

TRANSCRIPT

On Your Terms



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Episode #: 153

How to Be an Innovator (Taco Bell, James Corden & Beating the Competition)

Sam Vander Wielen:

Hey there, and welcome back to On Your Terms. I'm your host, Sam Vander Wielen. And today, we're talking all about being an innovator, not an imitator. And I think that innovation is the key to not only growing a really successful business that lasts for the long term, but also to beating out the competition. But we're going to talk about that more in a little bit.

I also want to kick off today's episode by just taking a moment to recognize, take a deep breath on what day this is. So, this episode's airing on September 11th, I wanted to remember 9/11 and all of the people who are impacted, affected by it, both people who lost people that day, people who've been sick from that day, people who are traumatized from that day. There's a lot of hurt and pain, obviously, around that day. What a horrific day.

It's been really weird since moving to New York, first of all, being in a community that's so much more personally impacted by 9/11. There were a lot of people who lived here who commuted into the city. I live out in the North Shore of Long Island, and we're pretty far out, so most people here don't work in the city, but there are people and then there are a lot of people who, you know, have family members who did, obviously, that day.

And, also, to see something that has just been so mind blowing to me is to see here how many lung related and health related clinics there are here for people who are impacted by 9/11. It's really wild. So, I had to go do this asthma test. I don't have asthma, but I had to go do this test. And when you walk into the building for the university hospital, it says asthma, lung, and 9/11 clinic. And it's just really, really wild how many people have been impacted by this.

So, I wanted to take a moment on such a somber day just to check in. I know it's a difficult day for a lot of people, if you were old enough to remember what happened and saw it that day. So, with that, there's never, never a good way to transition out of that.

But I'm sitting here towards the end of August recording this episode, and I'm enjoying a little bit of a cooler weather. I really love summer. And especially living here on Long Island, it's such a summer place. It feels like a vacation here and especially it feels like a vacation in the summer, everybody's out, they're on the water, and people have boats. And we live in a water community, so it's just very water-centric, active community. And it's so nice here in the summer.

I just also love fall because I don't love being super hot. Although it's not nearly as hot here as it is in Philly, where where I'm from, but I just really appreciate the little bit of a cooler weather situation that's starting to happen around here.

I'm also plugging away at my book. So, in case you haven't heard, I got a book deal. I'm writing a book. And my first, essentially, four chapters are due in mid-September. So, the publisher is kind of having me hand in sections at a time which I really like because, first of all, it's making it feel like super manageable and something I could kind of sketch out a plan for and figure out how I'm going to write this thing.

It's a lot different than people think. It's very - I don't know how to explain it. But it's just so weird to, like, sit down and start to write a book. When I got the book deal, I'm like, "What happens now? Does somebody send me some sort of magical document that I start writing in?" No. It's super uneventful. You just start a blank Google Doc and you start writing. It's really weird. So, I've been writing and writing and writing.

And I tend to find that I write in sprints, so I don't write every single day. I try to pick several days a week where I have writing sprints or writing blocks that I have set apart. And I find it hard to kind of switch back and forth between business and writing, business and writing. So, for me, waking up in the morning, having breakfast, if I can get my movement

in, that's awesome, and then I sit down and write for a while. And then, usually by that time, it's lunch and then I kind of transition to doing business stuff for the rest of the day. So, it's interesting. It's just like something you kind of chip away at.

I don't know what people think it's like or I don't know what I thought it was like, but you don't sit down for, like, eight or nine hours. Or at least I don't and none of my friends who have written books have done this either. But you don't sit down for eight, nine hours and write. It's just not possible. My friend Jen was saying, she thinks after, like, 60 to 90 minutes you're writing, creativity juices are kind of dried up, you know.

So, that's been the way it's been for me but it's coming along. I am almost done with this first section, actually, that I owe the publisher and it's early, so I'm just kind of taking my time with it. I continue to flush it out. It's been something that I'm just really excited to bring to you. But it's also been something that as I'm writing it, I'm just really, really focused on how is this helpful to you, how is this helpful to you, how is this helping.

