

GOOD IDEA

TIPS FOR PROMOTING CREATIVITY

CREATIVITY IS A FICKLE THING to understand. You can put all of your time, energy, and heart into developing an idea and still end up with nothing. How do you get the most creativity from your employees? How do you manage creative people? Why do articles like this always start out with questions? There are thousands of articles and books about creativity. There are thousands of ideas on how to be more creative and manage creativity more effectively. I can't answer them all in this short article. What I can give you is five quick ideas to foster a more creative environment with your employees. Creativity is like a plant. Both need certain things to promote growth. I do not, however, recommend adding Miracle-Gro to the employee water cooler under any circumstances.

And now here are the five ideas. Why five ideas instead of 10? Everybody does 10 ideas. Five is the new 10.

1. Encourage your employees to relax and think. When was the last time you or your employees took five consecutive minutes to relax and think? Our world is filled with voicemail, e-mail, cell phones, pagers, appointments, conference calls, and PowerPoint presentations that are hard to read. Sometimes we need to take a breath. Usually, when we're relaxed and not thinking about the project at hand, the ideas start to flow. Everyone should take at least five minutes each day to walk away and just think. Ideas will come. At the very least, you might just enjoy a quiet moment.

2. Create a positive environment. Sounds easy, doesn't it? It's not. What are you doing every day to create a positive environment? Make eye contact, appreciate people, and praise people. Fix the lighting, buy new office chairs, put a plant in the corner, or put a bench outside.

3. Don't be so quick to judge or analyze. Every great idea was once a bad idea. People called the Wright Brothers, Bill Gates, Henry Ford, Albert Einstein, and Thomas Edison crazy. If you're ever on a deserted island or just lonely, come up with an idea. Someone will come around very soon to tell you that your idea won't work. Devote the first half of meetings to being creative. Use the second half to analyze ideas. You just can't do both at the same time. As soon as you start analyzing, you stop being creative. Creativity feeds on momentum. Don't stop the energy. And don't stop till you get enough.

4. Reward the effort of creating the idea. The reality is that most ideas don't work. So, here's what happens: Your employee continues to create ideas. You keep taking a sledgehammer to those ideas. Eventually, your employee isn't going to create any more ideas because he's afraid of the sledgehammer. Instead of constant negativity, reward the time and effort he or she put forth to create the idea. You'll find that rewards will create even more effort.

5. Expand the possibilities. Are you creating rules where rules don't exist? Here's a test. Go through the alphabet and give me an animal for every letter. Yes, I am serious. Do this right now. How did you do? Did you get stumped? What did you do for the tough letters, like "x"? Did you make up animals that don't exist, such as a "xefgrough"? Did you put an adjective in front of an animal, such as a "violent lion" or "ugly coyote"? I didn't say you couldn't do either of those things. If you did, you created your own rules. When I play this game with professional groups, employees rarely expand their possibilities. They only think of animals that exist. Watch out if you've ever said, "This is how we do things here, and this is how we've always done things here." If that's true, then we should all still be living in caves, hoping that lightning will strike a tree and create fire. Isn't that how we always did things?



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