

A Better Mouse Trap

I was listening to a famous inventor on the radio the other day. He had an impressive list of successful products to his credit and he did an admirable job of explaining the process of creating something new. It got me to thinking of the myriad products that we all use regularly and where in the world they came from. So I did a little research and found a number of unlikely heroes, folks who are not exactly household names. But they are every bit as important as the Edisons and Franklins when it comes to the things we rely on, the stuff that puts the quality in our 'quality of life'. Please understand that the things on my list might not make it to your list. After all, one man's toothbrush is another man's fingernail scrubber, or something like that. Anyway, I'd like to give a little shout out, a much deserved honorable mention to these folks on the "B" list in the back of "Who's Who?"

You probably don't know Angus MacDangus Bangus. He was the second assistant pro at Bonny Dunes Links and Lawn Bowling Club in Aberdeen, Scotland. One rainy April morning about forty years ago Angus taped an eraser to the end of his scorecard pencil. Seems simple enough but before the golf eraser the only way to change an unsightly 8 into a birdie 3 was to scratch it out or write over it. Hardly subtle. His simple improvement would lead to neatly improved scores in favor of countless clients which, in turn, greased thousands of business deals on golf courses all over the world. I'll put 'customer golf' up against anything you care to mention as the greatest boon to business since the invention of the martini.

How about Glynnis G. Glossmacher of Scott Paper? She is a senior vice president now with a big corner office at their corporate headquarters. Her contribution was subtle but genius is in the details isn't it? She didn't invent the paper towel she just made them better. You can still hear awestruck employees say, as she passes by in the hallway, "There's Glynnis Glossmacher, she invented the half sheet." That's right, Ms. Glossmacher was the first to take the ordinary paper towel and perforate it down the middle making it perfect for nose blowing, spectacles cleaning and oh so many other smaller than full sheet jobs. Throw those scissors away when you need half a towel. Glynnis has it covered.

Then there's Orville Overunder who was one of the founders of the Glad Bag Company. Anyone other than this visionary would have taken the profits generated by the zip-lock bag, put them in the bank and called it a day. Not Orville, no way. He went on to put two color strips, blue and yellow, on the closure of each bag. When the strip turns green (blue plus yellow equals green) the bag is closed! I can't imagine how many leftovers and lunches have been saved from the trash can because of bi-color zip-lock technology. I for one was always leaving my bag unzipped until that handy green strip came along. I have Orville to thank for all those still tasty lunches. Mr. Overunder passed on a few years ago and was laid to rest out at Shady Oaks Cemetery. He was buried, at his request, in a special casket which featured a color change zip-lock lid.

How about little Amber Sand, a marketing intern at Abbott Labs who proposed the brilliant angle of adding time release technology to the company's list of drugs with expired patents. Her notion opened the floodgates for the entire pharmaceutical industry to patent the very same drugs all over again, this time with time release added, thereby increasing the price of each drug exponentially. Pills that cost twelve dollars on Tuesday sold for three hundred fifty nine dollars on Wednesday. Amber is now retired near Mahwah, New Jersey and is quietly addicted to time release pain medications. She's not complaining though, she still gets the company discount.

This column would be incomplete if it neglected a young wizard from Colorado by the name of Charlton "Bunny" Coors III. He was born into the famous brewing family in 1980 and has never needed to work for a living but that hasn't stopped "Bunny" from contributing two blockbuster ideas to the annals of Beerology. In 2007 he hit upon the notion of a cold activated label for Coors Lite Beer bottles. When the mountains on the label turn blue the beer is chilled enough to drink! But that's only half the story. "Bunny" followed two years later with cold activated cans. The man is a dynamo. As is so often the case there's a human interest angle to this story. Charlton "Bunny" Coors III was born without nerve endings in his hands or feet. He couldn't tell you whether that can of beer in his hand was right out of the 97 degree car trunk or half way to frozen. In his case at least necessity was truly the mother of invention. Here's looking at you "Bunny".

As I said at the beginning of this column, none of these folks actually invented the plastic bag or the prescription pill or the golf pencil or the paper towel or the beer can but they did improve on what was handed to them. Along the way some of this stuff might actually have done some good for the world. But that's beside the point. The point is that if you want to leave your mark on the world you might consider studying that mouse trap behind the fridge and get to work on building a better one.