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Innovate to Move Beyond Lessons Learned See page 4

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AMA RESEARCH

Innovate to Move Beyond Lessons Learned

AMA's recent global study revealed how organizations can maximize their innovation potential.

Page 4

16 Managers Must Play a Role to Negotiate an Organization's Innovation

20 The Role of Psychological Safety in Innovation

FEATURES

Good Culture Truly the Key to Achieving Innovation

Have you ever been at a job where you were afraid to speak up, and the culture grated on you so badly you could not bring yourself to do more than the minimum to get through the day? Additionally, it was not only you who felt this way—your co-workers had the same opinions.

You're probably not at the same workplace now, but cast back your memory to that time. I bet all of the ideas came from the top down, failure was never an option, things were done in the same way they had always been done, and trying to make changes was discouraged.

If you looked up your old company, is it still in business? The likelihood is, it probably is not—unless there was a serious change in corporate culture and an embrace of innovation.

This issue of *AMA Quarterly* looks at the links between building a strong corporate culture and how it can encourage innovation, particularly in light of a crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic.

AMA's featured research looks at how fostering innovation will yield the ideas that will sustain organizations in the future. "We can't possibly imagine and prepare for every potential calamity ahead, but we can enhance our readiness to react to new challenges with new ideas and a willingness and determination to implement them," writes Mark Marone, AMA's director of research.

Nick Holmes looks at the concept of psychological safety and how it supports innovation. "Businesses that create a favorable climate for innovation, support innovation at every opportunity, and welcome ideas from all employees do much better at innovation than those who do not prioritize it," he writes.

What is a common thread for successful managers? Often it's having a relationship with a mentor and becoming a mentor. Ruth Gotian and Morag Barrett argue that in order to be truly successful, you can't just have one mentor—you need a team of mentors.

Even if you don't consider yourself to be innovative, you as a leader can develop the skills to think with more flexibility and agility. AMA has the courses you can count on.

Christiane Truelove
Guest Editor, *AMA Quarterly*

Innovation as a Growth Strategy

Why maximizing employees' innovation potential should be a top priority

There's a common concern among many successful executives these days. It's a sense that something is coming up behind them—and it isn't paranoia. It's the constant threat that a competitor's innovative move could jeopardize their own organization's future.

In typical years, roughly 7% of U.S. businesses fail, and it's not exclusively small mom-and-pop businesses. Corporate life expectancies are declining, and competitive forces are picking up speed. Innovation seems to have found a whole new gear.

Of course, in the technology industry, it's always been about innovation: the race to develop the next-generation mobile phone, perfect virtual reality, or launch commercial space travel. But even with traditional services and more enduring products, innovations in delivery, customer experience, and business processes are shaking up the standings. Leaders everywhere are hoping not to be caught out.

AMA recently conducted a global study of nearly 6,000 employees across 11 countries to learn more about the current state of innovation and what innovative companies do differently.

One of the key findings from our survey is that nearly 40% of respondents said they had a good idea to improve something at work that they did not bother sharing. I believe that represents a significant missed opportunity.

If the acceleration of innovation—both incremental and radical—continues, winners will be determined by which organizations become skilled innovators. Yet fewer than one in five respondents in our study characterized their company as highly innovative.

The good news is that our findings offer clear indications as to what leaders can do to encourage and support the creative and innovative efforts that can help organizations survive. Our study found that factors such as having a compelling and well-communicated purpose, positive attitudes toward change and risk, and a commitment to learning were fundamental to employees' willingness and ability to engage in innovative work behaviors. But these innovation fundamentals alone aren't enough.

Research also shows that people are more inclined to consistently innovate when they feel motivated by the importance of their work and are continually adding to the knowledge and skills that can enable the generation of new ideas. Equally important is their belief that their managers are receptive to developing, championing, and implementing those ideas. Again, our survey suggests room for improvement, with only 26% strongly agreeing that their managers encourage them to come forward with new ideas and even fewer seeing innovation as part of their job.

To maximize an organization's innovative potential, everyone needs to see innovation as a legitimate part of their work, and nurturing it needs to become a core competency for the entire management team. We've dedicated this issue to the exploration of ways to do just that.

Manny Avramidis
President and CEO
American Management Association

Innovate to Move Beyond Lessons Learned

BY MARK MARONE

AMA's recent global study revealed how organizations can maximize their innovation potential. Leaders around the world are obsessing about how to use lessons learned during the COVID-19 pandemic to prepare for the next global pandemic, and the issues another will create for their organizations. In doing so, though, they may be in danger of missing the main point. If anything, the turmoil we've just been through reminds us that it is the very nature of unexpected events to surface difficult problems that are tough to anticipate. That means applying lessons learned, while still a great best practice in general, isn't going to be the solution. What got organizations through this crisis isn't likely to be what will get them through the next one.

Instead, it is innovation—the creation and execution of new and valuable processes, services, or products—that has been the key to business survival. We've witnessed innovations in delivery methods, workflows, business models, and much more. Almost anything you can name can be, will be, or has been subject to innovation. Preparing people to solve problems with innovative thinking and innovative work behaviors is the key to overcoming future challenges we've yet to even imagine—but that we know are coming.

The good news is that developing the capacity to innovate doesn't result in a plan that sits on a shelf awaiting the next crisis. It's an investment that can yield returns immediately and pay regular dividends.

Innovation Skills: A Shortage Compounded by Missed Opportunities

In fact, not long before the pandemic began, a PwC survey identified innovation as the top priority for most CEOs. At that time, 77% of them said that they struggled to find employees with creativity and innovation skills. The problem has only worsened: One of the features of the Great Resignation has been entrepreneurial employees with big ideas leaving their employers to start a record-breaking number of new businesses/start-ups.

But perhaps a scarcity of innovative employees isn't the only issue. Could organizations be overlooking the opportunity to better foster the creative, innovative thinking of the employees they do have? Some think so. In a recent survey of nearly 6,000 employees across 11 countries conducted by AMA, nearly 4 in 10 reported they've had an idea to improve something at work that they didn't even bother to share. That number rises to more than half (53%) of those who consider themselves to be in a minority group at work. Clearly, many organizations are missing out on the innovative potential of a significant percentage of their workforce.

What It Takes to Maximize Innovation

Maximizing innovation takes more than hiring talented people and hoping for the best—though having the right people is essential. There is a science to driving innovative work behaviors. Research shows that while organizational support for innovation is crucial, it is strong

> In a recent survey, conducted by AMA, of nearly **6,000 employees across 11 countries,** nearly **4 in 10 reported** they've had an idea to improve something at work **that they didn't even bother to share.**

managerial support of innovation that has a direct and significant impact on whether people consistently engage in the innovative behaviors that lead to innovations, both big and small. From idea generation to development, championing to implementation, the success of a new idea requires supportive managers, yet a significant number of managers haven't embraced that role.

In the AMA survey, only a quarter of managers strongly agreed that innovation is part of their job. The employee perspective confirms it: Just 26% strongly agreed that their managers encourage them to come forward with new ideas. Worse, a significant number of those who admitted to withholding their innovative ideas said they did so because their managers discourage them from trying to change things in their organization. In sharp contrast, other managers not only create an environment that welcomes new ideas but take measures to support their development and advancement.

Employees who say they bring their ideas forward without hesitation are far more likely to report that their managers consistently act in ways that encourage

Just 26% strongly agreed that their managers encourage them to come forward with new ideas.
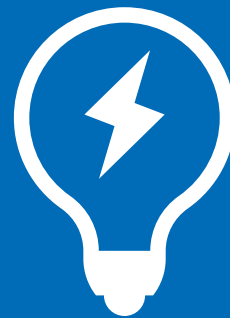
innovative behaviors, including:
- Providing access to learning opportunities that expand the expertise and knowledge of their people
- Creating a psychologically safe team environment where everyone feels a sense of belonging
- Demonstrating an ability to win support for new ideas outside the department
- Showing a willingness to implement new ideas with speed
- Recognizing efforts to be innovative, regardless of the outcome

We can't possibly imagine and prepare for every potential calamity ahead, but we can enhance our readiness to react to new challenges with new ideas

and a willingness and determination to implement them. At a high level, that is exactly what made all the difference for many businesses over the past two years. With today's intense competition for innovative thinkers, developing managers' capacity to encourage the innovative potential of their current teams only makes sense as a complementary strategy to help fill the void. Smart leaders will recognize this opportunity to balance investments in solutions to solve today's problems and in preparing their people to solve tomorrow's. AQ

Mark Marone, PhD, is AMA's director of research and thought leadership.

Common-Sense Wisdom:

A Trusted Companion for Your Life and Career Journey

by Pepper de Callier

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Pepper de Callier

Quotes That Can Change Lives

AMA's international affiliate, Management Centre Europe (MCE), spoke with Pepper de Callier, a top corporate leadership expert, about his most recent book, *Common Sense Wisdom: A Trusted Companion for Your Life and Career Journey* (Barbreck, 2021). The book contains quotes drawn from the world's greatest writers, thinkers, and leaders from across the ages, and is illuminated by de Callier's insights as one of Europe's preeminent career and life coaches.

Pepper, many would say that you have had an amazing career yourself. Starting out as someone who didn't finish high school, became a barber, went on to graduate university, became a U.S. partner in what was at the time, according to the *Wall Street Journal,* the most respected executive search firm globally, Heidrick & Struggles, retiring and moving to Europe at 55 and becoming a senior advisor to one of the most respected former heads of state in the world, Václav Havel, founding the Prague Leadership Institute, and founding the Central European branch of one of the most admired think tanks in the world, Aspen Institute. In addition to which you were named Top Corporate Leadership Coach—Europe. Do you cover any of this in your new book?

Pepper de Callier: No. As I hope we will discuss in this interview, this book is not about me. It's about all of us who are facing the obvious challenges of not only the pandemic, but the stress of the 21st century. It's also about those of us who, as we have been building our careers, our brands as professionals, and our companies, may have experienced setbacks, loss of motivation, or are experiencing some sort of life transition, in which one

looks for understanding, guidance, and sound advice, not only to understand the past but to bring things into balance and chart a course into the future.

What was your inspiration for writing this book?

Pepper de Callier: I have been thinking about this book for many years. Through my own career and life struggles and from coaching people around the world for more than 40 years, I have witnessed the power of attitude, perspective, and context and how they could ruin a life and career, or how they could create the resilience and creativity to overcome the setbacks and stress we all experience in our normal, everyday lives. I saw, firsthand, how the uncertainty and pace of the 21st century was taking its toll on people. That was difficult enough, but then our lives were changed forever. The pandemic came. That is when I knew I had to write this book, not just to lift spirits but to help people chart their own satisfying and rewarding course through the chaos we have come to know as the "new normal."

What is the inspiration for the title, *Common Sense Wisdom*?

