

TIM Lecture Series

Insights on Innovation

Ibrahim Gedeon

“Never put one person in charge of something that should be part of everyone's job. Whether it's innovation, reliability, or transformation, make sure everyone understands it and takes ownership.”

Ibrahim Gedeon
CTO, TELUS

The TIM Lecture Series is hosted by the Technology Innovation Management program (TIM; carleton.ca/tim) at Carleton University in Ottawa, Canada. The lectures provide a forum to promote the transfer of knowledge between university research to technology company executives and entrepreneurs as well as research and development personnel. Readers are encouraged to share related insights or provide feedback on the presentation or the TIM Lecture Series, including recommendations of future speakers.

The fourth TIM lecture of 2014 was held at Carleton University on June 19th and was presented by Ibrahim Gedeon, CTO of TELUS (telus.com), who shared his insights on innovation from his experiences in the telecommunications sector, particularly from his recent work at TELUS. Below are selected insights from his lecture:

1. For telecommunications providers, the business is no longer just about running the network – it is about understanding how the network runs how it can do different things for different people.
2. Increasingly, our vision is "people as service providers" in their own right – not in the sense of selling services for monetary exchange, but in the sense of individual entities that both consume and provide services.
3. Each of us has different aspects that form part of our overall identity, including even our phone numbers, banking information, health information, the content we read, etc. Telecoms can add value by providing personalized services that cater to the different aspects of our identities.
4. Providers can no longer try to own everything. Instead, our goal is to nurture a healthy ecosystem where we can be one player. We want to expose what we can control and have others work together, but we do not have to control the ecosystem itself.
5. In my day-to-day role as CTO of TELUS, the only things I really to ask are: how reliable is the network, how happy are the clients, and how fast is everything running? If I focus on these three things, the rest will take care of itself.
6. The most difficult part of my job relates to people: people accepting innovation, rather than the technology itself.
7. In any company, the person who looks at what the customer is doing is the most important person in the company.
8. I never want to lose a single customer, ever. It is always harder to win a new customer than keep an existing customer.
9. There are two ways of communicating: to please yourself or to transmit your message. With the first approach, we just assume that people know what we are talking about, but it takes discipline to make sure they actually do.
10. To test an idea, avoid only telling it to people who are just like you. Double-check your ideas with someone who may not automatically understand how the solution works but will focus solely on its benefits.

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11. The most important thing to remember about innovation is this: if it doesn't work, kill it. The problem is that technologists in particular are not good at killing projects that they care about. What is often required is input from outside of the project team, urging them to let it go. And, remember that carrying on with a project that is floundering stops you from doing something else.

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This report was written by Chris McPhee.

About the Speaker

Ibrahim Gedeon is CTO of TELUS, where he is responsible for technology strategy, service and network architecture, service delivery, and operational support systems for the company's wire line and wireless divisions, as well as service and network convergence, enterprise applications, and network infrastructure strategies and evolution. Ibrahim began his career in telecommunications engineering and research in 1990 when he joined Bell Northern Research. After moving to Nortel in 1994, he was named Vice President and Director of Data Network Engineering in 1996; Vice President of Internet Brand Management in 1999, and Senior Vice President of Wireless Engineering in 2000. Ibrahim has held numerous leadership roles in the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE) and has also received numerous professional awards and various forms of industry recognition, including being named three times to the Global Telecoms Business magazine's "GTB Power 100," a list of the 100 most powerful and influential people in the telecoms industry. Ibrahim also serves on the board of a number of industry associations, including the Alliance for Telecommunications Industry Solutions and Industry Canada's Communications Research Centre. He holds a Bachelor's degree in Electrical Engineering from the American University of Beirut and a Master's degree in Electronics Engineering from Carleton University in Ottawa, Canada. In 2010, he received an Honorary Doctor of Laws degree from the University of British Columbia.