies are able to do that. And I think, from my experience, the more hierarchical and the more siloed you are, the more difficult the change is going to be. You're just going to be too slow because the orders pass down and they pass up, and it's confusion. They don't go horizontal. So, there's not many companies like that anymore, but the ones that are, they're just not going to survive. And, I think as well, and not that we're trying to put together a recipe for how to do this, because it's a big, big question. But, I think if you don't really get that everyone in your organisation is equal, everyone brings a different perspective, that its culture and atmosphere for people to speak up and express their ideas and pick things up and that everyone could potentially lead.

(23:57)

I've seen that at Roche, where we believe everyone can lead. Say there's a project and a senior manager should run it. If a junior person is better skilled at running that project, that junior person will run the project. And that helps propagate change and change of mindsets in an organisation as well. It kind of dismantles the layered management and hierarchical thinking and ignites more potential. So I think the cultural piece is really important and big companies can change for sure. Yeah. They won't always be as fast. They won't always be as fast as they'll start off. They're not able to pivot as quickly.

Na'eem Ahmed (24:40)

Most of what you have said is great if it was an equal system and we lived in an equal society. I know this is a scenario that you're particularly really passionate about, and you've spoken really strongly about

it. And in fact, you started by talking about Black Lives Matter. How much - just in tech and in terms of innovation, - does the whole equality agenda - where does that sit in it? You'll read a lot in the press about - Lara and I talk about it, about female founders and the fact we're both from ethnic minorities and we're leading this startup. Will we have the same shot at raising funds, et cetera? What's your experience been and do you buy that in terms of fairness?

Gerard Harkin (25:39)

Completely! As I said the killing of George Floyd has driven a lot of change, a lot of self-reflection. At Roche we had a lot of colleagues, we ran a number of sessions and colleagues just talking about what they've had to deal with in their lives and even on their way to work and, abuse on social media. So it's really gone deep for us in Roche, bringing about change all the way up to the very highest levels. If you go on Twitter and LinkedIn, you'll find our CEO and our small senior team talking about massive changes that are taking place in Roche around diversity and inclusion.

(26:30)

And if I bring it back to innovation as well, there's so much to talk about because you want everyone in the organisation to be equal, to express their ideas and be able to contribute and be able to speak up. And sometimes I say to teams, does the innovation team, does the diversity of the innovation team represent the diversity of your customer base? And if not, you better do something about it! A personal story - many years ago, I was leading a team. It was like six white guys. And we were developing concepts primarily for women. And in the first concept testing a woman walked in and she looked at the concept and she said, 'I can tell there's no women on the innovation team.'

(27:15)

And it was the biggest kick in the a** for me and my career. I was just so caught up in the concept that it never occurred to me to actually, are we representative of - is there any diversity? I said it was six white guys on the innovation team. So I think in all honesty, making mistakes is a massive awareness check-in for ourselves as well. And, so I've never, ever made that mistake again. It's a simple question, really, for anyone, if you're involved in innovation, say to the innovation team, do we represent the diversity of our customer base? If not, do something about it. And then there's also the other diverse perspective. From an innovation perspective, have we taken a board who's going to implement, who is going to sell and, pull in perspectives from HR or from finance, from different people as well.

(28:17)

But that's the obvious stuff. Just putting in different perspectives. And grads. I mean, we had an apprentice by the way, at Roche. He came up with this amazing idea. I mean, it's, it's gone global. The point I'm making there is, it would be easy sometimes to say, an apprentice they're only 18, give them a bit of time and they'll have great ideas. But actually, when you get that out of your mind, then everyone has great potential to bring in great ideas. For me, it comes back to kind of that self-awareness, asking questions, driving change. Are we where we need to be from the D&I perspective globally? No, absolutely not. Is there a lot of positive change taking place? Yeah.

Na'eem Ahmed (29:05)

Yeah. That's really important. And I think it ties back into having this authenticity and being able to have all of those voices in, and given an equal footing within organisations, is incredibly important for progress.

Gerard Harkin (29:30)

Absolutely. And it makes sense, right? We hire all these smart people, and we want to hear their points of view on things. If there was a colleague who had suffered a racial attack on the way to work, when you arrive at work, if you went through that, you want to be able to talk to people about that. Imagine being in an environment where you have to hold onto that. You couldn't be yourself. So, actually I've been able to open up and be surrounded by a community of people. And we're blessed in Roche Diagnostics UK & Ireland, we've got 42 different cultures in our 650 staff, we've got 42 different cultures. So we try to represent our customer base. For me, this stuff is all a no-brainer. It's so obvious. (laughter) Why do we even have these issues? It's crazy.

