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The Daily Telegraph

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 1, 2016

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LIGHT-BULB MOMENT

EMPLOYERS ARE LOOKING FOR INNOVATORS SO SHOW THEM YOUR BRIGHT IDEAS, WRITES MELANIE BURGESS



NEW MINDSET: Gaia Grant says innovators look to adapt and design new strategies for the future. Picture: BOB BARKER

INNOVATION seems to be the buzz word of the moment, popping up in settings from business to politics and technology. It's especially prevalent in the world of work.

In August alone, 29,580 job listings on SEEK featured the key words innovate, innovation, innovative or innovator. But what does innovation even mean and how can a jobseeker show a prospective employer they can deliver it?

Gaia and Andrew Grant, directors of consulting company Tirian and authors of *The Innovation Race*, say it's about being able to not only keep up with the pace of change but also adapt and design new strategies for the future.

"(Innovators) need both an exploration and preservation mindset, they are both dreamers and doers," Gaia Grant says. "The exploration mindset can be demonstrated to an employer by referring to original ideas you have identified and contributed to projects, sharing about diverse work

teams you have worked with successfully (and) giving scenarios demonstrating ways you have adapted to meet changing new demands.

"The preservation mindset can be demonstrated by giving examples of how you have calculated risks about new projects, explaining how you have a solutions focus (and) describing how you have successfully pushed new ideas through to implementation."

Unfortunately, Andrew Grant says it can be difficult to find true innovators in Australia because "even though we're talking about it a lot we're not sure how to do it".

"Most people just think of new products and technologies when they think of innovation, without realising that it goes much deeper. Innovation is also about coming up with new systems and structures," he says.

"Gen Y have the potential to be highly creative as they have access to a massive range of information and ideas through technology ... yet research has revealed that creative

thinking skills have actually been dropping since the 1990s."

The Beanstalk Factory chief executive Peter Bradd says in Australia "innovation talent is pretty slim" so those who have it should demonstrate it in the job interview.

"When you come into a job for the first time you see everything with fresh eyes and often think 'why are they doing it this way' and the answer is often that they have always done it that way (so in an interview) you could identify how you have done that before and been able to influence the people you have worked with," he says.

"Innovation is trying to find new ways to solve existing problems or solutions to new problems. By being creative and looking at things from different perspectives and being collaborative it will help you reframe the problem or come up with nonlinear solutions. Innovation is more important today than previously because the world around us is changing so much."

Q&A

Gaia Grant, co-director of Tirian International and co-author of *The Innovation Race*

WHAT IS A TYPICAL WORK DAY?

It might be a day in the office coordinating staff and designing and preparing for client work, or we might be out at client meetings or travelling to deliver client programs.

Eighty per cent of our work is outside of Australia, so we spend a lot of time on planes.

Work can also easily extend into the evening as our Asia offices don't close until a few hours after us ... calls with clients can be at any time.

WHAT INSPIRED YOU?

My husband Andrew and I love working with people and helping them to find ways to reach their full potential. We have travelled extensively for more than 30 years, initially working on not-for-profit

development projects such as drug education in Myanmar, health education in India, and educator training in the Philippines.

Since then we have worked with chief executives from top Fortune 500 companies in their offices around the world to identify how organisations with power can use that power positively.

WHAT'S YOUR BEST ADVICE?

It's possible to come into our line of work from different angles, for example some people might start with a business focus, while others might have had an interest in psychology. Whatever background you come from you need to ensure you are coming with a fresh and inspiring approach that can challenge and motivate others.