Pepper de Callier: I was born and raised in the farm country

of the midwestern United States, and common sense was valued very highly. It was something that stood for the truth spoken directly and in simple language that could be widely understood. That is the way I work with those whom I coach, and I think people appreciate this style of communication. The wisdom part comes from sharing what others have taught me over the years as well as the mistakes I have made in my own life.

Your book has a unique style in which you use quotes from over the past 2,000 years to illustrate a point and then follow the quote with your own explanation of how it applies today. What is behind your use of quotes, and how did you select the ones you use in the book?

Pepper de Callier: A good quote is unforgettable. It resonates immediately and it causes one to think, to reflect, and possibly to develop a new perspective or reinforce something you knew to be true. Over the years, I have found that a good quote is quite often more valuable than an entire book.

I didn't select them; I guess you could say they selected me in a way. The quotes I have used in the book are quotes that I heard from people whom I was interviewing for my newspaper column or with whom I was working. These were people who were grounded and serious about adding value—to their companies, families, teams, and themselves. I find that the best quotes come from people who understand the quote through their own life experience and have been an example of its meaning and worth.

What is your personal relationship to this book?

Pepper de Callier: It's deeply personal. For over 50 years I have studied human behavior, especially behavior that led to lives that, while having their ups and downs, were successful and fulfilled. I have been very fortunate to have had some wonderful mentors and coaches over the years who taught me the value of learning from my mistakes. They showed me how to pick myself up after failures and setbacks. They instilled in me the importance of character and integrity for sustained, healthy self-confidence and a personal brand people could trust. Each quote in this book means something to me, and that is what makes sharing them such a meaningful experience—I know how powerful they are.

Is this a career and leadership development book or personal development book?

Pepper de Callier: Thank you for asking that. My publisher asked me that same question! The short answer is both, but let me explain. I have found that the happiest, most productive, and satisfied people are those who have found a balance between their personal and professional lives. What I mean is that there is a genuineness in how they conduct themselves personally as well as professionally. They are not two different people. Their values, respect for others, and approach remain the same, so I would say this book is about identifying and developing balance in one's life as a whole.

Who is your audience for this book? Who is it meant for?

Pepper de Callier: I wrote this book for people who are looking for something better in life—in their career trajectory and personal life experience. People who would rather be the masters than the slaves of their circumstances. It's meant for those who are genuinely interested in the pursuit of their potential personally, as well as professionals.

What can the reader hope to get from this book?

Pepper de Callier: In a word, context. All the knowledge, all the wisdom in the world is meaningless unless you can put it into the context of your life and what it means to you. Context also helps one see not only if something is potentially valuable for them, but if it is, how to use it, when to use it, how much of it to use, and with whom. Context is what illuminates our North Star, what makes our paths clear and gives the journey meaning. That's what I want readers to get from this book.

Do you have a favorite quote?

Pepper de Callier: That's like asking me if I have a favorite child! But here's what I'll do. I'll give you a quote and then I'll give you my take on the quote, which is what I do with all of the quotes in the book—offer my context for today's challenges.

> *"Fear is a reaction. Courage is a decision."*
> **—Winston Churchill**

After more than five decades of collecting quotes, this one, undoubtedly, is among my all-time favorites. Why? Because to me, for a quote to be at its best, it must be an absolute truth; it must come from someone who is credible to speak its words; it must deliver meaningful insights in a most compelling and comprehensible way; and it must be easy to remember, so we can call it to mind at the right time when it can be most helpful.

One of the wonderful things about this quote is that it acknowledges and accepts a basic human reaction—fear. It is telling us it's okay to feel fearful, to be human. But, unlike a reaction to something (fear), courage is a conscious decision—it is a choice. So, to put this into context, whether it's meeting someone, making a presentation, taking an intelligent risk, speaking up for something you believe in, or feeling overwhelmed by the challenges of everyday life, it's okay to react with fear, but what happens next is a decision you consciously choose to make—master or slave? Is there some way you might apply this insight in your life today? AQ

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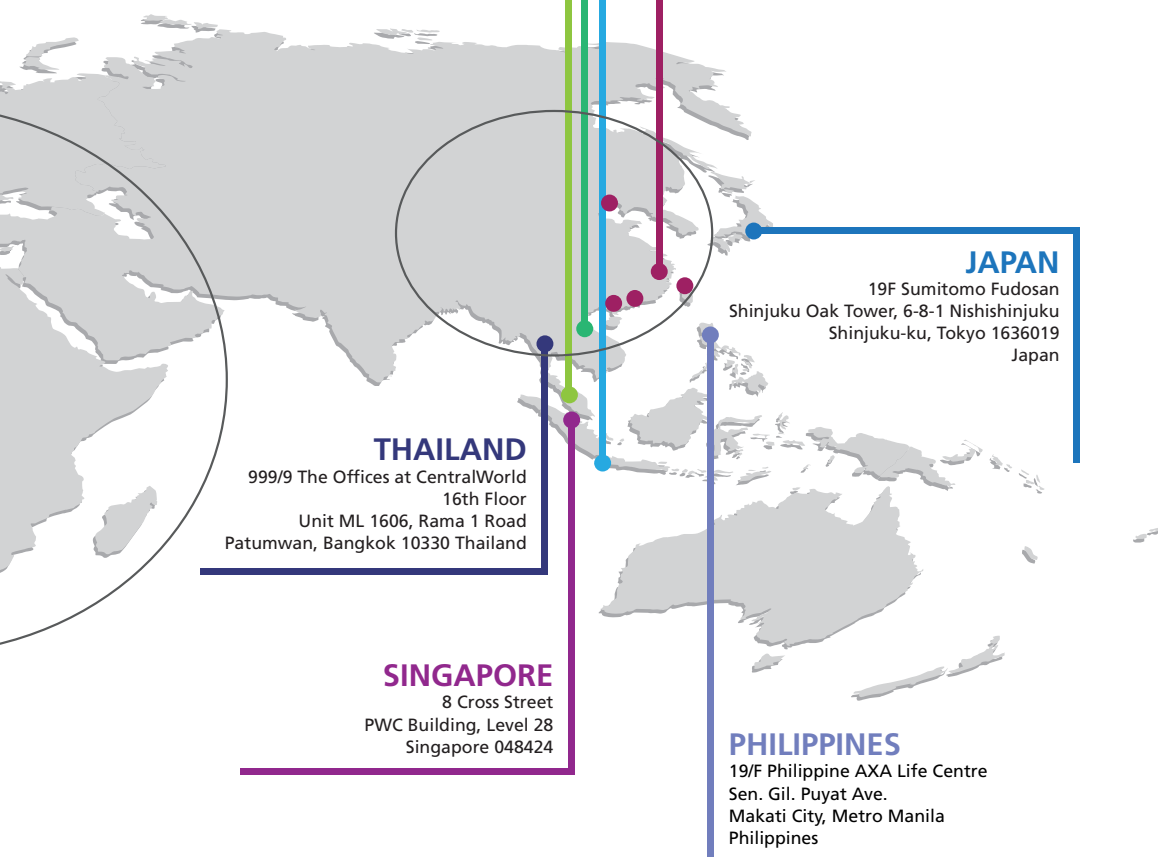
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You Don't Need One Mentor—You Need an ENTIRE TEAM

BY RUTH GOTIAN AND MORAG BARRETT

If we go by the headlines alone, the world of work is a disaster in the making.

Not only are we continuing to feel the impact of the pandemic, but people also are leaving the traditional workforce in droves. The Great Resignation is the current doom-scrolling, click-baity, reality-show headline that is sucking us in and keeping us focused on the symptom rather than providing perspective that inspires new thinking. Maybe a new approach is needed.

There's no doubt that organizations are struggling to fill key positions, from entry-level through to senior executives. As executive coaches, we hear about the frustration and business impact from leaders across the country. The current situation is not viable if we are to maintain a healthy and robust workforce. The sign-up bonuses are not attracting top talent. The fancy breakrooms and free snacks have lost their luster and are not retaining talent. But instead of worrying about the Great Resignation, what if we were to consider this the Great Recalibration? An opportunity for us all to take stock and reimagine the future of work and what would cause us to stay with our organization, be all in, feel connected to our colleagues and teams, and have fun while doing it—whether in person or working at a distance.

The pandemic has had a huge impact on our attitudes about the what, where, and how of work, whether as employers or employees. We're all working in different ways. We've had to adjust to working at the kitchen table, the tension of homeschooling, or our pets disturbing Zoom-Google-Teams-Slack meetings. Frontline workers continue to contend with the eerie commute on empty subway trains, working alongside masked colleagues, and trying to keep six feet apart. If the Great Resignation represents those who have already chosen to leave, beware the many who appear to be staying yet are quietly planning their exit strategy.

One consistent theme we've heard through the last few months is the slow decline in the health of our professional relationships and networks. Endless Zoom meetings that give the illusion of teamwork have turned into a "What are you doing?" project-focused conversation, with little time given to the human side of business and "How we are doing." Research shows that when we feel disconnected from our colleagues, we start to consider new opportunities, wondering if the grass is greener elsewhere.

During a recent coaching session a (female) leader shared the following:

"I'm seriously considering quitting. I feel so burned out. I've cried more days than not and am caught in the middle of everyone's drama. I don't remember the last time someone checked in on me. This has been the toughest year of my life."

It's no secret that people who are mentored outearn and outperform those who are not. Research over many decades has revealed that mentored individuals are more productive, have a higher salary and salary growth, earn more promotions, have greater job and career satisfaction, have higher self-efficacy rates, and have less burnout. While the benefits to the individual are significant, an effective mentoring program helps the organization as well. Mentored employees show

greater loyalty to their institution, take fewer sick days, and are more engaged, making it a win-win for the mentee and the organization.

In our work with leaders and high achievers, we note that money has never been the sole motivating factor for staying with an organization. Certainly, we all wish to get paid for our worth. Money may attract us to pull up a seat at the table and join the team, but there's so much more at play when it comes to retaining talent and choosing to stay at the table. Employees want to know that you see them as adding value, and more important, they wish to get mentorship on how to accelerate their learning and advancement. According to a 2019 study by Olivet Nazarene University, 76% of people think mentors are critical, but only 37% have one.

If maintaining a connection with our immediate colleagues has been tough, then finding and maintaining mentoring relationships has been toughest of all. Perhaps, as we embrace our hybrid world, this is the time to reimagine mentoring as a retention strategy. The time is now to double down on being a mentor and nurturing mentoring relationships, as well as assembling a team that can mentor you in return. It's an opportunity to rekindle the sense of connection before your talented employees choose to disconnect. For all of us, mentorship can unlock motivation and potential. It's one superpower most often overlooked. What could be achieved if you were to assemble the right group of people who will believe in you, more than you believe in yourself?