Lara Mott (30:37)

It's so funny because, and I don't know if this is a personal thing or whether this is a sign of change with the times, but I know earlier on in my career, my first big job when I was 23 and I inherited all these pharmaceutical and biotech customers, and I'm dealing with chief execs and board members. And I remember thinking to myself, I can't bring my personality to work. I have to be super professional at all times. Now, again, this could just be me. So, I'm interested to hear your views on this, but I feel like now the lines are kind of blurred between work life and social life. And you absolutely, I feel anyway, you can be yourself.

(31:22)

I couldn't for the life of me think of texting one of my customers, or one of my clients, back when I was 23. Everything was super formal and maybe that was the corporate world, but now you've got WhatsApp and Twitter. You're DM-ing people, and Twitter is a good example. You can really get a sense of what people are like outside of the day job and outside of the suit, or the white coat or whatever it is. Do you think that's just a sign of the times? Maybe Twitter's really helped that, but what's your view on how it was 15 years ago?

Gerard Harkin (32:02)

Yeah. (laughs) Well, I'm thinking, because we met on Twitter!

Lara Mott

We did!

Gerard Harkin

At NHS trusts at the right place at the right time, because it's just like (explosion sound).

Lara Mott (32:12)

That's what it was. I messaged you, you followed me on Twitter and I was being super polite saying, thank you for the follow. And I'd read your bio. And I said, looks like we've got shared passions. And that was actually, I did check this. This was May, 2019, would you believe? So the Twittersphere brought us

together. And then we had a meeting at our offices and we really had a deep and meaningful conversation about Irish tea.

Gerard Harkin (32:38):

Barry's versus Lyons for all the Irish listeners

Lara Mott (32:42)

Exactly, and Barry's won, I think.

Gerard Harkin

Of course it did...

Lara Mott

But we did have a long debate in the office. It's kind of unbelievable really that I could just connect with you on Twitter and message you. And now here we are.

Gerard Harkin (32:54)

So where I currently work, I really feel that I can just be myself. And all of my colleagues feel the same as well. When you've got that culture where you can just be yourself - because I've worked in other places and, you feel like you've got to speak in a certain way, articulate things in a certain way. Just letting people be who they are, and that also drives that richness of welcoming and accepting people - you don't have to be anyone else. Imagine the relief, when I joined Roche. I don't have to be anyone else! I can actually just be myself. I don't need to contain my passion and box it up. So it's great. And I think you're right, Lara. A lot of the social media, it brings people together. When I saw - cause it was a Trust that had tweeted about how great ImproveWell was, right? It was kind of a similar passion then. You're innovating, helping people in the NHS to come up with ideas and implement those ideas. We've got similar pathways really, we all want the same outcomes, which is people living longer.

Na'eem Ahmed (34:11)

Gerard, we've spoken about experimentation, we've talked spoken about improvement. One of the things that holds us back really is this fear of failure, which you said really nicely was the F word. Successful people like yourselves have obviously had failures along the way - it would be really interesting to know what you learned from them and what happened.

Gerard Harkin (34:36)

Yeah! I work in the innovation space. So yeah, for me to say, you know what, after 28 years in innovation, I don't actually think [I've had failures. (laughs) Loads of failures! Absolutely. All of the time. At the moment we're driving this culture of experimentation across the UK and Ireland, but a year and a half ago, I thought I'd create these experimentation cards. Create this card and give it to everyone and that's it. Everyone will start experimenting. And it just didn't happen. And for me, there was a massive - it was a wake up call. You create the website, make the video, email it to everyone. And then you kind of realise, that's the safe way of doing innovation and you've got to really stick your neck out.

(35:28)

You got to like start going to the senior management team saying, 'this is happening. I want you guys to start talking about experimentation. I want you to stick your neck out.' We're running these small five-person group sessions to have close, intimate conversations with everyone. Putting up awards, really putting lots of different things in place in order to scale experimentation, based on that initial failure thinking, oh make a tool and create a website. Or the example I shared earlier about having all the men on the innovation team. What a colossal failure. And then, sometimes I can get quite excited about stuff. So I will go from idea to solution quite quickly. So this is the solution. So I prematurely converge on the solution and that's often a failure for me because actually you've got to involve more people, you've got to socialise it more with people, you've got to make sure you're not just going from idea to solution very, very quickly.

