



## Interview with Gabor George Burt

Founder of The Slingshot Group  
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*Entrepreneurial mastermind Gabor George Burt has been helping individuals and organisations to broaden their horizons for decades. We caught up with him during INNOVEIT to find out more about his work, his thoughts on European innovation and why he believes creativity is essential for entrepreneurship.*

### Gabor, let's dive right in: what does the word innovation mean to you?

Innovation is about continuous change, but to me, the word 'innovation' is almost too general and therefore I like to define it further. I talk about 'meaningful innovation', which is innovation that is embraced by your target audience and, at the same time, brings benefits to you as the provider in terms of profitability, growth, and the welfare of your organisation.

The other thing I would say is that, rather than call it innovation, I prefer to use the term 're-imagining boundaries'. When you talk about innovation, a lot of people are resistant because they equate it with disruptive change, but when I say 're-imagine boundaries', people understand it to be something much more organic and embraceable.

### The EIT is championing innovation and entrepreneurship with the aim of increasing Europe's competitiveness on a global level, and growth as well. Why do you think these areas are so essential for Europe's future?

Entrepreneurship is really the seed of growth. Especially today, where all the old paradigms about business – such as being big is the source of strength and the basis of your future success – are being challenged. Companies like Apple, Google, Virgin or Amazon are some of the most valuable and influential in the world, and they're also all young companies that were started by entrepreneurs. So if Europe wants to be a leading hub of the new generation of businesses then it needs to nurture entrepreneurship. It needs to enhance and empower your young generations to think that way, and

give them the tools and the infrastructure so that they can become world-shaping entrepreneurs.

### Do you think the EIT is providing such environment?

From what I have seen, the EIT is very well positioned. Its mission is commendable and it seems to have the right energy, people and network in place. I've been impressed.

### As somebody who has lived and worked in both Europe and the US, do you think Europe can rival the US and maybe even the Far East in terms of innovation and entrepreneurship?

I think the ability to be creative and to come up with fresh ideas is a universal quality. Historically, Europeans have a deep culture of innovation and entrepreneurship and it's just been more recently that the US has taken that over. The US has, perhaps, been more adept at promoting entrepreneurship recently, and is luring away European

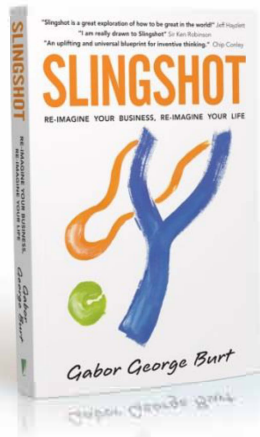


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immigrants who are driven, hungry to innovate and who enjoy the fact that there's a greater freedom to create companies than there is in Europe. But the ability and personal qualities exist in Europe for that as well.

**If you could change one thing about entrepreneurship and innovation in Europe, what would it be?**

I think Europe is still behind in terms of what I mentioned a moment ago: the freedom to explore. And that might be because of too much bureaucracy and too many obstacles in terms of access to the know-how and capital, as well as the thinking – even though we have



the EU – still within national borders. As an entrepreneur today, you really need to think globally and in Europe there's still more of a local mind-set. In the US, people don't really think too much about bi-coastal collaboration, which in Europe would be between one end of the continent and the other, and a much more difficult issue. So the more you can ensure cross-continental collaboration and freedom of movement for entrepreneurs, the more competitive Europe will be.

**You're the founder of the Slingshot Group and the author of the best-selling book *Slingshot*, which looks to unite creativity, innovation and business. Could you tell us what inspired you to write the book and pick some of the key messages that you share with the reader?**

My background before *Slingshot* was with Blue Ocean Strategy, which was very well received globally. The inspiration for *Slingshot* came about as a result of that work and my interest in psychology and human motivation – namely to find what motivates people to want to innovate and change. I was looking for a very

simple justification that everybody understands and can easily embrace as to how and why you should continuously re-imagine boundaries.

The 'how' is the premise that, as children, we were all explorers, full of curiosity and creativity, so the symbol of *Slingshot* is this universal toy to remind us that all we need to do is recover that sense of exploration, imagination and creativity.

What I try to capture in *Slingshot* is the idea that our natural state is to be creative and once we understand that, we can channel it via a framework to formulate smart strategies and overstep perceived limitations.

**There are many organisations that wouldn't be willing to take risks. So do you think it's as much about changing mind-sets as it is about changing business practices?**

Some organisations embrace change and are looking to get even better at managing it, while others take it on out of desperation. There is a third group, the one that you're talking about, which is composed of companies that are not really convinced that they need to change or don't want to. If you look around our business environment, this is a very difficult position to defend. After the global crisis of 2008, Jeffrey Immelt, the CEO of General Electric said, "*This crisis does not represent a cycle. It is a reset. It is a full emotional, social, and economic reset. Those companies that understand that will prosper. Those that don't will be left behind.*" And so it's everyone's choice as to what extent they embrace the idea that you need to continuously rethink, reimagine and reinvent what you're doing. My premise is that it is not only dangerous not to, but it prevents you from realising the full potential of your business and employees.

**INNOVEIT 2016 welcomed a variety of young and talented people from across Europe. Is there one piece of advice you'd give to these young entrepreneurs?**

Make sure that you can justify not just a substantial market need for your new product/service but also find a way to establish and maintain a strong emotional connection with your target audience. And, have a roadmap for continuously re-imagining your offering and expanding its relevance as your company takes off.