A MENTOR FOR YOU! AND YOU! A MENTOR FOR EVERYONE!

Before you start assigning mentors or looking for your own mentors, consider that there may be a better way. The new

hybrid workforce might offer opportunities to expand your reach and impact, as a mentor and a mentee. The unfortunate truth is that assigned mentor relationships rarely work. Matching mentors and mentees based on arbitrary factors such as shared alma mater, association, gender, or ethnicity is an approach many programs adopt. It's easy. But just as all people from New Jersey are not alike, it is not fair to think that all people who attended the same college or are the same gender think and learn the same way. At best, assigned mentors are benign. They are fine for a first stop of getting a litany of questions answered, but they're not great for long-term career guidance. At worst, these mentors are unresponsive or try to be a mentor, but without organically connecting with their mentee, this is little motivation to be a great mentor.

A bad mentoring relationship can be akin to the "Elf on the Shelf"—someone who sits apart from your day-to-day environment, may be elusive, who you feel like you have to be professional with at all times, and often causes mentees to think twice before forming new mentoring relationships. A strong mentoring relationship should be the "Guide by Your Side"—someone who is willing to walk alongside you, is readily accessible throughout your career journey, or at least this chapter of your career, and empowers you to be the best version of you—your authentic leadership self.

To experience a powerful mentoring relationship, you need to define the role of a mentor and what you expect from and can give to the relationship. Then you can go about finding your mentor (or mentee).

THE ROLE OF A MENTOR

So what exactly is a mentor supposed to do? Decades of research by Kathy Kram, professor emeritus at Boston

"A mentor provides the support and encouragement to help you put things into perspective. They can easily see the big picture and identify gaps in your plan."

University's Questrom School of Business, underscore the two leading roles of a mentor—career guidance and psychosocial support. This person should help you to overcome your fears, especially in social and work settings. A mentor acts as a sounding board, providing a perspective that can help you to overcome roadblocks. They can suggest options or new courses of action that you may not otherwise have considered.

The role of a mentor is to act as:

- **Advisor and coach**—providing advice and guidance, sharing their experience and expertise as appropriate. A mentor gives feedback and acts as a sounding board for ideas and action plans.

- **Champion and cheerleader**—providing the encouragement and support you need to have the courage to try new things and move out of your comfort zone. A mentor will help celebrate your successes and support you in understanding if things do not go according to plan.

- **Provider of resources and recommendations**—helping you to identify the resources that will assist with your personal development and growth. This may include recommending a book or workshop, encouraging you to join a new networking organization, or maybe introducing you to a contact in the mentor's network.

- **Devil's advocate and truth-sayer**—providing you with the tough feedback that you may need to hear to move forward. Your mentor should push you when needed to move outside your comfort zone, while playing devil's advocate to help you consider the potential consequences of your decisions and actions.

THE ROLE OF THE MENTEE

As a mentee, you own this relationship. You should come to your mentor with a specific goal you would like to achieve and an idea of some of those milestones you would need to hit that goal. Focus on your next goal, not the one that is five steps ahead. For example, if you are a manager, there is no need to consider being a partner if there are five steps in between. Consider the following questions:

- *What is your next goal?*

- *What are the quantifiable measures needed to achieve your next goal?* Is it to land certain accounts, publish a certain number of papers, close a requisite number of deals, or perhaps obtain another academic degree?

- *Who would you need to speak with to help you achieve this?* Do you need to start collaborating on projects and make your intentions known? How can you leverage your networking?

Armed with your goal and the list of milestones you need to achieve, your mentor can help refine your plan, make connections, and put things into perspective. In addition, they can introduce you to people in their network who can help you achieve your next goal.

Not every workday is filled with hope and promise. Some days are difficult and isolating. A mentor provides the support and encouragement to help you put things into perspective. They can easily see the big picture and identify gaps in your plan. Just as important, they can offer guidance on how to fill any holes in your strategy.

Here is one example of how a mentee/mentor relationship can work: Nicole Stott, now a retired astronaut, had started her NASA career as an engineer and manager for the Space Shuttle and ISS programs and was always wondering if she could be an astronaut herself. Her mentor, Jay Honeycutt, the former director of NASA's Kennedy Space Center, encouraged her to take charge of what she could control. In her case, filling out the application was the first step. He never tried to manage her expectations about the competitive application process or even talk her out of it. Instead, he encouraged her to fill out the form and take the first step.

What's the first step you can take toward your career goals and identifying your mentor?

DEVELOP YOUR MENTORING TEAM

Traditionally, senior members of an organization would mentor more junior mentees one at a time. It works. It can be great. However, if one mentor can be a powerful experience, think what you might be able to achieve with a team of mentors!

More leaders are choosing to work with a group of diverse mentors who can offer an array of experiences and perspectives. This is often referred to as a mentoring board of directors. Just as assigned mentors have their flaws, having just one mentor can be limiting. When building your mentoring team, consider the different skills that would be beneficial to your career, such as writing, negotiating, marketing, relationship building, or leadership development. Who are the people who can help you develop these skills?

So, where does one find a mentor? While people within your organization are an obvious first step, it is critical to think more broadly. Consider the following types of people to add to your mentoring team:

Close to home. Identify those people within your current organization that you know and respect. Check to see if your company offers a mentoring program and how you can get involved. Consider being a mentor for others.

In your field. While people within your organization are critical, thinking more broadly about other organizations is beneficial. Another company in your line of work may have figured out how to solve a problem you are currently facing. Mentors in your field can provide ideas and suggest resources.

Outside your field or industry. If everyone on your mentoring team does what you do, then you will only learn one way of solving problems. Consider people from other industries who view problems and solutions in new ways. Learning from them can help you identify gaps and connect dots that other people are not seeing.

Community of practice. This is a group of people who all have something in common, such as marketing executives, sales directors, or women in accounting. There is something that unites you and offers a baseline for discussions. All you need is a way to communicate, such as an email listserv, Facebook group, WhatsApp, or Slack.

Project experience. Save yourself a great deal of time and frustration by finding a mentor with knowledge and expertise about a specific project. They can give you a history of what has previously worked or not, shortcuts to consider, and ideas to ponder.

Consider three levels of people for your mentoring team: those who are senior to you, those junior to you, and your peers. Mentors who are senior to you can provide a 60,000-foot view and put things in perspective. Those junior to you in rank might be aware of new technologies or have read an interesting article or heard a relevant podcast. And your peers offer empathy when needed most. Finally, do not forget retirees, as they have time and a wealth of knowledge and do not feel bound by company policies.

Hybrid work allows you to think broadly outside of your field and industry and gain a robust mentoring team with which you can meet virtually. The members of your mentoring team do not need to know of each other's existence, and you can call on the various mentors as needed. Phone calls, text messages, and Zoom are all great communication styles when you cannot meet in person. In fact, they may lend the opportunity to communicate more often. A recent participant in one of our mentoring programs shared, "Mentoring has been the catalyst for change. Before I created my board of mentors, I'd applied for promotions and other opportunities—and been turned down. It was disheartening. It felt like nobody wanted me, that I wasn't valued, and my confidence was at rock bottom. My mentors provided me with fresh insights and perspectives, how to present my skills and achievements to date, even apparently simple things like my LinkedIn profile. They made a difference, and encouraged me to keep trying. I'm so glad I invested in my mentor relationships—I've just accepted a promotion and new role."

HOW TO APPROACH A POTENTIAL MENTOR

People like to work with those who they know, like, and trust. So when seeking a mentor, consider ways they can get to know more about you. Put yourself in situations where you can meet interesting people, hear about their work, and listen to their communication style. Equally as important, listen to how they talk about their mentees.

The most successful mentors wear the success of their mentees like a badge of honor. When Dr. Robert Lefkowitz won the Nobel Prize in Chemistry in 2012, one of the things he was most thrilled about was that he shared the Nobel with one of his former mentees. This former mentee encouraged Lefkowitz to pen his autobiography, and the two wrote it together.

So how do you ask someone to be your mentor? In short, you don't. When asked to be a mentor, a person's initial gut feeling is that they will have to take on another obligation for which they likely do not have time. So instead, ask them for their perspective. Tell them what you are working on or considering. Ask for a few minutes of their time to hear their thoughts on the topic. Then, continue building that relationship so that they know, like, and trust you and want to help you develop your career. AQ

Ruth Gotian is the chief learning officer and assistant professor of education in anesthesiology at Weill Cornell Medicine in New York City and author of The Success Factor: Developing the Mindset and Skillset for Peak Business Performance *(Kogan Page, 2022).*

Morag Barrett is the bestselling author of Cultivate: The Power of Winning Relationships *and* The Future-Proof Workplace, *and is currently working on her third book* Better Work Together: The Five Practices of an Ally Mindset. *She's the passion behind SkyeTeam, an international leadership development company.*

Managers Must Play a Role to Negotiate an Organization's Innovation

BY GREG WILLIAMS, PAT IYER, AND GEORGE HORRIGAN

> When dealing with innovation and considering the impact that it will have on a company's operations, leaders must maintain a negotiation mindset.

In part, this means that managers of the innovation process must become aware of their actions' impact on the successful implementation of innovative changes. This awareness must become part of the negotiation process, and help lay the ground and nurture it for the changes managers seek.

The pandemic swept through people and organizations, causing massive business failures. The companies whose core services did not change survived, and so did those that capitalized on the changing opportunities.

What made the difference between those companies that went under and those that survived and thrived? Amazon, Zoom, Netflix, and many other companies thrived. What follows are insights that will allow leaders to heighten their sense of awareness and serve as a reminder that they are constantly negotiating throughout the innovation process.

THE RESTAURANT INDUSTRY: A MODEL OF INNOVATION

Consider the hard-hit restaurant industry—a highly competitive, labor-intensive industry that relied on the ability to serve people inside buildings.

Some of the innovations we've seen in the last few years include:

- QR codes to pull up a current menu

- Pickup and delivery

- Use of ghost kitchens with food prepared at nearby catering businesses

- Online and mobile app ordering

- Payment using a mobile phone

- Waitlist management

- Online cooking classes

- Dish-sanitizing technology

- Meal progress bars on an app, so the customer knows the status of an order

- Creation of more outdoor eating spaces, and more

All these innovations helped the restaurant industry to survive in 2020 and 2021.

COMPANY CULTURE IS THE KEY TO SUCCESSFUL INNOVATION

Various studies show the structure of company culture has the highest correlation to successful innovation within an organization. And any innovation relies on the ability of managers with a vision to recognize the value of change and encourage employees to share their innovative ideas.

Therefore, people must work in a climate that fully supports and endorses innovation. That may explain why companies such as Apple, IBM, Procter & Gamble, 3M, and General Electric can reinvent themselves again and again. It's in their DNA—their culture—to recreate themselves through innovation.

