



Engineering & management solutions at work

## Fostering creativity

MANAGERS WOULD LIKE TO HAVE a crystal ball to anticipate market trends and then align organizational strategies accordingly. But even the best prognosticators can rarely envision the myriad challenges that arise in business. By creating an environment in your company that fosters creativity, you can encourage employees to react and adapt as conditions change. Here are five tips to identify roadblocks to creativity and cultivate an innovative work environment.

First, employees are often skeptical that there is a true commitment from management for real and meaningful change. Requests for innovation can be perceived as rhetoric if management doesn't demonstrate such a commitment.

Second, develop an environment that is conducive to innovative thinking. Working in environment with the same demands and routines results in predictable outcomes. Change the physical environment to liven up things visually, and set employee expectations in terms of desired results while allowing flexibility and individuality. Micromanagers beware! Think about how your organization envisioned its programs compared to what they have become. Chances are the programs are more detailed and con-

strictive than intended. A good system evolves by adding necessary procedures and removing unnecessarily prescriptive procedures.

Third, employees must be convinced that innovative ideas will be given valid consideration. Nothing is more disheartening to an employee than to have an idea dismissed without proper evaluation. Create a procedure for evaluating suggestions and ideas, and be sure that more than one person reviews suggestions. If ideas must work upstream through the traditional chain of command, then any manager in the chain who is averse to change can shelve the idea. You never know which discarded idea had the potential to shape the firm.

Fourth, when the inevitable occurs and innovative ideas sometimes fail, employees must not feel as though their innovative spirit will be frowned upon. If the blame game is part of your corporate culture, then efforts to innovate are destined for failure. Ideas come forward in an atmosphere where the value of innovation exceeds the real or perceived consequences of entrepreneurial failure.

Fifth, give your employees, either through their own initiative or under your guidance, dedicated time to focus



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on innovative ideas. Inspiration is often considered a mystical gift that strikes like lightning. In truth, it has a more practical reality. Be it through corporate retreats, brainstorming meetings, or simply giving employees the flexibility to walk away from their desks for a few minutes each day, allow dedicated time for them to invoke their creative powers.

Success usually begins with a decision that gives rise to a mindset. Cultivating an environment of creativity shouldn't be an afterthought; it is essential. Your job as a manager is to create an environment that will allow great ideas to come forward and then get out of the way. ~

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