My book coach who had helped me with the proposal, Rachel, said, it's about you, but it's not for you. And so, even though I'm sometimes telling my story, my personal story, my business story, it's not about me, but it's how does my personal story, how does my experience with my business help you. And so, I'm really, really writing it with that focus. I'm trying as much as possible. And so, we'll see. We'll see how it all comes out. But I hope you're excited. I'm excited and I'm really, really loving writing it so far.

All right. So, let's start talking about innovation, not imitation, today's topic. You know, when I think about how most people's online businesses start, it's so similar. I feel like everybody starts in kind of the same way. So, I feel like what often happens is that you have some sort of personal interest that you explore, like health or wellness or money or business or finance, or whatever it is, and you fall into social media and you start seeing that other people are doing something like what you want to do. You're like, "Wait. You can be a money coach online or you can be a

fitness coach and not have to see people in person.” You start seeing examples.

And I feel like often what happens is that you see this example of the kind of business that you want or the kind of career you want, maybe even just the lifestyle, and then that’s what drives you to be like, “Oh. I want to do that. I needed to see that example to understand what was even possible for me.” So, I feel like the way that most people start an online business is by seeing online businesses, like you see them on social media, or maybe you run across somebody on YouTube or a podcast.

And then, what happens is that you often get into this – I mean, you tell me if I’m wrong. Like, you write to me and be like, “No. My experience was completely different” – I feel like then what happens is that you then come into this online world and you start following more and more people and consuming more content, downloading more checklists, watching more webinars, and you start to think that these types of businesses that you’re seeing are the rubric. It’s the standard of what you have to do. And it’s almost as if it’s like some sort of box that you’ve got to stay within the nice, neat boundaries of.

And then, you start getting targeted with all this messaging and marketing and programs and courses on how to build a business. And they’re telling you here’s the way to build a business, here’s the way, you have to be on Instagram, you have to post this many times, you have to do this, you have to do that, you have to have a premium offer, you have to have a high ticket offer, you have to have a one-to-one service, or you hear don’t have one-on-one service, only have courses. You’re hearing a lot of this same messaging.

And from there, I feel, as a collective, it leads to a lot of the same. It just leads to generally a lot of the same, the same people, the same businesses, the same messaging, the same tactics, the same strategy. Just a lot of cookie cutter cut – I don’t know – replicated businesses.

And I totally get why people want to do this and I get how it happens, because I went through the same exact experience when I started my online

health coaching business when I first left the law because I had the same experience that I'm laying out now. I was always into health and fitness. My mom was a doctor. She was obsessed with it. So, you know, I was indoctrinated early and often and then I was always into it.

But I didn't know that that was something you could do until I saw somebody doing it. And then, once I saw that example, I was like, "Wait. You can do this? You can just have an online business? These people are using Instagram to find clients?" My mind was blown. And then, I started following people. Then, I started saying, "Oh, okay. This is how you do it. You set it up, then you have a one-to-one. You also offer a course to try to make passive income." I saw it as this is the way to do it.

So, I get why people want to do it this way. We all want to be successful because we all want to be safe at the end of the day. We want to know that what we're doing is going to work because we need it to work to make us feel safe. And we're just kind of wired, I think, too, to find the fastest way there. Like, nobody wants to sign up for something to be like, "I would like to find a way to start a business that's going to take me 20 years to get off the ground just to make sure I do it right." Nobody is looking for that.

Everybody's like I want to leave my job, or I want to make more money, or I want a different lifestyle and so this is what I'm going to do. I heard that this is what you need to do. And if I do it that way, then I'll make what I need, or I'll be safe, or I'll have the - I don't know - success that I'm looking for.

But I think unintentionally, what it leads to is a lot of imitation and not innovation. And sometimes I feel like we've gotten away from the point of entrepreneurship. The point of entrepreneurship is to innovate. You don't have to invent something.