Research by G.J. Tellis, J.C. Prabhu, and R.K. Chandy, "Radical Innovation Across Nations: The Preeminence of Corporate Culture," in the January 2009 *Journal of Marketing*, found that an organization's culture was a much more important driver of innovation than labor, capital, a government under which it functions, or the country where it operates.

Having a suitable climate/culture for innovation and leadership that supports innovation is the No. 1 factor that distinguishes more innovative companies from the less well-performing ones. Businesses that create a favorable climate for innovation, support innovation at every opportunity, and welcome ideas from all employees do much better at innovation than those who do not prioritize it.

Managers cannot issue a memo and announce, "Starting tomorrow, we will be a fully innovative company." Building a company whose mission, values, and culture reflect the constant need for innovation takes time.

WHAT IS AN INNOVATIVE CULTURE?

Gary Hamel, in his February 2006 *Harvard Business Review* article "The Why, What, and How of Management Innovation," describes an innovative culture broadly as "a marked departure from traditional management principles, processes, and practices or a departure from customary organizational forms that significantly alters the way the work of management is performed." Other experts state that innovativeness in an organization is associated with a culture that emphasizes learning and participative decision making.

The basic elements of culture—company values and beliefs, assumptions that guide future performance, and the resulting

> "An agile and dynamic company that continually searches for new ideas rewards creative employees and adapts to unique circumstances."

demonstrated creative employee behavior—form the foundation of an innovative environment.

A conducive climate signals employees to think and act a certain way, facilitating a comfort level with continual change. In turn, employees must positively respond to the challenges management faces and the changes that innovation breakthroughs will necessitate.

An agile and dynamic company that continually searches for new ideas rewards creative employees and adapts to unique circumstances. Innovation has always been important, but it is even more so during disruptive times when making changes becomes part of the survival imperative.

LOOKING BEFORE YOU LEAP

Part of the culture of innovation requires a careful analysis of change. Consider the following questions:

- What is the business case for the innovation?
- Will this innovation create new revenue streams, more sales to existing clients, or entry into a new market?
- What need does the product or service fulfill?
- What is the total market potential?
- Are there any regulatory or legal risks?
- How long will it take to create this new product or service?
- What will it cost to develop it?
- How feasible is it to operate this new offering?
- What is the cost of not innovating?

- Is this innovation a luxury or an essential ingredient in placing the company in its best competitive position?

THE NEGOTIATION ASPECT OF INNOVATION

Let's assume the analysis shows there is a clear business case for innovation. Will this innovation be successful or fight an uphill battle in the face of employee resistance to change?

In a company culture built on trust, transparency, employee involvement, clear communication, and positive relationships, resistance is visible and less common. When those factors are not in place, resistance to change shows up as:

- Missed meetings
- Criticism of the intended change and the architects of the change
- Lip service with no intention to carry out the change
- Arguments about the plan
- Sarcasm
- Sabotage
- Withdrawal from conversations
- Deliberate misunderstanding
- Passive-aggressive behavior

WHO OWNS INNOVATION?

Employees are likely to resist when they are inadequately introduced to changes, see no need for them, and believe the changes will make them work harder.

Trust your intuition. A manager with experience in similar situations related to resistance to innovation should beware when they drive innovation in their organization. Tuning into your intuition provides direction for a particular course of action. Do not ignore those sensations. Instead, use them to aid analysis of the sources of resistance.

As a manager, consider your role in communicating about innovation. Some of the strategies that support innovation and reduce resistance are:

• Including critical players and decision-makers when planning an innovation

• Collecting input from employees before making changes

• Encouraging employees to be frank

• Considering the input of employees

• Explaining the need for change

• Emphasizing the positive aspects of the change

• Using an internal implementation team to plan and champion the changes

• Providing thorough training in a variety of modalities to accommodate different learning styles

• Considering the pace of making changes so that employees are not bombarded with too many changes

THE APPEARANCE OF INNOVATION

When considering the advancement of innovation in an organization, analyze the current innovation climate within the environment. Investigate to understand how the culture came to exist. Think about the factors that made the encouragement of innovation successful—or not:

• What specific actions led to the factors that affect innovation?

• What behind-the-scene activities were necessary to get to its present point?

• Did the innovation climate or resistance to change depend on key people?

• Are there people around who still resent occurrences from before?

If those who still resent previous occurrences become power brokers, solicit their support in the upcoming innovation plans. Plus, the insight gained from identifying who they are, the roles they may have played in the past, and the steps they took to reach success will provide a framework for future innovation.

PERSPECTIVE ON INNOVATION

During any negotiation process, be aware of your perspective on the topic of discussion; that perspective will sway your point of view. Thus, when considering how the company's leaders will drive innovation forward in the organization, consider their thoughts about innovation based on past experiences.

Look at the forces of power driving innovation and at hidden underlying influences that may be resisting. The latter may be stronger than the former. If so, consider addressing that aspect of innovation more fervently.

In some situations, if a manager has had a negative experience with some form of innovation, and they tie that experience to the current project under consideration, their perspective may become tainted. And that might require a different set of negotiation strategies, given the norms and expectations of the members who hold such thoughts.

POWER ENERGY

Managers must be aware of the power sources in a company to enhance their role in the organization's innovation. Power is fluid and not always reflective of the organizational chart. Become aware of the shifts that may have opened between former allies and the invisible impact on those who control an organization's power.

Some may have hidden agendas, leading some people to flip alignments. That can become an impediment to advancing innovation. Therefore, to allow innovation to thrive, leaders must keep their eyes open to recognize the efforts of those who would stop the process from progressing.

GETTING AHEAD OF THE CURVE

Which planning stage is the organization in for the next round of innovation? And where might new management team members be in that process? Depending on the answers to those questions and the degree to which some managers will have more power over the process than others, those in power will have to gather support. That means they will have to prepare stakeholders up and down the line to accept what is to come. How leaders address this will determine the success of the implementation.

Regardless of the strategies you put in place to advance innovation in your organization, realize the future you will be creating with your choices. The next time you order takeout from your favorite restaurant, thank the innovation process. And as a leader in your organization, remember, you're always negotiating! AQ

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The Role of Psychological Safety in INNOVATION

BY NICK HOLMES

Most companies like to boast about their innovation.

They'll talk about the new product they've launched, demonstrate the bells and whistles, and even share their plans to expand the product line. But a closer inspection reveals that many of their innovative ideas are not sustainable. The fact is, innovation requires a unique environment to thrive, and a company's approach to innovating must engage in the culture's DNA. Unfortunately, there are not enough examples of transformational, inclusive, and empowering types of innovation. Perhaps if it were more mainstream, it might help address the Great Resignation companies are experiencing.

WHY INNOVATING IS HARDER TODAY

Today, companies are facing an important choice. The pandemic has significantly altered the work landscape, and leaders spend much of their time solving the following issues that have affected the work environment:

- Most employees continue to operate remotely and remain globally dispersed.
- Productivity lapses are resulting from Zoom fatigue.
- The number of disengaged and uninterested employees continues to rise.

Companies' efforts to shore up these challenges have deprioritized their approach to transformative change. Unfortunately, placing innovation on the back burner may do companies more harm than good. The impact will become more apparent after the crisis ends.

I work for Fishawack Health (FH), a fast-growing, global commercial partner in the life sciences space. With several company acquisitions in the last five years, FH expanded quickly and now has 1,300 employees, with offices in the United States, United Kingdom, Ireland, Greece, and Singapore. The executive team knows that integrating a company with varied cultural influences is challenging, but thriving after the pandemic requires emphasizing innovation to support its growing client base. FH sought a different approach to facing the pandemic. Rather than storing innovation in a closet, the company decided to accelerate the process in 2021 by focusing on its people and work culture. Fortunately, our executive team saw this as an opportunity to disrupt.

HOW PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY CONSTRUCTS A SPACE FOR INNOVATION

Innovation is not iterative. It is never dull or uninteresting, and it is in a constant state of change. No great idea begins from conception and immediately becomes a million-dollar product. There is always a period of improvement. It's not quick or easy. It's the result of successful teams collaborating together with the same vision in mind.

A few years ago, Google gathered its best and brightest to codify the secrets of team effectiveness. Like most companies, the
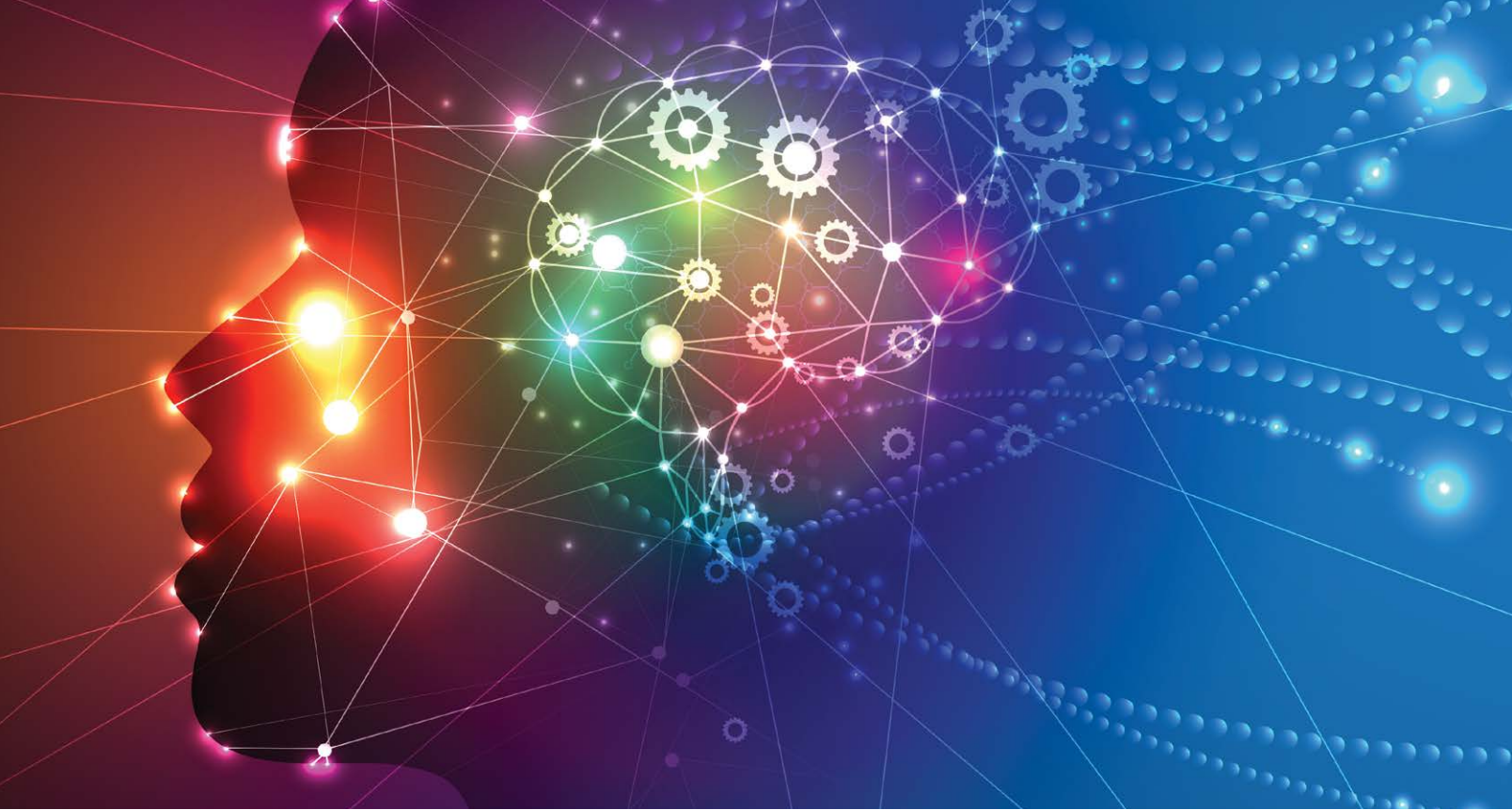
executive team initially believed that building the best teams meant bringing together the best people. However, after studying nearly 200 groups under the name Project Aristotle, they discovered that effectiveness was not the result of bringing great people together. Instead, Project Aristotle pinpointed the five key characteristics of a successful team—one of them focused on psychological safety. Google described the characteristics in November 2015 in its re:Work blog, "The Five Keys to a Successful Google Team." Google found that to be effective and successful and to deliver innovative products, people need to feel safe. Successful team members believe that they can share their ideas in a psychologically safe environment without being embarrassed, rejected, or punished. They understand the specific job expectations or consequences and can be relied on to complete a project or task.

