

## **Rewarding Creativity and Risk Taking**

Innovative companies are successful not only because they create time and space to nurture creativity but also because they encourage creativity and risk taking. Think about it, any new idea or implementation of change creates risk. Plus, many people feel sharing their ideas is risky because they fear being turned down, which is what happens in many corporate cultures.

So, when employees do not feel supported to take risks, the company becomes stagnant as employees continue to do what they know works or what has always been done. However, this can be detrimental because what works today may not work tomorrow. In a changing world, doing things the way they've always been done without looking to the future can be a company's demise.

For example, one of the reasons Google is so notoriously successful is because they encourage risk-taking behavior within their controlled environment. They even mandate that their employees spend a certain percentage of their time working on their own creative side projects.

The best way to encourage employees to think outside of the box is to create an environment that rewards that behavior. Make sure it's clear to all levels of management that any and all suggestions or observations for improvement are to be acknowledged and taken seriously. Too often, managers feel threatened by employees' suggestions for improvement and so ideas are blown off or even reprimanded. This leads to the employee losing motivation to make creative suggestions, as they will not feel it is ever going to go anywhere. An atmosphere of encouraging improvement needs to be implemented at all levels within an organization.

Keep in mind that rewards do not have to be monetary. Studies show that recognition can be more motivational than a monetary reward. Rewards should also be given publicly so that people can see that this type of behavior is appreciated and rewarded. Simple ways you can reward employees for creativity and risk taking include:

- Announcing the winner or idea in a newsletter, email, or meeting
- Special parking space for a time period
- An award
- Title
- Gift cards
- Special lunch
- Extra time off

What other ideas may work for your company?

You can also make it fun by gamifying the process of creativity, such as inviting employees to come up with a way to increase efficiency, allowing them 1 week to turn in one suggestion. Then, have the team or department vote on the best idea and award a prize to the winner. Allowing all participants to give input on which idea is best creates buy in. Keep in mind that it is equally as important to recognize the other ideas that may not be implemented or put into action. The goal is for people to feel that there is a benefit to giving suggestions and thinking of created ways to help the company.

In what ways could you gamify creativity or in another way encourage it?

It's also important to support smart failures. Whenever risks are taken, it is natural to have failures. Therefore, make sure that you let employees know that you support both successful and unsuccessful attempts. More importantly, show it through actions. When a new idea doesn't work as hoped, ask all parties involved what can be learned from the experience and what changes can be made to the idea to improve the outcome. In other words, unsuccessful attempts should never be frowned upon or approach with a negative perspective.

In what way can you ensure that all contributors of ideas and creativity are honored for their contribution, even if their ideas are not used or their attempts are unsuccessful?