Like, since I was a little girl, my sister and I, we always had little invention book, like a notebook, and we would sketch things out, we were always coming up with ideas. And I've shared some of my ideas here or in my email newsletters before. I maintain that my idea when I was little to have

a washing machine that when the clothes are done being washed, it has a conveyor belt that transfers it to a dryer and dries it for you. I'm like, "This is genius." Everyone laughs at me when I tell this. I'm like, "I don't understand what's wrong with this? Why can't we invent this? This would be so convenient." But anyway, I was this little girl who thought you had to invent something. You had to create the washing machine that automatically transferred to a dryer.

And, of course, that is a type of entrepreneurship and that is a certain type of entrepreneur, an inventor. But entrepreneurship generally, even when you're starting a business, is meant to push things forward, to change things, to improve something, to create something that's never been done before, or if it has been done before, to give people a better or easier way faster, cheaper, more accessible, more convenient, whatever it is.

And I feel like even in business, once you create something or you create something that's original or you create something that's useful or helpful to people, you don't then just stop. Your business is supposed to continue to innovate and continue to evolve. Not constantly, I'm not saying you have constantly be on this treadmill of innovation. But generally speaking, companies who don't innovate and evolve.

Look at Blockbuster. Blockbuster could have been Netflix and they missed a huge opportunity. Blockbuster also could have been Blockbuster and double downed. I have a lot of thoughts on Blockbuster. I used to love Blockbuster. But, you know, that's what happens when we just remain stagnant. They didn't have to become a Netflix, but they couldn't stay a Blockbuster in a Netflix world. We needed to keep moving, we needed to keep innovating as the world's changing, as people's needs are changing.

So, I feel like this conversation is all well and good. But as I was prepping for today's episode, I'm thinking but if you have a coaching business, for example, or you have a consulting business or product based business, you might be thinking so how do I be an innovator in a coaching business? How do I be an innovator in a digital product or services business?

Well, here are some of the basics that I like to think of. I mean, as somebody who only has a digital products business, I think about innovation a lot. So, first, I start with you and then I kind of move on to your ideal client.

Because one of the problems I think in our industry is that people spend too much time thinking about themselves in their marketing and their own personal lived experience. And there are parts of your lived experience that other people are going to identify with, but really they're just going to see themselves in it. So, I think, yes, it's important sometimes our own experiences can give us some insight as to where we should go with the market. But it can't be the only thing you look into. Just because you need or want something doesn't mean that there's a market demand for it. This is actually something I'm writing a lot about in the book.

So, let's start off talking about you first. So, how can we innovate thinking about looking at ourselves first? So, first, I would look at what has bothered you. What's bothering you? What are you missing? What have you been frustrated about that you, in your own life, keep going to use? For example, you're washing the laundry and then you forget to move it to the dryer. That's like, "This is so frustrating. I wish I just had a washer that transferred my laundry via a conveyor belt to my dryer." Which, again, I maintain is a brilliant idea.

So, you can look at what's bothered you. And I also think sometimes when something's been bothering you or you've been looking for something, because you're looking for a hole to fill and you can't find it in the market, that's usually a good tip off to me. It's like I'm looking for this and I can't find it. I can't find a washing machine that automatically transfers to the dryer. So, why hasn't anyone invented this yet? That's a great place to start.

I think also you can come from this place of if you're somebody who constantly thinks about this kind of stuff, constantly thinks about innovation and products and improving, is there something that you see maybe that nobody else does? Like, you just had this genius idea.

For example - well, this is a whole separate issue for a separate day, but in general, I was listening to this interview the other day. I think it was CBS Mornings. I'll try to find the clip, if I can, for you. But it was about how the T.V. Guide - sorry, not T.V. Guide - As Seen On TV company is being accused by a number of different inventors that they've stolen their ideas.

And this one guy, he was on Kickstart and he was raising money through a campaign for his invention and his invention was brilliant. This guy was an engineer by background, and I guess he had kids and they always wanted to play with water balloons. And it was really annoying to have to fill up an individual water balloon one by one by one.