Psychological safety is not a leadership trait, but one that is embedded into the culture of an organization striving to innovate and retain its talented workforce. Therefore, executives support building the foundation and give it the resources needed to embed it into the company's DNA.

Before psychological safety went mainstream in Fortune 500 companies, leaders used compensation, benefits, and seemingly endless snacks to energize their employees. It was standard to bring teams together and rally them with big speeches, exuberant language, and enticing promises. COVID-19 altered that landscape in a number of ways.

- Suddenly, employees are working in different locations and time zones.

- Their offices are in dining rooms, bedrooms, and living rooms.

- Distractions can include pets, young children, and the comforts of home.

- Zoom calls have become the new email, whittling away people's productivity and time.

Fear of reprisal, inability to discern facial expressions on screen, or not wanting to be seen as a "complainer" make it difficult for many to truly raise their voice. Disconnected, these employees have very little reason to come up with innovative ideas, let alone produce. Building a psychologically safe environment is hard and time consuming. It requires the top and middle management to buy in for it to succeed with all members of the organization.

FOUR CRITERIA FOR BUILDING A PSYCHOLOGICALLY SAFE ENVIRONMENT

According to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, psychological safety is as important as the physiological (i.e., food, water, shelter) and the physical (i.e., economic, violence) for motivation to occur. The criteria for building a safe environment include:

- Inclusion (the feeling of belonging)

- Learner safety (the ability to be open to understanding the skills gap and the desire to improve)

- Contributor to safety (the knowledge to apply the skills to what matters most)

- Challenge (the awareness to feel one can improve)

> "In this environment, innovation begins to rise when diverse perspectives come together and people feel open enough to say that something isn't working or could be revised."

Organizations that thrive in psychologically safe environments don't hire talent for cultural fit. That was the old way. Instead, successful companies hire individuals who bring something new to the organization, such as diverse perspectives, unique skill sets that have not been applied before, or even experience from different industries.

Psychologically safe companies hire individuals aligned with the culture's behavior, attitudes, and values. For example, at FH, it is important that our company doesn't focus on years of experience during the hiring process. Rather, we look for talented individuals who also imagine a healthier world just as much as we do and are passionate about helping achieve that goal. In this environment, innovation begins to rise when diverse perspectives come together and people feel open enough to say that something isn't working or could be revised.

In a culture built on a psychologically safe foundation, all members understand that micro-cultures exist and are accepted. Different experiences and backgrounds all ladder up to sharing perspectives that could lead to a better end product.

BUILDING A FOUNDATION IS NOT A ONE-AND-DONE EVENT

It's important to emphasize that creating a policy that says this is a safe environment and posting it on the walls does not make it so. There's trial and error, testing and tweaking, and training and improving.

FH started its innovative process with a pilot program in one city. The program, called Team Design, is intended to create an environment where teams can flourish. We provided an opportunity for feedback, conflict communication, collective intelligence, and belonging—all of which are integrated into our purpose and values.

Team Design began with a workshop that all cross-functional teams participate in. Each team member is tasked to make

him- or herself accountable and create a document that enables each member to discuss a successful way of working with others. The workshop does not "discriminate" the perspectives of new employees against those who are more seasoned. Rather, both are viewed and discussed equally.

Based on the outcome of the pilot, the program was adjusted. We've begun implementing the approach in groups across the whole organization. In the end, once psychological safety has seeped into our DNA, FH should be able to see:

- Higher levels of collaboration
- Increased productivity
- Stronger relationships
- Improved retention
- Accelerated execution of transformative ideas

This will allow immediate delivery of better services, better products, and better relationships for clients. Lastly, this will demonstrate revenue growth for FH's brands. While most of us hope that the end of this pandemic is near, work life as we previously knew it will have forever changed.

To continue succeeding in this new landscape, companies must learn to adapt to an environment where employees want more than just compensation, benefits, and free snacks. They want leaders who are empathetic and open-minded, have an attentive ear, and encourage every voice in the room to be heard. Employees want an organization that offers flexibility, diversity, opportunities for growth, and a safe place to share their perspectives without retribution. In this environment, we are the ones that are likely to recruit effectively and retain talented employees. And innovation? It is at the forefront. AQ

Nick Holmes is global head of career experience at Fishawack Health (FH), a leading global commercialization partner for the biopharmaceutical, medical technology and wellness industries.

Cultures That Create a
CLIMATE FOR CHANGE
Are More Innovative

BY DALE S. RICHARDS

COVID-19 has created many stresses and potentially many opportunities.
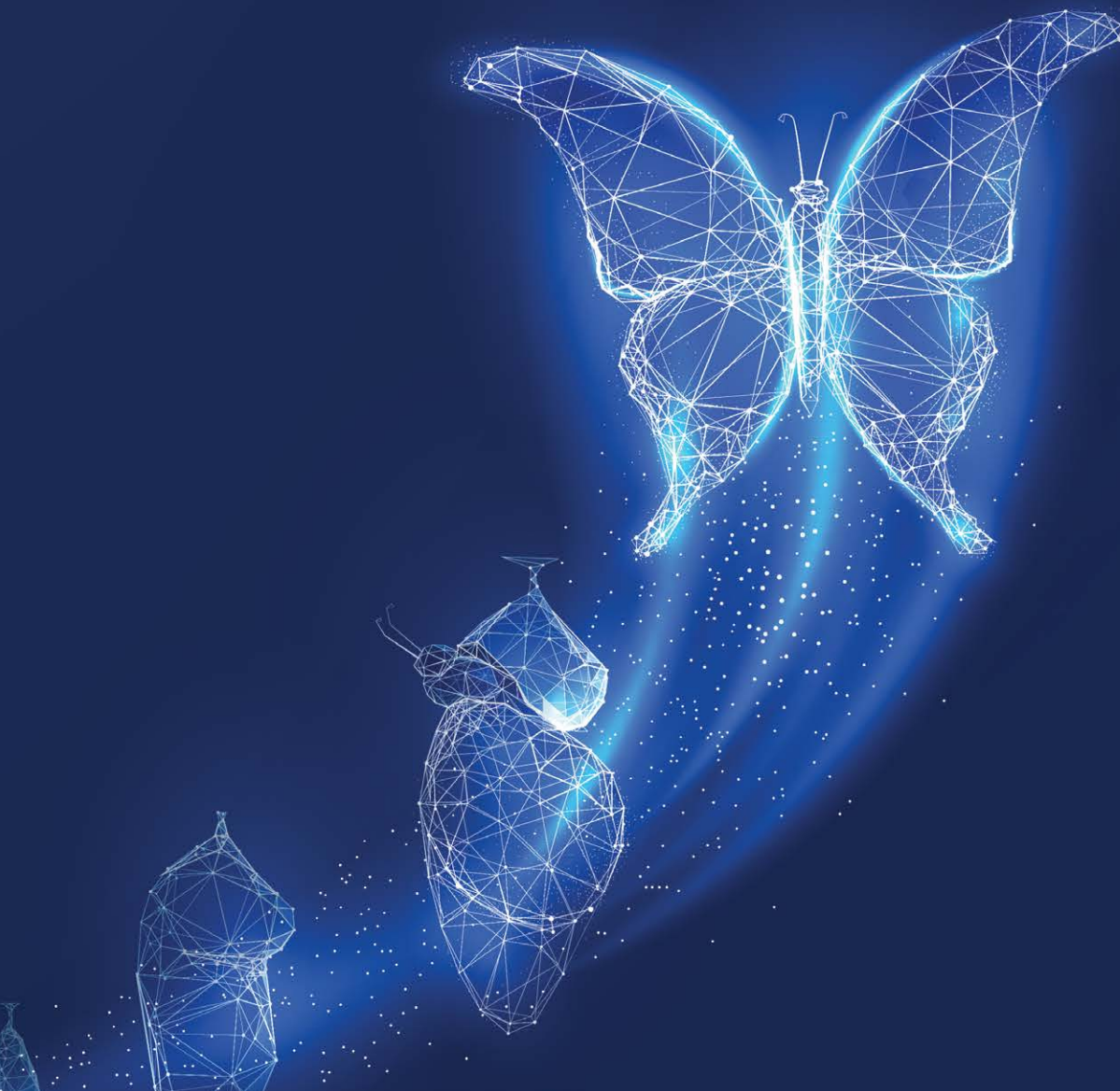
"The question is, how can we strategically create a team culture with innovation as a core objective?"

With extra time or additional circumstances, many companies can examine their culture and productivity. This examination can lead to innovation, which is spurred by a team-positive atmosphere and culture. Fantastic cultures do not just happen. They must be methodically created.

The question is, how can we strategically create a team culture with innovation as a core objective? I have had the opportunity to significantly enhance company and individual performance, team cultures, and profits in more than 100 companies. Let's examine how we can design and implement a team culture that will lead to innovation.

