

## **Improving Teams with a Dose of Creativity**

Innovation is vital to the health of organizations and to the functioning of successful work teams. Often teams naturally stick to familiar practices they know to be successful. And of course, that makes perfect sense. But imagine what might happen if a team sought out better ways of working and constantly searched for new efficiencies. Certainly, greater results would follow. So what does innovation mean in a team environment? What does being creative really mean? How do you get your team to access their creative energies and take advantage of the benefits of innovation? Consider the following situation...

The annual sales meeting planning committee had been meeting weekly every Monday morning for a month or more. Everyone takes a turn and gives their updates, just like always. I don't particularly want to be here – I have done my tasks and am annoyed that some others haven't met their deadlines – again. And they are asking for help from the team to complete what they should have done already. Next, the leader asks for ideas for an ice breaker activity to conduct during the first evening reception. He's looking for something to get people interacting across functions - something to prevent marketing people talking to marketing people, sales people talking to sales people, customer service people – well, you get the idea. No one can think of anything. There is no energy in the room. Our only ideas are what we have done before.

What do we need here? We need energy, ideas, and some good questions! Initial ideas stimulate more ideas because ideas generate other thoughts which

in turn generate more ideas! That is the way it works. Have you tried to think of a solution and come up with nothing, but as soon as you talk to someone else the ideas start popping? This is one of the advantages of adding people to the creative process – having other people to bounce ideas off of.

Let's start by looking at the difference between creativity and innovation.

Creativity is all about generating new ideas – it is thinking outside the box.

Innovation is the act of using these new ideas to create something that did not exist before. Innovation puts creativity into action.

Many techniques exist to increase creativity on your team. Here are a few to get you started

### **Get Out of Left Brain Thinking**

Our left brain is very important. Most of us spend large amounts of time using our left brain. It is about structure, logic, analysis and getting things done in a linear fashion. Although it is efficient, left brain thinking can be a roadblock to creative thinking. Dan Pink, in his book *A Whole New Mind*, tells us why right-brainers will rule the future. I'm not the only one who thinks this is important!

**Carry a notebook** and bring ideas to team meetings and brainstorming sessions. Thomas Edison carried an idea book with him all the time. The book was not simply his "to do" list. He carried the book to capture ideas when they occurred to him during his day whether walking down the street or taking a break

sitting on a park bench. Remember, creative thinking requires relaxed time and space for the ideas to surface. Make sure everyone on the team understands that creativity does not happen when you are stressed out trying to meet a deadline.

**Capture Your Creative Output in Different Ways** - Bulleted lists on a flip chart are often efficient. Why not try capturing ideas in a non-linear way such as in a random pattern, or a circle. Try mind mapping (many Google articles to help you with this). Visual images help stimulate additional ideas and illustrate potential relationships. Remember the old adage, “a picture is worth a thousand words.” Visuals help you get from creative ideas to innovation you can implement.

### **Create a New Environment**

Another way to stimulate the right brain of your team is to change the look of “meetings.” It is easy for the same people to meet in the same room and do the same things – you get stuck in a rut. A rut is a coffin with the ends cut out. Break the routine! Innovation and creativity are hard pressed to thrive in a rut.

Make the meeting environment stimulating. Occasionally change the meeting room and things about the meeting. This can mean try a different food, have a theme, dress differently. Decorate the meeting room with a theme for the purpose of stimulating ideas on a topic. If you are planning a global meeting, plan for food from different countries attending. Differences can be subtle or dramatic. It is all about expressing creativity.

Following are some questions that can generate ideas for creating an idea generating environment.

- How would you describe an environment that stimulates ideas?
- What small changes can you make to the current environment to make it more appealing?
- What changes would stimulate people visually?
- How can you use sound or music to soothe or stimulate?
- How can you use taste or fragrance to help create the environment you are looking for?
- What are environments do you find comfortable to be in?
- How would your team describe the desired environment?
- Would you want colors that are stimulating or soothing?

Not all ideas will be practical or affordable, but it is good to think of ways to stimulate people – even if it is just occasionally. Creativity is a muscle that needs regular use to keep it toned. Team members can support each other in this effort.

Reprinted from 10 Steps to Successful Teams, used with permission from ASTD Press.

**Bio:**

Renie McClay is passionate about innovation. She has facilitated programs on creativity and innovation at Kraft, Pactiv, CDW, Sylvan Learning, Bangalore Management Association and more. She is certified as an Innovation Trainer, Innovation Facilitator, and Innovation Coach by Solution People.

She was trained with Second City and uses improvisation as a tool to help companies improve creativity and develop more productive and innovative teams.

Renie has facilitated training for corporate, non-profit, and university audiences in North America, Africa, Europe, and Asia. She has trained audiences virtually from Australia, Europe, China, India, Latin America, and Canada. She helps companies develop curriculum and training programs.

She is the author of *The Essential Guide to Training Global Audiences*, *Sales Training Solutions*, *10 Steps to Successful Teams*, and *Fortify Your Sales Force*.