And so, he invented this insanely brilliant thing where it just screws on to the end of a hose and then it has a hundred little balloons. And when you turn the hose on, in less than 60 seconds, it immediately fills a hundred water balloons. And there's something about the thing that he did with the tip of each balloon that it automatically seals, so you don't even have to twist and tie them or anything. Genius, right?

This guy starts the Kickstarter thing, starts selling them. Well, what do you know? One of his first sales, unbeknownst to him, is to somebody who works high up at the As Seen On TV company. And they buy the thing, they send it off to China, replicate it and get hundreds of millions of units out, like, overnight before this guy can even take off. He had a patent. He was in the process of patenting his thing. It's a whole interesting, separate legal issue which we can get into on a separate day.

But in general, I was just thinking about him as we were talking about what's something that's bothered you, what's something that you see that nobody else does. Because he was bothered by having to refill these balloons and he was able to see a solution because he was an engineer so he was able to fill that hole.

The other thing is that you can listen to patterns from your customers. I think that this is a huge missed opportunity in terms of looking for places to be more innovative in your business if you consistently hear your

customers asking the same thing. So, they might not be asking you like, "What I'm really looking for is an invention of a hundred water balloons that fill up." What they're going to be telling you is about the problem, like, "Oh. It is so annoying that I have to fill each water balloon one by one by one." And then, you're like, "This is the solution. I've got it."

So, you have to listen to patterns in what they're frustrated with, what they're complaining about, what they can't find, where are they looking, where have they looked already, whatever's out there, why is that not good enough or why is that not filling the need for them.

And last but not least, I think that the last place I like to think about or look for innovation in my own business or in my products are through trends. Because you can also see something coming. You can anticipate something. So, maybe the problem doesn't necessarily exist, but it's going to exist soon based on something that's changing in your industry or some trend that's coming or whatever.

And that kind of goes back to maybe there's something you see that no one else does. This is why I'm such a fan of you staying on top of your industry, continuing to be really a little investigator and be really curious about what's going on in your industry and continue learning. It doesn't mean you always have to buy courses from other online entrepreneurs. It might mean something different.

For me, this means like reading the New York Times on the weekend, for example. They have a great business section. I read about that because there are so many interesting stories in there, but it gets me thinking about business from a different perspective. I hear different stories from different people with all different kinds of businesses that have nothing to do with online legal templates or coaching or anything else. And it gets me out of my space and it gets me to start thinking differently and thinking bigger. So, that's a good way to start.

Okay. So, I have two examples other than our balloon guy. I have two examples that I wanted to talk with you about, about people or companies

that I think have taken innovation in a really interesting way and let's see how we can apply this to our own businesses.

So, the first example was something I thought of a while back when I was reading an article about James Corden, the night show host. And I thought it was so interesting because James Corden - who's now off the air since I decided to talk about him. He's off the air now by his own choice - when I read this about James Corden, what they were saying was that James Corden is not necessarily the highest watched on TV., yet he is the most highly watched late night comedian overall when we take all means of watching late night T.V. into account.

That's because James Corden and his marketing team and everyone who works for him, I'm sure, very brilliantly thought about how people were consuming their content. So, one of the things that James Corden thought about was that people, generally speaking - and this comes from personal experience as a grandma who goes to sleep at, like, 9:00 p.m. - are not up at - I don't know, is he on at 11:30 or 12:30? I don't even know. That's a good example. I love James Corden. I love watching his segments. But I don't even know what time he's on. I don't even actually know what channel he's on. I watch him on YouTube. So, I'm proving my point right now.

So, he thought about how people were consuming his content and he knew that nobody was up watching this stuff so late at night. So, if people were going to watch these in segments on YouTube and clips on social media, he wanted to make them more segmentable, the show more segmentable. So, essentially, the show would be made up of different little segments and game show type things, like Carpool Karaoke and other ones like that, where people would have something that they would get hooked on.

