

## My path to 2016 innovation challenge top solver

Am I an innovator? I hoped I was, suspected I might be given that label by some, but without independent validation from people with no connection to me as colleague, friend or family, at some level I wasn't all that comfortable calling myself one. An inventor, yes. I was more comfortable with that label. I have invented new human-computer interaction methods, a new kitchen product and have a patent granted.

My story isn't about any one innovation challenge, but about my experiences working at online incentivized innovation challenges over 18 months, from about mid 2015 to end of 2016. I worked primarily on challenges hosted on the Innocentive platform, partly because I found them first. I won my first challenge after a few months effort, and through 2016 tackled enough challenges to keep me busy filling gaps in my schedule. Innocentive lists me as the #1 solver with most number of awards won for 2016, having won awards on six challenges which fit their 2016 time slot. All six are listed among the many hundreds in the database of challenges HeroX referenced for this challenge!

This result has helped me a great deal. I feel more confident of what I increasingly, over the past six years, thought may be a strength of mine but had self doubts. I won the first and thought it could just be a lucky fluke. I won a second award and thought OK, if I win a third it will show it's not a fluke and I really do have some good ideas and the ability to back them up and present them. I won a third and thought, wow, it's true. I really have some skill providing value through conceptual ideas and feasible designs for innovation challenges. I then won a fourth, fifth and sixth challenge, and now hope to make this work a fundamental new part of my career.

To be sure I practiced a lot by entering a large number of challenges - about 40 over that time period. So it's not like I always have a top rated answer. Regardless, I find the work invigorating, doing the online investigation into domains sometimes very far from my core areas of expertise. I treat each challenge as a mini project and I feel like I am getting a deep lesson in each project subject area, expanding my overall technology knowledge base.

I left a five year research position at a large corporation over two years ago, willing to take a chance on myself and work developing some of my own projects, and unsure

how I would establish a new living for myself. I sensed I was capable in coming up with good ideas, but frequently doubted myself about whether they were just fancies of my mind or truly valuable, marketable solutions. My own recent projects have been developing slowly, given my limited resources, so I have not yet reached the stage where I can be sure they are viable products as foundations for new businesses. However, my innovation challenge solving experience has given me greater confidence in my innovation problem solving capabilities, and therefor in my own project ideas.

I have dreams of a better future and ideas to help bring that future about. I hope to continue solving innovation challenges as a freelancer, as well as push the ball forward on projects I'm interested in such as addressing air pollution, reducing human impacts on climate change, and providing better tools to improve peoples ability to create and communicate.