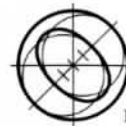One aspect of "putting it all together" is knowing when to interrupt the process to "go live" with the current version of your new creation. We reach that point in every project. Sometimes multiple times. It's the time to cut and run. You can only brainstorm and prototype for so long.

Here's a simple drill that can help you to make the right decision—not just deep into a project, but right at the outset. Try turning your most feared deadline into a trusted friend. We try to work the deadline like 49ers quarterback Joe Montana used to work the two-minute clock. When we're at our best, that's how we approach the whole game. Nearly every product can be made incrementally better, including the one you've just finished. As we often say, that's why God invented clients—and bosses. Clients and bosses have budgets and schedules that bind the prototyping process. They're like the school-teacher in the movie *Six Degrees of Separation* who says that the secret to getting great art from second graders is knowing when to take the paper away from them.

Success at innovation is like putting together the perfect golf swing. Back when I still attempted to play that challenging game, a golf instructor told me that there were just seventeen things to get right during the swing. Each one is pathetically easy: Can I keep my head down? Absolutely. Left arm straight? Can do. Knees slightly bent? C'mon, you're insulting my intelligence. They're *all* simple. The hard part is putting all seventeen together in real time (a lot harder than, say, patting your head and rubbing your stomach at the same time) and then doing it consistently several dozen times in a row out on the course. In my case, *many* dozen times.

Some of what we advocate is obvious, simple, and almost free. Stencil the brainstorming rules on your conference room walls and call a bunch of brainstormers to inaugurate the newly invigorated space. Buy

a few cases of giant Post-it easel pads and use them as freely as if they were little Post-its.

Tear up your "casual Friday" policy and adopt an "anything goes" approach, reminding people to use their good judgment when they know clients will be around. Double your budget for printed T-shirts. Or sweatshirts. Or messenger bags. If it's currently zero, of course, you have to more than double it, but you know what I mean. And then don't look too hard at what gets printed on the team-identifying apparel.

Try some homemade end-of-project awards, as a peer-oriented way to celebrate and recognize team contributions.

Publicly acknowledge a risk taker, a rule breaker, even a failure, and explain why every successful organization needs them. Hold an open house—internal at first—for staff members and project leaders to show off their work in process, as a way to motivate teams and encourage cross-pollination.

GIVE AND TAKE

Many aspects of reenergizing the culture are more subtle and built into tacit work practices. Here's an example of what I mean:

Your boss (or your client) gives you a month to come up with an important "deliverable," a piece of software, a report, a presentation, a product, or an ad campaign. We believe there are two dramatically different approaches to such an assignment. The first is to spend your month making the "perfect" version of the deliverable, polishing until it shines. Then, at the end of the month, you have the meeting with the Big Boss in which you—literally or figuratively—pull off the black velvet cloth and say "voilà." Well, if your boss throws up all over the thing, you're in trouble. Ego damage, for sure. Maybe even status and career damage, depending on your boss.

The second approach to that same one-month challenge is to burn the whole first week cranking out four or five really crude outlines or prototypes. The high-tech one. The playful one. The low-cost model. The pure-digital version. Then you squeeze in a ten-minute meeting at the end of the week with the Big Boss. Even in the unlikely possibility that she hates *all five* of your ideas, you're going to learn a lot as she tells you what's wrong with them, and you've now got three weeks to make the sixth one really sing.

Chances are, she'll pick elements from two or more of the prototypes, and you'll be able to combine the best of each in your final version. Even so, whatever criticism you get in week one doesn't sting much. After all, it's not your finished work, and you haven't put too much ego (or career risk) into any of the alternatives.

If you take this message to heart, you'll have to start training your boss, getting him or her accustomed to the idea that you'll be back around, long before the deadline, to get solid feedback. Try an up-front deadline compromise like "May 30 is great, if you'll let me have ten minutes with you on May 7 to make sure I'm on course."

As long as you negotiate it up front, it's such a reasonable request that who could say no? And if *you* are the manager or executive we're talking about, even better. All you have to do is hold your tongue and keep your criticism focused on the objective. What I mean is developing an attitude in which everyone around you understands it's OK to show you rough prototypes. No making fun of the workmanship or materials. No fussing over typos, no critiquing the fit and finish of a prototype. *It's just a prototype, after all.* Learn to restrain from issuing these little barbs, and you'll see more good work sooner, get a chance to redirect projects headed off into the weeds, and end up with better final results.

HITTING THE PRACTICE RANGE

Over the years we've come up with some valuable innovation practice tips. Try jotting these down in your own words and posting them around your workplace. Most of all, practice them whenever you can.

- Watch customers—and noncustomers—especially enthusiasts.
- Play with your physical workplace in a way that sends positive "body language" to employees and visitors.
- Think "verbs," not "nouns," in your product and service offerings so that you create wonderful experiences for everyone who comes into contact with your company or brand.
- Break rules and "fail forward" so that change is part of the culture, and little setbacks are expected.
- Stay human, scaling your organizational environment so that there's room for hot groups to emerge and thrive.
- Build bridges from one department to another, from your company to your prospective customers, and ultimately from the present to the future.

ADOPTING AND ADAPTING

It's time to get out there and give it a whack.

Building a culture of innovation is as simple—and as hard—as sifting through the ideas in this book and adopting (or adapting) the ones that fit your situation. Most of IDEO's examples come from the tangible world of products, but we have already proven to our clients that we can adapt those same approaches to everything from shopping for your first home to on-line banking or taking a ride on a high-speed train.

Try it yourself. Innovation isn't about perfection. You've got to shank a few before your swing smooths out. Get out there and observe the market, your customers and products. Brainstorm like crazy and prototype in bursts.

You know the drill. The next time you're knee deep in a challenging project, don't forget the true spirit of innovation.

That's right. Have some serious fun.

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