So, if you, for example, have watched Carpool Karaoke, you've probably gone on his YouTube channel or wherever else you watch it and you've watched other segments of Carpool Karaoke. And unlike what people do with the other late night shows where you might watch it every night or watch it on certain nights because you see an interview, you want to see an interview with somebody who's on that you like, the idea here was that you could create bingeable content because on something like YouTube.

For example, if you watched the Carpool Karaoke with, like, Lady Gaga, then maybe it automatically starts playing the one with Adele afterwards or Stevie Wonder. So, people get hooked on certain segments and there was buy-in of like, "Oh. I love Carpool Karaoke with James Corden" and then they started watching and watching and watching.

They also thought a lot about virality - hopefully, that's the right way to say it - things going viral or making things go viral. So, they thought about creating segments in a way that people would pick up on things and share it, which would then drive additional people back to wherever they were watching his content and getting new subscribers and new viewers and new fans, essentially, to watch his segment.

So, I just thought that was really brilliant and I wanted to bring that up as an example because, you know, I'm always thinking whenever I create something like, How are people watching this? How are people consuming it? Or if you're creating a product, it's like, "Well, do the people that you're creating this product for have 30 hours to sit down and watch videos?"

Like, I just saw somebody today kind of advertising a new course that she was coming out with, and she was advertising that there were 36 hours worth of video instruction in this course. And I know that she's feeling really proud because that's a lot to create, and I know what goes into creating something that's that big. But as a consumer, I'm wondering what people think when they hear that. Because I'm thinking like, "That sounds like a lot. I don't have time to sit here and watch 36 hours of video. Like, how am I going to watch? And I don't want to sit for 36 hours, let alone have 36 hours to sit and watch."

It's interesting and maybe that plays well to her audience, but it's something to consider. Like, if you have an audience who is the kind of audience or you want to attract the kind of customers who are the kind of person who wants to sit down and consume 36 hours of video, then that is what you need to create. If you're targeting busy people who are already struggling with time and that's why they're coming to you, and then you

create a course that has 36 hours of video, they're going to be like, "Uh, no. That's not happening."

So, thinking about how people are consuming your content. I even consider where are they consuming. Are they consuming in the car? Well, if they're consuming it in the car, they need audio, not video. So, when I did a webinar a couple of months ago, I came out with an audio only option and made it a podcast episode so that people could listen to it while they were driving or cooking dinner. Because I know that also people's viewing habits are changing. Not everybody wants to sit down and watch a webinar. And with my customers, my ideal customers are all business people or want to be business people, and maybe they've already spend eight hours sitting behind a desk somewhere or working on their business for the last eight hours, and they don't want to sit down and watch another hour of a video.

So, I love the idea of using James Corden as an example for how are people consuming this and driving traffic back to things. I also like the idea of using him as an example of creating more segment type things that people can get hooked on and can get more - I don't know - buy-in with.

So, even with my own podcast, for example, you might notice that now at the end of every podcast I'm sharing my takeaways, so that's going to become a little segment. At the end of every guest interview, I'm doing a little takeaway reflection on their episode. In the beginning, I'm doing more of a personal check in. I'm trying to create more and more segments and this is something I'm also thinking more about and it's in development, but that's kind of a real world example of even how I'm integrating that into, not just my business, but one of my marketing channels.

All right. So, now that we've talked about James Corden, we've got a very tasty example for you. I say this as somebody who, I think, has only been to Taco Bell maybe once. I'm not sure. I think it literally was once when I flew into Wisconsin. And we got into Wisconsin really, really late and there was nothing open except for a Taco Bell in Neenah, Wisconsin, where my husband's from.

And my husband, Ryan, he also makes fun of how I say Taco Bell, because I'm from Philly and when we say things - I mean, this is kind of a northeast thing, everything's like one word, like Taco Bell, Burger King. He says Taco Bell. And so, whenever I talk to him about this, I'm always like "Taco Bell," it feels like it takes 20 minutes for me to say it. So, I'm just going to say it normally for me and hopefully you're fine with it.

