

# The Power To Innovate

by Barry Wishner

Today's forward-thinking leaders realize that it is the implementation of innovation that will give them the competitive edge to outsmart their competition and differentiate their products and services in the market. However, success is never final. *Executives and managers who hesitate to innovate are lunch.* Those who fail to innovate go the way of the dinosaur and dodo bird and become extinct. Tomorrow's Champions Of Innovation will be those leaders who are excited about change and create an environment that rewards employees who get it done.

My challenge to all executives is to develop an R.O.I. Traditionally you have a Return On Investment in your operation. Isn't it time to develop a new **R.O.I. — Return On Innovation.**

As a leader, your major responsibility is to initiate, promote and communicate a sense of urgency to think outside the box — and, if necessary, throw the box away! — in order to achieve breakthroughs.

The challenge is for you to develop a motto, a slogan, or a battle cry that will drive the organization. For example, Jacksonville Electric Authority (JEA) has BHAG (“Big, Hairy Audacious Goals”). GE utilizes BOFAB (“Bust Out For A Billion”) at the regional sales levels. Taco Bell's charge is for “Total Share Of Stomach.” More general slogans include: “Swing For The Fences,” “No Boundaries, No Limits” and “Bold Belief.”

In creating these mottos, you are energizing your employees and channeling their energy in the same direction. It challenges your staff to question long-held beliefs, practices, processes and procedures; to become barrier busters, and to soar to new heights. It establishes a curiosity to see the world through a fresh pair of eyes and to see its unlimited possibilities.

Wouldn't it be great if you had a technique to find out what is blocking creativity and innovation within your organization? Sun Microsystems (Palo Alto, California) sends out an e-mail (the Employee Quality Index) to find out what is getting in the way of their employees doing their jobs. Similarly, you may wish to pose some of the following questions in a monthly e-mail to your own employees:

- “What's the dumbest, stupidest things we are doing in our company or in your department which is impeding innovation?”

- “If you were just starting out today, what would you do differently?”
- “If you could write the script for your career and your company’s success in the next 2 -5 years, what would it look like?”
- “Is what I am doing, necessary?”
- “What am I doing to challenge conventional wisdom and the status quo.”

Now that you’ve acquired these innovative ideas and suggestions from your employees, what do you do with them? The answer is to develop a **Statement To Implement Innovation**. It should be in 15 words or less, and made up of the *Three Clarities*:

- *Clarity of Direction* (Where do you want to take these innovative ideas?)
- *Clarity of Structure* (Who do you need within this organization to make these ideas happen?)
- *Clarity of Measurement* (What are the quantifiable benchmarks that you can institute to measure the progress?)

A **Statement To Implement Innovation** should apply to all areas of the business. For example, yours might read: “Utilize the database to profile the needs of your customers to increase market penetration.” Now you’ve got a real-world working blueprint to **turn innovative ideas into action!**

Ultimately, the successful businesses and their leadership will be those who champion innovation and adopt the wisdom of Leonard Reggio, CEO, Barnes ... Noble and self-styled “Head Muckity Muck”:

“I am a possibility maker. I am an inventor of concoctions and thing-a-ma-jigs.”

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