

## Andy Stefanovich on ... Innovation

### Andy Stefanovich answers your questions about innovation, and offers five tips for success

#### **What is innovation today? Is it any different than, say, 12–18 months ago?**

Today, innovation is a new way of approaching problems and projects within an organization. Innovation has to be a sustainable part of the culture, not a one-time process. A culture that accepts taking risks, new ideas, and ways of thinking will innovate.

#### **What is the most important thing that needs to happen before innovation can occur in an organization?**

Senior sponsorship. In order for behaviors to change, people have to see senior leaders engaging in new ways. Setting an example and acting as a catalyst for change.

#### **Does the importance of innovation vary depending on where an organization is in the business cycle?**

The corporate culture is always present, regardless of the business cycle. Engaged, passionate employees will contribute more to the business.

#### **Should you measure innovation and, if so, how do you put the metrics in place?**

Innovation can be measured by non-traditional metrics: How many times you hear someone laugh in an hour. The number of interesting, unique conversations. How well received failure is within a team. Do teammates eat at their desks? Instead of asking how to put them in place permanently, change the metrics.

In my experience, innovation is often seen as tomorrow's imperative rather than today's—i.e., would firms under pressure in a highly competitive environment perhaps see “risky” investments in innovation as something to do “manana”? Or is it the opposite—“necessity is the mother of innovation”?

Firms that will be successful tomorrow are those that

realize the value of it today. By assessing how risky it is with outdated metrics, you can't see the benefit of the investments as they are. Creative, productive, and engaged employees are always a good investment in the future.

#### **How do you overcome functional silos within a business? Don't such silos often hamper the flow of knowledge around the business?**

Employees are more than their title or role. They are people with passions. By encouraging employees to explore their passions, and not just their roles, they can connect with others within the organization and create and lead a new project or initiative. Give them permission to be more than just their titles.

#### **I would think that innovation must be channelled or controlled in some way—how do you resist the urge to innovate in too many directions? To what extent can innovation be left alone?**

Innovation is a living, breathing thing. It should be left alone. When people are rewarded for new ideas and behaviors, innovation can exist.

#### **If you could sum up your five “top tips” for the innovation process, what would they be?**

Ask bold, provocative questions.

Get inspired by seeking new experiences. Look at More Stuff.

Create mental space for inspiration and creativity.

Look for direct, tangential, and seemingly unrelated sources of inspiration.

Find the bigger big. Ask yourself what the impact could be on your team, your organization, and the world.

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