But I don't think I've ever been to Taco Bell many times in my life, but I know that a lot of people have. And I also want to start off this by saying the same thing I said in my episode a few weeks ago about Starbucks and Dunkin' Donuts and BJ's and Costco. You're going to hear me talking about a lot of different companies now moving forward. And I want you to know that when I talk about companies, I'm not talking about their morality, what they're doing to the country, what they're doing to people's health. I'm not focusing on that. We are just focusing on the business aspect.

And I'm not endorsing destroying everyone's health in exchange for business. And I'm not saying that they are destroying everyone's health. I just feel like sometimes with these topics, there's no winning. And people are going to be mad if you talk about fast food and then people are going to be mad if you demonize fast food. So, there's kind of no winning. What I'm trying to say here is that I don't really care about that for the purposes of our conversation.

What I'm trying to do is extract something from their strategy, their approach, and see how we can take that and apply it to your own business. Let's just work on leaving the rest. We don't have to care about the rest of it for right now.

And you can also pick a different business if you want to emulate certain things. One of the things you're going to hear me talking a lot about is that I think that there are little tiny things you can extract from lots of different companies. For me, personally, there are 100 million more things I would love to extract from a company like Patagonia or REI than Taco Bell. But there's one marketing thing that I find really interesting about Taco Bell, and so it's okay with me.

So, okay, here's the deal, let's talk about Taco Bell. Taco Bell, I was surprised to learn, serves 42 million people per week. It's another reason why we have to have this conversation regardless of how you feel about companies like Taco Bell or other fast food companies. Regardless of how we feel, these companies are serving a lot of people, and therefore they have a lot of data on consumer behavior.

I thought that this was so interesting, the founder of Taco Bell, this guy named Glen Bell, he had a biography named Taco Titan, which I just had a good giggle about. And his biography was written by author Debra Lee Baldwin. And he was quoted in Taco Titan by saying, "I was determined to beat the competition so I decided to experiment." I was just like punched in the gut when I heard this quote because I loved the fact that he tied together the idea that in order to "beat the competition," the key was experimentation.

And I was thinking, there were so many things that you could say in that moment of how you beat the competition with lower prices and doing this, that, and the other thing. But he understood and is giving us the gift of understanding that experimentation, being curious, leading with curiosity, testing things out, that's actually the key to "beating the competition."

If you've listened to my podcast before, by the way, you can go back to Episode 1, the very first episode of On Your Terms is all about why I think community over competition is BS, by the way. And it's not because I don't think you should root for other people who do what you do or that there's not enough room. There's more than enough room to have a hundred of us all doing the same thing or hundreds of us doing the same thing. That has nothing to do with anything. You are allowed to want to be a successful business owner.

And to me, "beating the competition," I don't think about the competition. That's how I approach the competition. I push on. So, I'm just kind of doing my own thing and maybe I end up beating other people out. I'm not really sure because I'm not even looking. That's just to give you kind of my take on this.

So, when I say beat out the competition, I mean for you to do well, for you not to lose to other people. I mean, I want you to be able to have a business and not be left in the dust. And I don't think there's anything wrong with and I'm not going to apologize for wanting to be ambitious and succeed and build a really successful, healthy business. So, all that to say.

I thought it was so interesting that one of the first things I learned about Glen Bell through Taco Titan was that his first customer was actually a businessman who, when he gave him the taco, the businessman dripped grease onto his tie. And at first people were like, "Oh, my God. This concept does not work. You can't be serving tacos for people to eat." You know, back then, businessmen primarily were his customers.

And for Glen Bell when he saw that grease drip onto that man's tie, instead of taking that as a sign that this wasn't going to work, he decided that he would actually teach people how to tilt their heads to "properly" eat a taco instead.

My mind was blown to think he saw a challenge. And instead of being like, "Oops. This is a roadblock. We have to shift gears." He was like, "No, no. Let me re-shift this whole conversation. Let me just teach people how to eat it." I would have thought like, "Oh. I'll create a napkin that goes around people's necktie." And he's like, "No, no. I'm going to teach them how to do this differently instead."