THE STEPS TO BUILDING VALUE

First, a company needs to be built on core values that reflect the decisions and actions for every employee. These core values are the creed for all operations, and they require deep thought and team participation to establish them. I suggest a retreat away from the office to brainstorm and wordsmith the potential core values.

Core values could be such principles as honesty, customer first, employee satisfaction, top quality, on-time delivery, innovation, and team culture. The retreat session should allow any employee to make suggestions without judgment. Once a potential list has been established, the team can improve the wording and order of the values list.

Second, once the values are established, the goals of the company and department need to be developed as a team and include one-on-ones with each individual. One-on-one *monthly* coaching sessions are critical to goal creation and accomplishment. It is fun and rewarding to be a monthly coach versus an annual review critic. These one-on-one coaching sessions are used to mutually develop and agree upon goals that an employee can reach to move the company to the next higher level of performance.

It is important in a team culture that the top executives use the tactic of bottom-up listening instead of top-down telling. Too many times, top executives announce to the team what the goals or plans should be instead of working as a team to develop the goals and plans.

A culture for innovation requires team input and the freedom to try and excel and/or fail. Failure is a fact of any innovation. Thomas Edison tried a thousand different designs on the lightbulb before he was successful. To create innovation, people need to brainstorm, try ideas, and fail at ideas without penalty.

I describe this team culture building and performance enhancing process as the Productivity Pyramid®.

Productivity Pyramid®
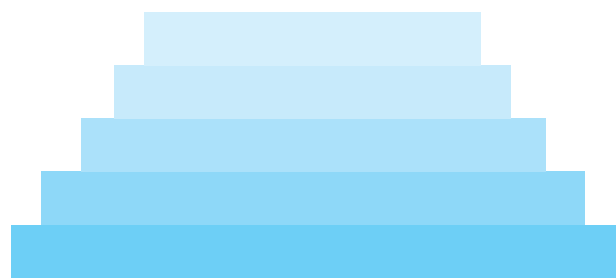
The bottom two steps of the pyramid are company goals and department goals, and can be determined with a team brainstorm and discussion session. Typically, 10 to 15 company goals (these should be things other than increasing revenue and net income) can be listed in five to 10 minutes.

Once these company goals are established, department assignments can be made and then individuals can discuss with their supervisor how to accomplish their part in effective coaching one-on-one sessions. This is where real innovation ideas can take place with the coach and employee.

The next level of the Productivity Pyramid®—setting coaching and employee goals—entails becoming a better coach and helping employees develop their own goals. What are the characteristics of a good coach? One important key to innovation and a team culture is the quality of coaching provided by supervisors, managers, and executives in the company. A good coach is rarely born, but develops key characteristics to facilitate goal achievement. I have listed what I think are good coaching characteristics.

CHARACTERISTICS OF A GOOD QUALITY COACH

- Inspires others
- Actively listens
- Is knowledgeable
- Motivates others
- Teaches skills
- Builds confidence
- Has trust
- Has empathy
- Has vision
- Has patience
- Coordinates skills with team
- Builds team culture
- Gives immediate feedback
- Gives positive affirmations
- Good communicator
- Understands systems and processes

To become a better coach, you have to create better habits. How many days does it take to create a habit? Psychologists tell us the answer is 21 to 30 days. To help everyone who wants to be a better coach, let's create an all-day action item on your calendar that repeats daily until you delete it.

Go to your phone calendar and click on a time within today. An action item or meeting options will pop up. From the list above of good coaching characteristics, pick one you would like to develop and put that into the title of the action item or meeting date. Next, change the time to "all day." Then move the input panel and notice where it says "does not repeat." Change that to repeat "daily." Now, when you look at your calendar every day, there will be an all-day task to develop this good coaching trait. When you have mastered it and it has become a habit, then go in and delete it going forward. This is a simple way to improve daily, monthly, and as needed to improve your coaching skills.

With the three items above, we have completed three levels of the Productivity Pyramid®.

Productivity Pyramid®

How easy do you think it may be to hold someone accountable if you are meeting with them in coaching sessions monthly? Easy! Accountability is a natural offshoot from quality coaching. How much productivity increase occurs from annual reviews? According to several executive speakers, the productivity gain for annual reviews is *zero* or *negative*. Annual reviews are not a motivator of people or a motivator for innovation. Monthly quality coaching is.

The fourth level of the Productivity Pyramid® is "Accountability."

Productivity Pyramid®

One great motivator to create an innovation culture is rewards and recognition for accomplishment. There is often confusion around what motivates people. Some would think that salary, benefits, good health insurance, or a nice office space are motivators. But in fact, they are demotivators if they are not as expected.

Real motivators are:

- Responsibility with promotion opportunities
- Recognition among peers
- Verbal and written compliments for doing a good job
- Properly designed incentive programs
- Open communication with management
- Inclusion in decision making

One of the characteristics of a good coach is using positive affirmations. It may be shocking how much motivation and influence occur when a supervisor, manager, or executive creates a written compliment to an employee for a job well done. I have seen in employee cubicles framed compliment letters from a supervisor and especially from an executive or CEO. One trick to help anyone become a better deliverer of positive reinforcement is to put a penny in the pocket of your nondominant hand. When you notice something or someone doing good each day, move it to the dominant-hand pocket. Start with one and add pennies as your habit of delivering positive reinforcement increases.

Another factor to consider is the design and implementation of rewards and recognition. I recommend that a reward system have three elements to outstanding performance recognition. The first, or about 25% of the reward total, is for individual performance based upon the pre-agreed-upon goals.

> "With the majority of the reward allocated based on the performance of the team and the company, it helps create team effort and unity."

The next 25% of the reward total should be allotted based on the performance of the department. The department will have goals as established by the team and as part of the Productivity Pyramid®.

The third tier of the reward system should be 50% of the total allocated on the basis of whole company achievement. With the majority of the reward allocated based on the performance of the team and the company, it helps create team effort and unity. Many companies get bound in department silos. Some silos even conflict or create a competitive, not productive, environment. The team reward may motivate disparate silos to work together for a common goal.

With the top level in place, the Productivity Pyramid® looks like the image below.

Productivity Pyramid®

| Rewards |
| Accountability |
| Coaching - Employee - Goals |
| Department Goals |
| Company Goals |

Developing the five levels of the Productivity Pyramid® requires three to six months. Then, once the goals, coaching, accountability, and rewards are functioning, a drastic increase in productivity can occur. The Productivity Pyramid has been implemented in more than 100 companies with a productivity increase of 20% to 200%. Imagine if your company increased productivity by just 10%—what lower costs and increases of capacity, revenue, and value might occur?

INDEXING PRODUCTIVITY

To track productivity in your organization, use productivity indexes. If you operate a production line and only reward volume, what happens to quality? *It goes down.* If you just reward quality, what happens to volume? *It goes down.* There must be both a quality and a volume metric. In a business, there must be volume (revenue) and quality (profit) metrics tracked to see all sides of performance.

The productivity metrics I suggest are:

VOLUME: Revenue per full-time employee count (FTE)

QUALITY: Gross profit per FTE

QUALITY: Contribution margin per FTE

QUALITY: Net income per FTE

Each of these productivity indexes could also be divided by payroll dollar.

Graph each index monthly with two years of history, and it will be easy to see when the Productivity Pyramid® kicks in. The graphs will trend upward.

I encourage each of you to examine your culture and productivity. This examination can lead to innovation with the implementation of the Productivity Pyramid® with its goals, coaching, accountability, and rewards. Innovation is created with team and individual accountable goals and a positive atmosphere and culture. AQ

Dale S. Richards is a seasoned, experienced business executive and advisor who helps create successful business and leadership transformations. He is a retired eight-year Vistage Chair and sought-after international speaker on the topics of business optimization, valuation theory, and how to turn attitude into positive actions.

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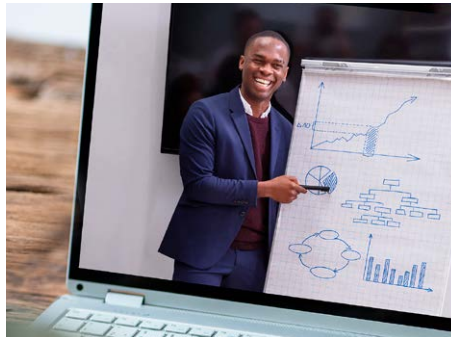
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Encourage
INNOVATION
with Company Culture

BY MOSTAFA SAYYADI

The foundation for innovation in the workplace is an engaging, supportive corporate culture.

Success in today's global business environment can be achieved more easily when executives are able to manifest themselves as change agents who reshape and, in some cases, manipulate corporate culture to better apply knowledge and create competitive advantage. Building on the three aspects of corporate culture (collaboration, trust, and learning), companies can continually innovate and create new and valuable services or products by applying new ideas and knowledge. This article is intended to inspire executives to create more effective corporate cultures to meet and exceed not only the challenges of today but also what we see as the onset of new advances in the future. The practices discussed here can represent a complete answer to the need for cultural changes in today's hypercompetitive environment.

WHAT IS CORPORATE CULTURE?

Executives today are focusing on corporate culture, which is reflected in shared assumptions, symbols, beliefs, values, and norms that specify how employees understand problems and react to them appropriately. Executives can build an effective corporate culture to improve customer satisfaction by acquiring additional knowledge from customers, developing better relationships with them, and providing a higher quality of service for them. Executives can also positively affect organizational performance by creating a more innovative climate in their companies.

Organizational performance is what every executive is concerned about. Thus, there is a global need to cultivate a strong corporate culture to achieve sustainable competitiveness in global markets. This strong corporate culture includes the three aspects of collaboration, trust, and learning.

HOW CORPORATE CULTURE IMPROVES ORGANIZATIONAL INNOVATION

Collaboration, trust, and learning play a critical role in improving organizational innovation and enhancing the effectiveness of knowledge management. For example, collaboration provides a shared understanding of current issues and problems among employees, which helps to generate new ideas within the organization. Trust regarding a leader's decisions is also a necessary precursor to create new knowledge and improve company performance through the increased quality of products and services. Moreover, the amount of time spent learning is positively related to the amount of knowledge gained, shared, and implemented, in an effort to break through performance gaps in a corporation.

Executives should be very involved in cultural change initiatives to create more effective workplaces, develop people, and shift organizations toward the creation of more innovative products and services. Knowledge, in itself, is a byproduct of culture, and culture's role in guiding and facilitating people's actions is the key to executive decision making. Through an effective corporate culture, executives can contribute to new products and services to meet dynamic market needs. By encouraging higher expectations and stimulating new opportunities to meet strategic goals and customer needs, executives can use corporate culture to become more profitable.

