

5 KEYS TO INSTILLING INNOVATION AND CREATIVITY IN YOUR ORGANIZATION

by James Feldman

Creative ideas are what turn ordinary companies into market leaders. These companies see the end result first and then build a path to achieve those results.

Unfortunately, in most companies today, neither creativity nor innovation exists. The corporate environment fails to foster creative or innovative ideas, which results in lost profits and opportunities every day.

However, creativity and innovation are key elements that propel businesses to the top. Without either, your company comes in second at best, and no one remembers number two.

While being number one certainly doesn't guarantee continued success, it is definitely better than being forgotten.

Answer these four questions to learn if your company lacks creativity and innovation:

- Are your profits stagnant or slowly rising at best?
- Are your customers satisfied, but not very loyal?
- Do your employees lack the enthusiasm to think of new ideas?
- Are you selling the same products and services as you were five years ago?

Any answer of "yes" indicates that your business may not be around for the long-term.

To revitalize your organization and keep it from extinction, follow these five guidelines:

1. Foster A Business Climate That's Open To Innovation And Creativity

Innovation is the ability to come up with ideas and solutions to pressing problems. It is the process of producing something that;

1. Has value, and
2. Did not exist before.

Creativity is the ability to take that new idea and make it valuable in your customers' eyes.

Realize that every problem has a solution, although the solution may not be in plain sight. To make the solution more apparent, remove "standard operating procedures" whenever possible and inspire creative thinking throughout the organization.

Use novel approaches, strive for dramatic results, and reach for the highest goal possible. Reward business associates for finding the "innovative solution" and for "thinking creatively."

As you encourage your people to display innovation and creativity, be prepared for mistakes. Acknowledge the mistakes, learn from them, and then try again.

When people know that mistakes are part of the process, they'll be more open to take risks and think in new directions. Remember, failure and innovation are related.

Success only comes when you learn from failure.

2. Become Number One With Your Clients

The more satisfied your clients are, the more business you'll have in the future. Realize that the only commodity your clients know is you.

Since you are the catalyst providing the solution to their problem, you are accountable for fulfilling their needs. As a result, you need to invest time in keeping the channels of communication open.

When communicating, be sure to listen more than you talk. Ask questions that solicit more than a "yes" or "no" response, and then truly listen to clients' responses.

Understand their needs, and then provide a solution that works. Also, thank your clients for their business on a regular basis. A simple "Thank you. Are you happy with the products or service?" works wonders.

The ability to communicate effectively could be the greatest innovation you have in your organization, as it's something few people have mastered.

3. Create A Partnership With Your Clients

All business transactions are based on someone delivering a promise to fulfill a specific desire or need. Companies that spend millions of dollars promoting their products or services only to make the client wait on hold or have to redial numerous times to lodge complaints erode the partnership.

To create a true partnership with clients, become a problem solver. Clients like when the companies they work with function as thinkers. Become your clients' best solution and they'll stay with you for the long-term.

Show your clients how they will look better, feel better, do their job better, or enjoy life better. Show them how you can save them money or time. Make the experience one in which clients realize their lives would be better with your product or service.

4. Create A Partnership With Your Employees

Asking people to be creative and then shooting down their ideas creates a rift in your organization. Instead, show people that bringing their imagination on the journey is welcome.

Information wealth flows directly from innovation, not optimization. Wealth, of any kind, is not gained by perfecting the known, but by seizing the unknown.

Therefore, we must all become successive producers of ideas, concepts, and innovations. We must try them out to see if they work; if not, we will lose out to our competitors.

Remember that the more offbeat, the more diverse, the more eccentric, and the more unusual, the better we learn and the more we retain.

So allow so-called "mavericks" and their ideas into your organization, as they will likely offer a new perspective to the same old routine.

Partner with these people, as we all need to stretch ourselves and innovate in everything we do. As you examine their dramatic and new approaches, remove constraints, limitations, and regimens.

Listen to your employees as you would your clients. Their insights will likely make your company better at what it does.

5. Implement Next-Generation Approaches

Doing any form of business is a form of innovation. The quest for knowledge opens the door to opportunity and helps us understand each other and provide what is best for each of us, personally and professionally.

To succeed at this level, your company must support innovation and creativity. Doing so will free your employees from the "we always did it this way" syndrome.

Constantly redesign your company's rules to be flexible and to show that you, as a company, value worthy ideas, no matter what the source. Only then will you increase your profit potential and become a memorable market leader that delivers results.

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