So, I find one of the most fascinating things about Taco Bell to be how they innovate and come up with new concepts and how they test things. So, this concept for me all started when I read a really great article in The New Yorker called Taco Bell's Innovation Kitchen, The Front Line in the Stunt-Food Wars. I'm going to link to it down below. It is a really, really good article. I think it's worth the read just because it's fascinating.

Again, I don't personally agree with everything they're doing or I was appalled at some of the things. I'm in a place of nuance these days where I'm much more like, "You know what? I can read about something I don't agree with and it's okay. I can also read about something and take from it

what I want and leave the rest and everything's not for and about me. So, that's all right." So, I encourage you to read it regardless of your feelings on Taco Bell and regardless of what comes up while you're reading it.

But the article goes into a lot of detail about the story of this Taco Bell employee named Lois Carson. And she worked for Taco Bell for over 23 years and she spent over 13 years of those 23 years creating what would become the Crunchwrap Supreme. I have never had a Crunchwrap Supreme. I had to look it up. But when I found it, I was like, "Oh, okay. I've seen this before." If you've not seen it before - is it a hexagonal? Oh, gosh. If Ryan hears this, he's going to be like, "Oh, my gosh." He's a mathematician game theorist. So, I think it's a hexagon and it's the one that has a million folds and kind of comes out in a circle, and yada, yada.

I'm going to link down below actually to one of my favorite food bloggers, Pinch of Yum. She has a Crunchwrap Supreme copycat recipe, which is fantastic. And I use ground turkey or I just use beans if I make it veggie and it's actually very, very good. So, if you want to make them at home, I'm going to link down below to that. I didn't think it was fair to have this episode about Taco Bell and not give you a recipe.

But Lois tried for 13 years to create what would end up becoming the Crunchwrap Supreme. She actually proposed it. What I find so fascinating about her story is that she proposed it back in 1995, and when she proposed it to Taco Bell, it didn't end up coming out, by the way, until 2005. But she proposed it in 1995 and many of the people that she told about at the company, the food engineers, were like, "This won't work. It won't stick." And she couldn't get the hexagon to stop popping open and they had to come up with a sealing technology and all this kind of stuff.

And the other thing that Taco Bell food innovation lab brought up was that they didn't like how long it took for the Taco Bell workers to fold it, so they dismissed the idea entirely. And one of the things you'll read about in this article, if you choose to read it, is that Taco Bell, because of the way that their business operates is seconds or money. Everything has to be done in a certain number of seconds. Everything has to be perfectly

even, the same consistent, blah, blah, blah. It's like a machine. It's crazy. I don't understand how they do it. But anyway, because of that making them nervous that it was going to take too long to fold it, they got rid of it.

So, fast forward, Lois keeps working on it, working on it. This is like her life's work. And Crunchwrap Supreme comes out in 2005. I hope you're sitting down, do you want to know how many Crunchwrap Supremes they sold in the first six weeks of its release? In six weeks after they released the Crunchwrap Supreme, they sold 51 million units of the Crunchwrap Supreme. In six weeks. And it continues to be one of their most popular items.

So, a lot of this article has to do with how, you know, they have this innovation lab at Taco Bell, and then also at Frito-Lay, which bought the taco shell company. And, I don't know, there's all these food conglomerates. It gets kind of crazy. But Taco Bell has 60 people, 60 fulltime employees on staff in its innovation lab. And then, Frito-Lay, who gives Taco Bell their taco shells, has a lab in Texas with hundreds of employees where they do very similar innovation lab stuff, like they're testing food, they're pitching products. They even have a machine that tests the mouthfeel of a chip entering your mouth. It's insane. It's crazy.

And so, it's so interesting to me because what I take away from both Lois's story, and if you read this article, just how much time and money and attention companies like Taco Bell pay for innovation. What I took away from it was that more items get pitched than get ultimately chosen. And some items are before their time. So, Lois Carson, for example, pitched the Crunchwrap Supreme back in 1995 and everybody poo poed on the idea. And then, ten years later, it comes out and they sell 51 million units. It was before their time. They didn't realize the value in it but she had a great idea.

