

Cultivating an Innovation Mindset — Actively Pursuing Innovation

At this point, most businesses are keenly aware that it is imperative to their survival, in a competitive business world, to actively pursue innovation and cultivating an innovation mindset within their organization. The real challenge becomes how to create a culture of innovation where individuals, and the team as a whole, are motivated and inspired to drive the company forward. Some companies make the mistake of assuming innovation comes from the top-down, and that leadership can simply dictate that innovation is a priority and then expect results.

In truth, cultivating an innovation mindset begins with the individual and happens over time. With each new idea that is encouraged and nurtured, or with each unlikely collaboration that yields positive results, the capacity for innovation grows within the individual and the company organically creates more space for innovation to happen. **You cannot grow a culture of innovation without the initial spark from that first innovator who is willing to go out on a limb.** If you want to cultivate an innovation mindset, you have to start with yourself and focus on the individual.

Innovation Happens from the Inside-Out

Make no mistake about it: innovation happens from the inside out. As a leader within the company, all you can do is provide individuals with the tools necessary to be successful and allow them to be their best. With that being said, the idea of creating a culture of innovation can still feel abstract and intangible. Individuals are left wondering how they can tap into their own creativity and foster innovation. Ultimately, while innovation comes down to the individual, some of the burden does fall on the organization. Leadership must look around and examine whether they have created a safe environment where employees feel empowered to innovate. If they feel stifled by a hierarchy, they won't go beyond the bare minimum of what is listed on their job description for fear of stepping out of bounds. Essentially, employees need permission to innovate. They need to know that not every idea has to be a homerun and that it is okay to strike out — sometimes in the pursuit of something bigger and better. Failure should be an acknowledged and welcomed part of the process. When people are given the freedom to fail, they are more likely to aim for the fences.

The Power of Self-Motivation

Whether you are an athlete, an entrepreneur or an inventor, the most powerful force that propels people towards success is self-motivation. As you probably know firsthand, when you set goals based on your understanding of other people's expectations, you tend to lose motivation and fall short. External motivation tends to lose steam quickly.

In a company setting, traditional goal setting might not be enough to motivate individuals for an innovation mindset. Instead, you need to rethink KPIs and your reward system. While offering incentives might provide employees with temporary motivation, it won't help foster a culture of innovation that has staying power. The best way to go from a one-time incentive to actually changing the way your company operates is to use

gamification and ideation software to transform projects. Gamification inherently involves built-in rewards so that employees receive encouragement as they move through the project or innovation process. This positive feedback spurs internal motivation and keeps them pushing forward even when a failed attempt might put them back at square one.

How to Nurture and Grow Your Team

As your company and your team evolves, so will your approach to innovation. Maintaining self-motivation and continuing to get the best out of each individual innovator will require constant evaluation. Even if you are successfully churning out projects, you always want to build in the time to reflect on the results. This will allow employees to go beyond acquiring new skills and actually create wisdom that can be carried forward into future projects. As you work on developing an innovation program, think about whether it allows your innovators to answer the following questions:

How am I being a leader right now?
How am I using my genius?
How am I tapping into my multiple intelligence?
How am I collaborating right now?
How am I striving for wisdom?
How am I creating progress?

When you create an environment where employees are encouraged to ask these questions and free to adapt their behaviour according to their answers, then you will begin to reap the rewards of an innovative culture.