

Serendipity

The ability to link luck with skill in business

ABS Materials headquartered in Wooster is celebrating its 8th year in operation offering a range of products based on Osorb® media, a silica that grows in size to encapsulate chemicals ranging from contaminants to fragrances.

Chemistry professor Paul Edmiston serendipitously discovered the technology working with students in his College of Wooster laboratory while devising a means to detect hidden explosives. Rather than just set aside the curious expanding silica, he ventured

into new research to understand the capacities. Sometimes innovations from the lab — even accidental inventions — need a nudge to optimize their potential. Often, the solution comes first and the inventor subsequently works to identify the needs it can address.

Edmiston readily admits it was serendipitous to make his discovery in Northeast Ohio.

“Organizations such as the Burton D. Morgan Foundation (which funded entrepreneurship at Wooster), TechLift, the Innovation Fund of Lorain County Community College, JumpStart Inc., and local business advisers all provided assistance at just the right time to help guide technology from discovery to product,” he says.

Fast-forward to today and ABS Materials is expanding its product line to solve problems connected to industrial wastewater, storm water runoff, oil and gas production and even cosmetic applications.

Take the time to explore

Serendipity — the idea of a fortunate happenstance — clearly played a role in the genesis of ABS. The practice of serendipity is the focus of a new book by Pagan Kennedy called “Inventology: How We Dream Up Things That Change the World.”

Kennedy observes that there are people who are super-encounterers. These are people who plan “on being surprised and believe ... themselves to be endowed with

a special kind of perception that helps ... them stumble across clues.”

They learn to “embrace random walks and chance encounters” and take the time to explore the possibilities rather than merely bury their heads in daily routine. They allow nagging possibilities to inspire their imagination and drive their exploration.

Consider the evolution of NicheVision Inc., a company located in the Akron Global Business Accelerator, focused on developing software solutions for DNA analysis in forensic labs. According to NicheVision founder, Luigi Armogida, the company pivoted based on the practice of staying open to the ideas of others. This practice made all the difference in the refinement of the company’s product line when suggestions from a client led to a breakthrough that streamlined their processes and enhanced their product.

Stay curious

Armogida says that entrepreneurs must “think consciously about being open to new opportunities.” Kennedy points out that mixing “together diverse groups of people” acts “like a spotlight illuminating new problems and pushing us to imagine.”

Spotting a potential discovery and pursuing it is an important innovation skill. Kennedy believes that breakthroughs require the inventor “to be in the right place at the right time, performing odd or unusual activity that allows [one] to open a door that is closed to everyone else.” Inventors can indeed luck into a scenario that delivers “unique access to a problem,” but it is insatiable curiosity that keeps that inventor on the path (often meandering) to the eureka moment. ●



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