Innovation: Company Culture or Go-To Word (Part 2)

Article

Innovation. This word is plastered over every website, a go-to word in nearly every company description, yet, 94 percent of managers are displeased with their companies innovation record. Our previous post mentioned how to develop innovation into a company culture and how to conquer your fear of innovation . But there is still the issue of management. If management doesn't follow through with innovative developments, even if the rest of the company does, the company will still fail to be innovative.

> Innovation is more than a go-to word. It's your leaders.

Unfortunately, it is becoming more and more difficult for organizations to introduce innovative products or services. As budgets tighten, managers seek rapid returns on investment and fail to look at long term rewards. This is why products that may save them time and money in the long run, and even in the shortrun get overlooked.

Getting bogged down in the day to day task makes innovation nearly impossible, but keeping these next 3 items in focus, you can bring innovation back to your company.

1. Employees who've been taught to think like innovators.

Nothing will get better unless you invest time and effort into your employees for systematic improvement of the innovation skills of your employees. Most people are not naturally blessed with skills, they are taught and nurtured to cultivate those skills. Individuals who have been trained or given opportunities to practice innovative thinking can work to foster great ideas.

Much has been written about where innovation comes from and what distinguishes an innovative mind. Our research and experience suggest that inquiry is at the heart of it. Innovators have an inclination and a capacity to examine what others often leave unexamined.

So if you want innovation, individuals must to be taught to do four things:

- Challenge the status quo. Don't think about what is, but what could be.
- Look at the big picture. Don't think about what is changing, but what could change.
- Mix and Match. Don't focus on what you do, focus on what you have. See your organization as a portfolio of skills and assets that can be mix and matched in any number of ways to get new product

and businesses.

- Find solutions. Sometimes customers don’t know they have a problem until there is a solution. They’re used to a certain struggle, but is it a necessary one or are we wasting time and creating new frustrations.

2. Accountable and capable innovation leaders

Who is accountable for innovation in your company? The president, vice president or designated project managers? Does the promotion or lack of innovation affect their compensation? Too often innovation is the responsibility of specialized units like R&D or corporate business development, rather than being the responsibility of every leader at every level. But do they have the training to be a leader in innovation? These qualities include:

- Able to use innovation tools available.
- Accepting sky as the limit for new ideas.
- Evaluating new options without predetermined judgement.
- Recognizing innovators and celebrating “smart failures.”
- Stepping up to mentor innovation teams.
- Finding ways to free up time and money for innovation.
- Hiring and promoting for creativity.
- Eliminating upsets in the innovation pipeline.
- Finding affordable ways to prototype and experiment.

Don’t sell your employees short.

If they don’t naturally display these qualities, don’t dismiss them automatically. Instead, lead by example and teach them along the way.

3. Innovation-friendly management processes

No matter how innovation-focused your employees are, nothing will succeed unless you have a management as committed to innovation as you are. If you have too much dedication in one as such as funding, but don’t have a team with the skills or the commitment to innovation then you won’t get far. The same is true if it’s reversed. One simply can’t work without the other and they have to work together.

The only answer is get every management position on board to take a systematic approach to each area. Make not to see what needs to be worked on and how it can better work with areas within the innovation framework.