I think it's interesting, too, to note that Taco Bell comes out with ten new items per year. They keep a pretty limited menu. I think that's pretty obvious for food costs. They essentially also use the same five ingredients and just recombine them into a million different forms where they, like,

fry them differently or prepare them differently or put it in a Dorito dust coated shell, apparently. I didn't know that was a thing.

But they released ten of these new items per year. But those ten items come from a final pool of 70 items that they test in all these different markets, which come from a pool of thousands of ideas per year. So, think about that, thousands of ideas brought down to 70 items to test, brought down to ten finalists, essentially. And not all of those things end up staying on the menu. They're taking things off and shifting them around.

So, obviously, we are not doing that. I am not recommending nor am I capable of creating thousands of ideas, although I think I might have thousands of ideas, like, per month. I'm an ideas person and it's just important for me to get it out, so I just keep a long list on Asana of a lot of my ideas.

But it's important to just take away here that generating ideas overall can then maybe boil down to some things that you test. And when you test things, you're in the experimentation phase. Remember Glenn Bell's quote, "I was determined to beat the competition so I decided to experiment." You're going to have to experiment. You're going to have to come up with a lot of ideas. In order to come up with experiments, you have to come up with ideas. And then, from your experiments come some solidified things that actually go into practice.

So, from this Taco Bell thing, I say to be competition, they're teaching us to innovate, to be innovators, to keep testing, come up with ideas. And, again, to think about how our customer is consuming our stuff, how they're buying, how they're consuming not just your product, but your freebies, your content, all of that stuff. So, that's our conversation about innovation.

Like I mentioned, starting right now and starting with my guest episodes you've heard already, I am sharing my takeaways at the end of every single episode. And for these episode, if you were only to take away three things from this episode, what would they be?

So, the first thing that I would encourage you to take away from this episode is that great companies are the innovators. That's how they stand out in the crowd. They are leaders. They are not followers. The second thing I would take away from this episode is that innovation doesn't stop. It's something that we continue to do. It's part of our fiber, our being as entrepreneurs. And my third takeaway is that innovation can come from seeing holes and plugging them either before it ends up becoming an issue because it's something that you anticipate or as you realize it. But that's only going to happen, you're only going to come up with those ideas if you're paying attention, if you're listening to your customers, if you're staying at the top of your game, in your field, and staying involved.

And if I'm able to add my two cents, if you are thinking outside of the box, you are exposing yourself to other ideas, other companies, other influencers, innovators, authors, whatever, outside of your direct industry or your direct way of doing business, I really highly encourage mixing it up, diversifying the kinds of voices you're hearing from, the things you're reading, the places you're looking. Read stuff that you don't agree with to see why you don't agree with it. Formulate an opinion. Become an expert on your own. I really highly recommend thinking about how we can be more of an innovator and less of imitators, even when we're not doing it on purpose.

So, I hope that you enjoyed this episode. If you did, it's always helpful for me if you just text it to a friend real quick. Just shoot them a quick text and be like, "This episode was so good. Do you listen to this podcast?" It's really helpful to help spread the word about On Your Terms. I also want to ask you to follow or subscribe wherever you listen to my show, leave a quick rating or review. It's so helpful to helping additional entrepreneurs find this content and talk about Taco Bell with me.

If you have any takeaway, I want to know, like, is there a way that you thought about you could be more of an innovator? Is there an idea that you've been wanting to explore? Whatever you feel comfortable sharing with me, I would love for you to reach out either on Instagram - I'm @samvanderwielen - send me an email, respond to my emails that you get every week. But just send me a note and let me know after this episode what

was a takeaway that you're taking. I know I shared my three, but I would love to know from you what you're taking away.

I'll drop all of the resources I mentioned today in the show notes down below. I'll drop that Pinch of Yum Crunchwrap Supreme Recipe, The New Yorker Taco Bell article, and anything else that I've mentioned today. But thank you so much for listening. I hope you enjoyed the show.

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