

Rousing creative junkies - Continuation of “Hard wired”

Five ways to spark serial innovation in the workplace

Most companies don't realize that they are deterring innovation from happening in the workplace. Just look around. Is your company setting an atmosphere that says “let's get creative!” or a place that is suffocating, lethargic and starving for imagination? The real driver's for engagement begins at the top. Ultimately, it's the CEO and senior executive staff who should be nurturing employee engagement and innovation. It is our knowledge and ability to shape materials and information in new ways that are valued and utilized by our customers.

Gone are the days of stale or sterile office suites, departments that are behind closed doors and no place to have off the cuff one-on-one chats. At Epiphany Consulting we look for the potential value in employees and orchestrate models to bring out the genius in organizations. We look at what an organization does best, their values, brand promise, and their culture. To create an innovative environment, begin by laying out an atmosphere that promotes space to draw crafty ideas. This has been the norm in the Silicon Valley, where random meetings occur and thoughts are shared “on the fly.” This lends well for those who are motivated by spontaneity. Think about it, people like Steve Jobs and Bill Gates and other creative sorts have used this method for achieving and launching successful ideas for decades. Sometimes you just need to be brave enough to throw pasta at the wall and see what sticks. No risk, no reward.

Working with clients I see mounds of goals and initiatives streaming down the company pipeline. If there are specific areas that the company is looking to develop, improve, or get an upper hand on over the competition, then this is a great opportunity to get departments and employees chatting. Form a team of creative thinkers specific to the goal and allow the brainstorming and creative process to unfold.

Below are five ways to spark innovation

1. **Communicate** - It starts from the interview or the first conversation I have with a new employee about the opportunities we have to make a difference at Epiphany Consulting and with our clients. Communication should be consistent and ongoing reinforcing employees to think outside the box.
2. **Encourage and engage** – If you're in a management or executive position and empowered to create programs, promotions, or a position to get buy-in from the beginning will get more favorable responses from staff and make you the “cream of the crop manager.” Also, ask for their help let them know you can't come up with all the ideas yourself. Include them in the creative process and decisions early on. Leaders that surround themselves with creative people have the resources to cultivate out-of-the-box ideas and keeps a constant stream of innovation flowing. For example, during team meetings if you're discussion projects, program ideas, or customer comments ask your staff for insight and feedback. Make sure your promoting an atmosphere that makes all members feel safe to share thoughts. The quickest way to squash creativity is to make someone feel they are being criticized or judged by you or their team mates.

“Be consistent, eventually employees will reach out to you with ideas. When they come with an idea, they come with excitement. I respond acknowledging the excitement and ask them to put together a presentation that includes their idea, how it will work, the expectations, how it will increase production, what lift they expect from it and how to measure the results.” Says Suzanne Estela, AVP of SAFE Credit Union.

By encouraging your team to work together and come up with the above information, you will ensure everyone is in an agreement of what is being presented. Look for ways to create a niche. If it's a product or a new process to improve service, or maybe even a promotion between departments, it's an ongoing topic so it creates an expectation that your organization is always looking for ways to improve.

3. **Follow up** – To ensure the ideas keep flowing and the company is generating positive work habits make sure when recent thoughts are shared by staff and are not used circle back with the employee letting them know why. If it doesn't fit in with the plan or make sense, let them know it was a good try. The reason, you want to encourage more enthusiasm not squash it!
4. **Don't be afraid of new approaches** – we see this often when working with clients. Senior staff, even the CEO can get stuck in a rut. Sometimes the fear of change, a new approach or the risk the company may incur leads executives down the same old path of resistance. Meanwhile, it leaves staff yearning for change and improved leadership.
5. **Listen** – Refrain from immediately sharing your insight or thoughts. Wait and let the silence sit to allow staff to come up with ideas, thoughts, and an action plan. Also ask probing questions to spur conversation and creativity. The quickest way to squash someone's idea and take the wind out of their sails is to override their genius. Even if you're the CEO and one who prides themselves on knowing it all; STOP. Allow room for others to grow and gain experience by experimenting with their ideas. Just listen and you just might learn something new and see the potential value that exists within the organization.

For more information on innovation and our approaches for sparking creative junkies contact us at 916-248-9756 or laura@epiphanycoaching.net