(36:37)

And that's happened to me quite a bit. So it's been a learning for me, you know, as an innovation manager sometimes maybe to just slow things down and bring more people on board.

Lara Mott (36:48)

When I saw you present in Ireland, you proposed a new metric for innovation and innovation culture based on Benjamin Zander's quote in 'The Art of Possibility' about shining eyes. Could you share that quote and talk to us about the connection with innovation?

Gerard Harkin (37:07)

Yeah. So that was me sticking my neck out a little bit as well, to set the scene. Yeah, it was an honor and it was to a large group of clinicians. With innovation culture, it's just so easy to have all these number of prototypes, customer insight, blah, blah, blah. And I was proposing this 'shining eyes' as a metric. And for those of you who don't know Benjamin Zander, check him out, Google 'Benjamin Zander shining eyes'. He is the Boston Philharmonic conductor. He's an amazing, amazing person, who does a lot of leadership and development stuff. He came up with this quote and it's his definition of success. So he says, 'for me, it's very simple. It's about how many shining eyes I have around me.' There isn't any hidden meaning in that quote. (laughs) It's how many shining eyes you have around you.

(37:59)

If you're an innovation manager, look around. If you haven't got people who are passionate and alive and want to make an impact and want to make a difference and are creative, and really contributing - you see it in their eyes. You actually see really happy, passionate people. And if they're not there, you're actually doing something really wrong as an innovation manager. And I'll share a secret with you. So when we met for coffee at ImproveWell, we're looking out over London city, and then Lara said, do you want to meet the team on your way out? I'm like, damn straight, I want to meet the ImproveWell team!

So she opens the door and behind this door were all these shining eyes. All of these happy, passionate, driven people. I just looked into this room and I saw all of these shining eyes. Both of you know what I'm talking about. I just thought it's such a great quote. A measurement of success is just how many shining eyes you have looking back at you.

Lara Mott (39:08)
I love that! (laughs)

Na'eem Ahmed

That is brilliant! We are going to take that without any apologies and share that everywhere (laughter) It's been brilliant to talk to you and to get your humility, but also your continued passion for innovation. But something that obviously resonates with both Lara and I, which is about values, and we've tried to instill that within everything that we do, and we're so grateful and humbled actually to have someone like yourself to share this time with, so thank you.

Gerard Harkin (39:49)

Well, thank you so much for inviting me along. It's been great.

Lara Mott (39:55)

One of the things that we do in these sessions is featuring one of our ideas, which is called 'small, but mighty'. So a small change that can make a big impact. This one is one that actually one of our customers suggested very early on, and I was really impressed with it. It's called an amnesty box and it stems from the problem that clinical staff going about their jobs throughout the day are filling their pockets with swabs and tape and all sorts of equipment that they then might just take home, put in the bedside drawer and forget about it. And, six months later, it all goes in the waste. It goes in the bin. Someone had a lovely idea of putting a box in the clinical changing rooms to say, look, empty your pockets, and we will reuse anything that we can reuse. They count that up each week, and it's been estimated to be saving between £2000-4000 a year in just one clinical changing room. If you replicated that across an organisation, you could actually make a big impact. It was something that we really loved.

Gerard Harkin (41:03)

I think it's great because it's something small that you can prototype very, very quickly. So we're talking about a cardboard box and driving a little bit of awareness. It costs nothing to prototype and test, and it works and it's delivering a real kind of an impact. You say that's across one area. Multiply, multiply, multiply, and then we could keep on talking. You have my attention now. 'Cause it's about waste. Where else is there waste and where else can we re-purpose things and make it easy for people to recycle and save money? So it opens up the whole cost savings potentially as well. I think it's great. I mean, it's small things like that. You prototype that - I have an idea, that amnesty box, bang, here it is, in it goes, put up a sign...

Lara Mott (41:59)

And actually to your point about communicating and showing people what's great. You know, this particular idea was going around Twitter. They were doing it every week. They were like, here is the latest goodies from the amnesty box. It was lovely.

Na'eem Ahmed (42:11)

So Gerard, we heard today about experimentation, about your journey in innovation and about your passion for equality. We've really enjoyed the conversation today. And we just want to thank you for joining us at The Improver.

Gerard Harkin (42:27)

Thank you so much Na'eem and Lara. It's been a real pleasure. It's been great fun talking to the two of you and thanks so much for the invite.

Lara Mott (42:35)

Thank you, see you soon.

Na'eem Ahmed

Bye.

Lara Mott

Bye-bye.

Ending

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