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How to encourage U.S. inventions

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By Amrita Jayakumar, Thursday, September 13, 12:09 AM

Readers have poured in suggestions, debated with each other and voted on how to encourage the next great U.S. inventions. Here's a roundup of the most interesting ideas:

Revolutionize the American education system: ScottEdTech's five-step plan for improving education received the most feedback. "We must allow education to become free, open source & available to everyone," he wrote. Specifically, educational content needs to be localized, technology available to all children, and language barriers in education eliminated, he wrote. Several readers agreed with his basic premise that the education system needs to change to spur creative thinking, but also raised their own questions.

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The ongoing battles in the country's primary education system show that this is a critical area to promote the kind of thinking required for future innovation.

"The plain truth is that schools really don't matter much when it comes to education. What matters is the family environment where a student lives, and how motivated the child is to learn," wrote TheElJamo.

"The technology that is much touted by Scott EdTech is often created to distract and entertain, rather than to inform," wrote cuthbert.j. twillie.

"Get rid of the 'standards' requirements. The fun of education has been sucked out by the need to make everything meet federal and

state standards," wrote DonDagen.

Reform the patent process: In the wake of the Apple-Samsung verdict, changing patent laws matched education reform as the need of the hour. SteveR1's idea was to "restore Copyright/Patent law to its original intent of providing a LIMITED monopoly and for a LIMITED period of time." Readers did not completely agree with his approach, but shared their own experiences with legal battles, big companies and the costs involved in applying for patents. The approach to patents should change, as well as the litigious culture of big




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companies, readers said.

“As an independent inventor, I struggle to compete with the resources of the multi-nationals,” wrote BlueShiftFilm.

“It’s incredible to me the sheer volume of never-ending litigation between the big computer and phone brands,” wrote JackAfter6.

Innovation is not just for the talented few: (TRIZ, SIT) Readers dtroness and baumann debunked the idea that innovation is a light bulb that goes off in the heads of a chosen few. There are systematic processes by which ordinary individuals can come up with innovative solutions. TRIZ, a Soviet-era methodology also known as the Theory of Inventive Problem Solving and Tel-Aviv based Systematic Inventive Thinking (SIT), were two of the processes they mentioned.

These methods “should become part of any big company in the U.S., because it turns their own employees quickly into inventors just by shortening the leap of invention with some handy thinking tools,” wrote baumann.

Media platforms for competition: rexsolomon’s idea of having a page on The Washington Post and other news sites specifically for innovators highlighted the role of the media in spurring new ideas. Media organizations should set up competitions that help “finalists meet face to face with investors and capitalists who are to provide investment and grants (not loans) for these vetted ventures,” rexsolomon wrote.

Public sector creativity: “Innovation is already happening nearly everywhere in our economy. But the place where it’s least prevalent is in government — where our biggest gains could be made,” wrote Ash Roughani. Along with the education system and start-ups, the government needs to “reward and encourage” creative thinking, Roughani wrote.

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