

Small Things that will Increase Innovation in Your Company the Most

written by Lauri Moon | July 5, 2016

(Innovation Excellence — Yoram Solomon: 6-13-16) Last month I delivered my “un-kill innovation” executive workshop to an executive team of a Fortune 500 technology company in Florida. It was a great experience all around, but at the end I was asked for the key takeaways, and I narrowed them down to the following.

There are three key things that will increase innovation in your company the most.

They are small things. They have no investment or budget associated with them. They don't require you to roll out new processes or infrastructure. They don't need company-wide training. All they need is a change of attitude — *yours*.

Accept that you are not driving (or even fostering) innovation. You are *allowing* innovation.

Your employees already know how important innovation is. They know it's good. You don't have to tell them that. All they need is the *autonomy* to do it. Innovation is like the sport of curling than golf. It is not the driving of the stone that gets it there—it's the swiping and altering the state of the ice in front of it that allows the stone to reach its destination. And you can only make small adjustments. You can't drive large ones.

Ask yourself: how do I react when one of my employees tells me that he (or she) tried something I didn't authorize and failed?

If you react severely, and let them know that there will be consequences for trying unauthorized things—they will never do it again. But here is the thing—you know who never fails? Only those who never try. Accept that there will be trial and error on the way to success.

Let your employees try, and help them get on their feet again after they fail. This will give them the autonomy and creative freedom to try again. When your toddler starts walking, soon thereafter they start running. Very quickly they fall. What is the first thing they do after they fall? No, the first thing is not crying. The first thing is **looking at you** to see your reaction. Your reaction will tell them whether they should cry, or get up and keep going. If you yell “oh, no!” or react in horror—they will cry. But if you yell “come on! keep going!” they will get up and keep going.

When an employee comes to you with an idea, avoid “I’ll be the judge of that” or “I’ll know it when I see it.” Replace these reactions with “Let me tell you what will make me say yes.”

One of the most powerful factors affecting creativity (and thus innovation) is sharing the “big picture.” If you share the big picture with your employees and let them know what will make you approve a product idea (and the budget and other resources they are looking for)—you are forcing **them** to consider all aspects of their idea, and not just throw it over the fence to you for approval. You also **reduce** your workload (what a concept...), empower your employees, increase the probability that ideas are well vetted (your employees are in the front line of technology and customers, and are better positioned to assess the viability of their idea. I’m sorry to say, but you are highly disqualified to vet an idea from your position...)

Do those three things and you are guaranteed to increase the level of innovation in your company by orders of magnitude. As one of the participants in my workshop last week said: it will be transformative to the organization. Try it!

(Dr. Yoram Solomon is an inventor, a creativity researcher, coach, consultant, and trainer to large companies and their employees ... is active in regional innovation and technology commercialization ... and is a speaker and author on predicting the technology future and identifying opportunities for market disruption.)