Executives can change the culture of an organization by influencing behavior and providing valuable resources. This focus helps the organization develop a unique culture that is hard for the competition to duplicate. Executives can act as change agents to provide a more humanistic and applicable approach to creating a great corporate culture. For example, they can facilitate collaboration by developing relationships in the organization. They can contribute to the cultural aspect of trust by considering both employees' individual interests and the company's essential needs. Also, executives can identify the individual needs of employees and develop a learning culture to generate new knowledge and share it with others.

HOW TO DO IT RIGHT IN THREE STEPS

Here's a set of actions executives can take to build an effective corporate culture:

STEP 1: Build a true collaboration culture. To build a collaboration culture, executives need to improve the degree to which employees actively support and provide significant contributions to each other in their work. In doing so, executives can take the following actions:

- Develop a collaborative work climate in which employees are satisfied with the degree of collaboration between departments.

- Develop a collaborative work climate in which employees are supportive and helpful.

- Develop a collaborative work climate in which there is a willingness to accept responsibility for failure.

STEP 2: Create a no-fail trust culture. To create a trust culture, executives need to maintain the volume of reciprocal faith in terms of behaviors and intentions. They can take these actions:

- Build an atmosphere of trust and openness in which employees are generally trustworthy.

> "Corporate culture is the foundation of a supportive workplace and can improve organizational innovation and business success. Without a grasp on this tenet, executives are bound to fail."

- Build an atmosphere of trust and openness in which employees have reciprocal faith in other members' intentions and behaviors.

- Build an atmosphere of trust and openness in which employees have reciprocal faith in others' ability.

- Build an atmosphere of trust and openness in which employees have reciprocal faith in others' behaviors to work toward organizational goals.

- Build an atmosphere of trust and openness in which employees believe that decisions are being made for the good of the organization rather than individual interests.

- Build an atmosphere of trust and openness in which employees have relationships based on reciprocal faith.

STEP 3: Cultivate a successful learning culture. To foster a learning culture, executives need to enhance the extent to which learning is motivated within the workplace. They should take these actions:

- Develop a learning workplace in which various formal training programs are provided to improve the performance of duties.

- Develop a learning workplace in which opportunities are provided for informal individual development other than formal training, such as work assignments and job rotation.

- Develop a learning workplace in which people are encouraged to attend external seminars, symposia, and the like.

- Develop a learning workplace in which various social mechanisms such as clubs and community gatherings are provided.

- Develop a learning workplace in which employees are satisfied by the contents of job training or self-development programs.

SIX STRATEGIES TO HIRE FOR "CULTURE FIT"

Since executives are constantly dealing with corporate culture, recruitment is something they pay a great deal of attention to. Of course, this is not new, but it's worth mentioning. A mistake in this area may destroy all of the efforts previously made to build culture. Executives must choose wisely. Address these practices:

Prioritize candidate experience. Knowledge is a collection of meaningful experiences. The key takeaway for executives is that prioritizing candidate experience can enable a company to solve problems and create value through improved performance. It is this point that will narrow the gaps to success, leading to better decision making.

Tailor talent management strategy to business goals. Executives must determine business goals for the next three years and develop a talent management strategy that focuses on planning the work and technically supporting newly hired employees to achieve the business goals. A talent management strategy helps a company achieve its business goals that reflect excellence and some kind of higher-order effectiveness.

This is where executives can attempt to achieve business goals—stemming from a talent management strategy across pivotal areas of the company.

Educate the hiring manager. Hiring managers can become familiar with employee recruitment practices through education. Compared with training, education is more active, broad, flexible, experimental, synthetic, and strategic. Why is this? It's because education is a process that leads to the acquisition of new insights and knowledge, and potentially to correcting suboptimal or ineffective actions and behaviors that cause companies to spiral out of control.

Enhance training efficiency. Training is an effective way to share knowledge. By sharing knowledge about better decision making and work-related practices, executives can help employees innovate. But training has to be measured in some way. Some experts say measuring the return-on-investment of training is difficult; however, executives can measure how satisfied participants are about the training and gauge their desire to apply it to the workplace. This is an excellent barometer, whether the training is about learning new skills or building on old ones. The key point in training is the knowledge use coupled with testing and retesting to ensure that the knowledge is actually helping a company grow both professionally for employees and profitably for all stakeholders.

Meet the need for innovative services. How can executives meet the need for innovative services? The answer to this question lies in an executive's ability to motivate employees to approach organizational problems in a more novel way. In doing this, executives can inspire employees to rethink problems and challenge their current personal attitudes and values. Most important, they can transform a company by attempting to change the basic values, beliefs, and attitudes of employees so that they are willing to perform beyond their previous or original level specified in their job descriptions.

Be more flexible. Flexibility in the workplace may enable companies to improve departmental and managerial interactions and develop relationships among managers, business units, and departments. Through flexibility in the workplace, executives can shift the power of decision making to the lower levels and inspire newly hired employees to create new ideas and implement them, which can then propel interdepartmental communications and improve knowledge exchange.

Corporate culture has risen to a phenomenon that is worth understanding, learning, and using in organizations around the world. Corporate culture is the foundation of a supportive workplace and can improve organizational innovation and business success. Without a grasp on this tenet, executives are bound to fail. AQ

Mostafa Sayyadi is a senior management consultant, executive coach, and business and tech columnist.

INNOVATION IS ESSENTIAL

BY CARRIE ROOT

There are steps you can take to encourage innovation and create a climate for change.

A friend of mine, a very savvy attorney, once asked me to read the prospectus and financial reports of a small company that he was considering investing in. As a favor to him, I did.

Later, when he asked me what I thought about the company, I said the widget the company made was interesting and could be useful, but I didn't see how it would grow with the technology. He thanked me for my insight.

A few years later, I asked him if he had made the investment. He told me he declined, based on the lack of growth opportunity for the product. He thanked me again and told me the company was now out of business.

That was my first lesson in investing in the stock market. I learned that a product might be great, but it also needs to have a future, or the company needs to have a culture of innovation to get to that next great product. It's a lesson I've never forgotten.

In today's business environment, a culture that encourages innovative thought and creates a climate for change is crucial for survival and growth in a competitive marketplace. But what is that culture and how do you get there?

THE NECESSITY OF EMPOWERING COLLECTIVE INTELLIGENCE

I leverage a perspective of "collective intelligence." I use this term to represent the wealth of insights, experiences, and cognitive thoughts in your team. If I, as a leader, do all the thought work and don't engage my team or outside experts in my thought development, that work is limited by my insight, experience, and intelligence. However, if I widen my circle and engage with others to consider problems and solutions, challenges and goals, that work will be significantly stronger. This is where the power of diversity and inclusion comes into play in an organization.

As a leader, manager, or business owner, it can be scary to delegate important and hard problems to your staff, particularly if they are predominantly Gen Zers. However, these are the clients of tomorrow, and they represent the business base 10 years from now. Where better to go for innovative thought?

At a recent conference, I was asked by learning management system providers for online self-paced content on career

readiness. Since career readiness is our line of work, this intrigued me, and I told them I'd take that request back to my team and get in touch.

I returned from the trip, met with my team, and told them about the request for fully online content. We brainstormed about how we could take our existing online content and produce something that would fit their needs. As it turned out, we had a lot of content that had been developed for myriad reasons over the past few years that could be repurposed to meet this request.

I handed it over to them and left for a holiday break. When I returned, the team presented their concept of a brand-new product line that would work for an entirely new market sector, packaged in an innovative format. They did it without me, and it was good. They had ready a catalog of products, content for each product, branding and imagery for each product set, metadata for the online content, and a demo for each of the products.

I had not previously given over a task and let them do it in such a hands-off fashion. I was amazed at the quality of their work and the thoroughness of the new product set. We were ready to launch.

I should share that my team is made up of Gen Zers and Millennials. They are awesome. This exercise demonstrated that they have the creative, collaborative skills needed to take us forward, and I'm handing off more and more to them.

So here are some ideas for fostering a climate that supports innovation and change:

Create a safe space for idea work. Some folks are comfortable working in groups to form ideas. Others need quiet space and then the opportunity to express their thoughts. Make sure you provide both opportunities. This can often be done by providing the team with the challenge ahead of time. The team collaborators will come with an understanding of the problem and be ready to discuss it. The solo workers will have thought about it and be ready to offer their thoughts.

Make sure that all have an opportunity to contribute.
This means that everyone giving their ideas is listened to and respected—these are the foundational parts of a strong culture in which collaboration and innovation can flourish.

Recognize that diverse teams outperform non-diverse teams.
Seek to build strength into your teams through cross-functional and cross-generational collaboration in addition to race, gender, and cultural diversity.

Encourage networking or seek expert help. These approaches are especially useful for challenges that can be discussed with outside support sources. It provides a boost to your team as well to have new ideas to challenge them.

Strive for more than just solving the problem. If you find that you can improve productivity or save cost by 20%, grow into

> "Change is hard and no one likes it. Your employees will be the ones to implement and run with new ideas. They will make change successful. They need to be in support of it."

the habit of asking what it would take to get to 50%. It may encourage thought "outside of the box." And you might see innovative solutions that take you in new and better directions.

When you try new things, expect some of them to fail. Failure brings important knowledge, which can be used in the future to help find paths to success. If you learn from those failures, it was worth trying. Failure also builds resilience, which is necessary to overcome disappointments, regain and sharpen one's focus, and keep trying.

EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT IS KEY TO INNOVATION

Recognize that innovation and employee engagement are closely linked. In an article for the *International Journal of Business Science and Applied Management*, C. Brooke Dobni concluded that "there has to be an emphasis on the employee." Face it. Change is hard and no one likes it. Your employees will be the ones to implement and run with new ideas. They will make change successful. They need to be in support of it. It helps if they are implementing their own ideas.

We have just experienced the "I quit!" revolution in the American workforce. That is a big red flag for employers that they have issues with their employee engagement. Engaged employees don't walk out. They stay and improve.

But the sad fact is that, according to the annual State of the American Workplace report by Gallup, employee engagement has remained slow growing over the past 10 years, ranging between 29% and 36% without much meaningful improvement. Deloitte Insights found that nearly 80% of leaders acknowledge the importance of fostering better engagement, yet only 22% say their current organizations are doing so proactively.

According to Gallup, employee engagement in the U.S. actually dropped 2% in the second half of 2021 for the first time in more

than a decade. Simply put, employees become disengaged when their needs aren't being met by their leaders. Disruption caused by the pandemic shifted the needs of many people—individually, organizationally, and societally.

This should be a wake-up call for industry. Create a culture for change. Improve your innovativeness. Engage your staff. Consider a more nuanced and comprehensive approach to leadership.

Servant leadership is what today's best organizations practice to engage their workers, build better teams, and innovate their workplaces. Indeed, many experts agree that servant leadership is the antidote to the disengagement dilemma. Leadership company Cairnway LLC says, "Organizations applying servant leadership have exceptional employee engagement, customer experience and team effectiveness. Servant leadership improves performance on more than one bottom line."

