

Empowering a Creative Team

Creativity and innovation begin with the right creative team. Depending on your needs, you may be applying creativity principles to an existing team or department or forming a team specifically for the innovation you have in mind. In either case, the following strategies and tools will help create a cultural environment in which a creative team will thrive.

SUPPORT YOUR TEAM

Create a positive work environment: Stressful, overworked, and depressing work environments will kill creativity and motivation. All psychological studies on creativity have demonstrated that positive mood is essential for creativity and innovation. How can you reduce stress and boost creativity in the workplace?

Allow autonomy: One of the best things you can do is to empower people to make decisions and take responsibility. In what ways can you bottle necks and red tape when individuals need to make smaller-scale changes?

Allocate time for creative projects: If an employee has a great idea, allow them to set aside 10-20% of their workweek to work on it. Always keep in mind that creativity often requires getting into a focused state of flow, which takes time. How could you adjust current expectations and policies in order to allow employees who are working on creative projects to be able to block out time, ideally hours at a time, in which they will not be interrupted?

Grant flexible work hours: Having flexible hours is about meeting people's different rhythm. Creativity and innovation may not fit within a 9 to 5 schedule. Some people may benefit from long lunches to get their mind to relax so that they can be more productive when they are in the office. It's common in tech industries for much of their designers' creative work to happen after hours. Having flexible hours will also attract a talent pool that tends to be more creative. Are there any policy changes you could implement in this area?

The importance of input: Even before you ask your team for their ideas, make sure you give them ample time to absorb information. Creativity requires a base of knowledge to pull from. This includes using experiences, so encourage exposure to new things. What could you do to help your employees have greater exposure to new ideas and experiences or to learn in other ways?

FACILITATE CREATIVE MEETINGS

Meet in unusual places: Hold the occasional meeting off site: at a park, over breakfast, or on someone's patio. What are some ideas for how you could change things up?

Role-playing: Role-playing helps you take on your customer's point of view and can lead to helpful ideas. Ask questions such as: Why would someone want this product or service? What are they looking for? In what ways could role-playing be used in your organization or team to help develop a better understanding?

Provocation techniques: Provocation is a process where you intentionally reject a truism to help stimulate creative thought. For instance, you may pose the premise that getting rid of all of your business's computers will improve productivity. While you have no intention of getting rid of your computer systems, the concept may help stimulate thinking and generate ideas to improve productivity and re-examine your current processes. What assumptions could you remove from a scenario in order to inspire your team to generate ideas that aren't limited by this assumption?

Think like a kid: Albert Einstein once said: “To stimulate creativity, one must develop the childlike inclination for play.” Kids are naturally curious and open-minded, and definitely more creative than adults. They spend most of their time in imaginative worlds, and what other people think doesn’t matter to them. Kids don’t care about being wrong, but being penalized for errors at school and later at work eventually trains most adults to avoid errors, and therefore creativity.

In what ways can you encourage childlike thinking, open-mindedness, or play?

INSPIRE A CREATIVE WORK ENVIRONMENT

Write down your thoughts on the following ideas for inspiring creativity in the workplace:

Offer employees training on creative thinking, design thinking, and brainstorming.

Create a company-wide, internal repository of ideas.

Inject more fun and humor into your workplace culture. Humor is one of the biggest catalysts for creative thinking! (Ha + Ha = AHA!)

Create mentorship programs that encourage newer employees to participate in the creative process.

Create “mastermind” brainstorming teams made up of your most creative thinkers, who meet regularly.

Start a club that meets once a month to discuss current hot topics related to technology, innovation, and your industry.

Create sabbatical programs that allow employees to take an extended leave every five years.

Take your team on field trips to stimulate inspiration and disconnect, such as a historic tour of your city, a tour of a vendor or collaborative partner's business, or a trip to a museum.

Encourage cross-departmental mingling, such as employees taking colleagues they don't know out to lunch.

Hold regular challenges, such as an "Idea Challenge of the Month" that encourages employees to tackle specific problem areas.