Ultimately, it's all about mindset! Having the mindset that change is necessary, and that innovation comes from providing the right environment for the respectful exchange of ideas and leveraging from every sector to grow innovation from ideas.

I hope, when a potential investor next reads the prospectus from my company, that he/she/them find innovation and future growth in everything we do. **AQ**

Carrie Root, author of The Other Soft Skill: How to Solve Workplace Challenges with Generational Intelligence *(Advantage, 2021), is the founder and CEO of Alpha UMi, an education consulting firm that develops professional-development curricula. Her company has provided workshops at conferences for major corporations and associations. Prior to founding Alpha UMi, Root had a successful engineering career working for large and small businesses, followed by more than two decades consulting as a high-level troubleshooter for the U.S. Navy.*

The Great Aspiration:
MOVING INTO FUTURE GROWTH

BY WHITNEY JOHNSON

Could the so-called Great Resignation really be called the Great Aspiration?

> "A 2021 Egon Zehnder study, 'It Starts with the CEO,' reported that 80% of CEOs strongly agree they need to transform themselves as much as their organizations, up from 26% before the pandemic."

An ambitious workforce is on the march, seeking better pay, better work-life balance, and better opportunities amid an abundance of open jobs. Managers are wondering how to create workplaces that people aspire to join and where they are excited to stay.

Two years of disruption has fundamentally changed how the workplace functions. The silver lining for the workforce has been an opportunity for individuals to reflect and rethink their life and career values. As a result, workers are ready to go after what they want. For many, that means leaving a current position to pursue something new. In November 2021 alone, more than 4 million Americans left their jobs, according to a January 4, 2022 AP article, "A Record 4.5 Million Americans Quit Their Jobs in November." While there are numerous factors contributing to the enormous movement in the workforce, this massive disruption is accompanied by opportunities for leaders and organizations to innovate and adapt.

In this time of transition, many leaders desire or feel the necessity to transform both their organizations and themselves. A 2021 Egon Zehnder study, "It Starts with the CEO," reported that 80% of CEOs strongly agree they need to transform themselves as much as their organizations, up from 26% before the pandemic. As one C-suite leader recently told me, "Coming out of the pandemic, we have plans to grow and grow fast."

As a leader, you have an opportunity to be deliberate in charting a resilient and responsive growth path for your organization.

CHARTING THE PATH OF GROWTH

Innovative, employee-retentive workplaces incorporate flexible work schedules, benefits, and fair compensation. But a culture that draws people in and drives them to stay goes beyond these fundamentals. In May 2021, Tim Minahan noted in his *Harvard Business Review* article, "What Your Future Employees Want Most," that employees want to be assessed on the value they deliver, not the volume of work. They want to work on diverse teams, and they desire access to development opportunities. In short, employees want to grow in their roles.

Humans are hardwired for growth. Strong workplace cultures account for this orientation toward growth and recognize that when individuals grow, so too do organizations and societies. How do we lead in a way that unlocks the potential of our people? As it turns out, growth follows a predictable pattern, which helps us understand where we—and our people—are in the growth process. With this knowledge, we can chart a path forward.

In our work, we leverage the S Curve of Learning™, in which both career and company growth can be modeled by an S-shaped learning curve. The S Curve is divided into three distinct phases: the *launch point,* the *sweet spot,* and *mastery.* Within each phase there are critical steps to move up the curve. This model provides a powerful common language that can guide any leader in shaping change and growth.

Each phase of the S Curve of Learning has its own distinct characteristics. There is a slow start at the *launch point* when unfamiliarity is high; exponential upward growth occurs as competence is achieved in the middle of the curve *sweet spot;* and it levels off again at the top, where *mastery* of a new domain is achieved and stagnation threatens. This easy-to-grasp S Curve framework gives managers and employees alike a tool to pinpoint where they stand on their learning curve and power to proactively direct future progress.

Understanding positioning on the S Curve does several important things for the individual. It normalizes the experiences they are having, it provides a roadmap for how to gain momentum and continue to move up the S Curve, and it helps leaders effectively manage, support, and retain employees at different points on the curve. You as a leader must customize your managerial style based on a worker's position on the curve. Someone at the launch point needs different support and leadership than someone in mastery.

The S Curve model offers equal value to teams. The fundamental unit of growth in any organization is the individual. One person's growth can revolutionize an industry and uplift our world, and it can certainly ignite a team. For optimal organizational growth, your team should have a bell curve distribution along the S Curve, with no more than 20% of team members at the launch point of their S Curve of Learning, circa 60% in the sweet spot, and 20% in mastery.

THE LAUNCH POINT FOR SMART GROWTH LEADERS

We can think about the launch point, sweet spot, and mastery in the context of "Goldilocks and the Three Bears." At the launch point, the chair is too big; the role is a stretch. At the sweet spot, it's just right. And at mastery, the chair has been outgrown; the role is too small. It's time for something new.

For individuals at the launch point, progress feels slow. Growth may be happening, but it isn't yet apparent. Stress levels are high, and decisions are cognitively taxing.

For your team members at the launch point, the chair is too big and discomfort is common, but it's supposed to be. It helps to know that. Team members at the launch point need support. They know they are producing less and their capacity for work is lower than that of their colleagues. They are motivated to improve their situation. As a manager, it's your job to ensure they have the tools, resources, and training they need to do their jobs. In addition to tangible resources, people at this stage need to feel safe and believed in. Acknowledge and value their contributions. Treat mistakes as learning opportunities. Make it clear their individual growth is a priority to you. Invest in frequent and honest communication. A lack of communication and constructive feedback, whether positive or negative, indicates a lack of investment and stagnates growth.

Once you hire someone or move them onto the launch point of a new role, don't test them again and again. Make it clear you believe they can succeed. Tell your employees why you hired them. It inspires confidence and illuminates the strengths you see in them.

THE SWEET SPOT FOR SMART GROWTH LEADERS

Growth in the sweet spot of the S Curve feels fast because it is fast. It's exhilarating. The chair is right-sized, with stress at optimal levels. Potential is being realized, but opportunities for additional progress remain. People in the sweet spot feel motivated by their momentum and confident in the outcome of their work. But they won't grow rapidly without intentional support; they accelerate in part because of your focus on their growth. It's easy to set the autopilot with people in the sweet spot, but don't take their effectiveness for granted. Think of the sweet spot as a racetrack. Your team members are driving at high speed on their own, but even the fastest drivers need a pit crew.

As the leader of the pit crew, it's your job to ensure team members feel competent, autonomous, and related. In the sweet spot, people experience equilibrium. They're competent and things are getting easier, but not so easy that boredom and complacency are an issue. Because they feel competent in their work, team members in the sweet spot require autonomy. They require less support, but that does not mean no support. As humans, we crave vibrant connection to others and to something larger than ourselves. Relatedness involves two dimensions: the feeling that we are connected and the experiences of belonging to a team or group.

How do you walk the fine line between relatedness and autonomy? Be available to them, maintain frequent check-ins, and encourage them to occasionally pause and look up to see where they're going. Take time to have conversations about the next potential S Curve. Don't wait until it's too late. At the same time, encourage them to stay focused. It's easy for people to get ahead of themselves in the sweet spot.

MASTERY FOR SMART GROWTH LEADERS

At the high end of the curve, ease displaces effort, signaling the mastery phase. Confidence is high. Things are comfortable and familiar, and stress is relatively low. Individuals in mastery are competent and productive. They are the pillars of a team, and others frequently seek their advice or institutional memory.

But Goldilocks' chair is no longer just right; it's now too small. The role has been outgrown. New questions emerge, such as, "I'm good at what I do, so why do I feel like I can't keep doing this?" or "Is there more for me?"

Boredom is a key risk. But when you understand the experience people have atop an S Curve, you can architect plans to help them succeed in their growth.

What people need from you now is a new challenge, ideally one inside your organization. Help them see the top of their current S Curve as the base camp of a new one. Consider how you might find a new project or team configuration that expands their skillset, or how to tap into a larger purpose that allows them to expand their influence and reach across the organization.

But before employees move to a new S Curve, pause to celebrate the milestones. We tend to be so focused on production that we forget to look back at the accomplishments. We were made for movement, but when we pause (as when we sleep) we are able to consolidate our gains and reinforce what we've learned. Celebration allows us to mark the end of one S Curve, while giving us permission to begin a new one.

THE ECOSYSTEM OF GROWTH

Each individual on their discrete S Curve is part of a complex and important ecosystem. Individuals are responsible for their own growth, but without a growth-friendly ecosystem, their growth will be stunted. When team leaders and organizations invest in the health of the ecosystem, they proactively impact individual and team productivity, growth, and innovation.

As leaders, we need to understand the current state of our team's biosphere. It is up to us to ensure there is support appropriate to each person's position on their S Curve and that employees have the network, training, and other resources to grow in their role.

As the workforce begins to make bold decisions and to follow opportunities that make them feel challenged and valued, you can build an attractive and powerful organizational culture by being a smart growth leader. You can be a talent magnet; you can be a talent retainer. By meaningfully and intentionally investing in your team, you can be part of the Great Aspiration. After this long winter of our discontent, get ready for an incredible spring. AQ

Whitney Johnson is CEO of the tech-enabled talent development company Disruption Advisors. One of the top 10 business thinkers in the world as named by Thinkers50, Johnson is an expert at smart growth leadership.

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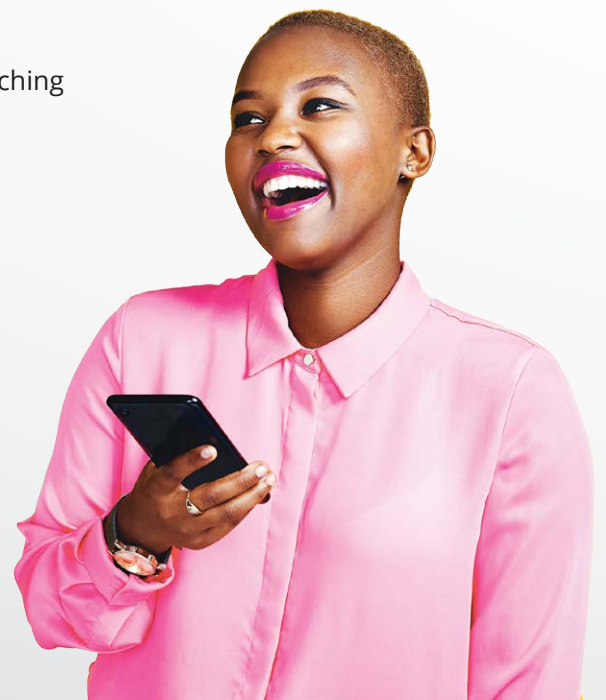
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