

# Karen Mathews & Associates Newsletter

**Intentional Leadership -- Intentionally Spurring Innovation**

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Welcome to October's newsletter. We are exploring the challenge for today's leaders of getting their brain trust to be innovative and not just improving productivity. The next economic boom will likely come from some innovation that will create consumer demand and result in great wealth to the company that owns that innovation. But how do you motivate that kind of in-the-moment creativity so that it is part of the on-going process of work?

*"Innovations never happen as planned."* - Gifford Pinchot, 1865-1946, American conservationist and public official

## • Intentionally Spurring Innovation (Read Time: 4 minutes)



**Karen Mathews and Associates can help.**

Is your business ready for better results? Contact Karen Mathews & Associates to find out how we can help take your leadership and company to the next level. Call 408-988-2361 or email us by [clicking here](#).

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To begin with, anyone who is a parent knows that you cannot make anyone do anything. You can certainly try by using different tactics of intimidation, coercion, threats, on the negative side, or you can try bribery which is the constant supplication to influence a person to do something that you want them to do. Basically what I learned when I had my first baby is that I could not make her do anything. So it is with everyone, including employees. It is a misstatement to use the euphemism that we "should motivate our team." The best we can hope for is to influence them with our vision and inspire them with our passion for the mission.

That is square one. Beyond that how do we get our team to create or to produce this in demand commodity of innovation? The word innovate means to alter; take something already in place and make modifications that will improve it. Like with computers, they were in place but were not accessible to the average person because the operating systems were very complex. I believe the engineers and scientists liked it that way because it gave them exclusive control over the great power of computing. It was like being in a club that not everyone could belong to for many reasons.

unreasonable deadline your boss gave to take the heat off of him in front of the program office. If you hold onto the knowledge, they can't let you go because only you know the system or how to trouble shoot it or what made it work the last 5 times it went off -line.

To have true innovation, you must have the mental space for it within the organization. That means you must have an environment of trust. It doesn't mean people won't get laid-off or have to deal with problems. It means, as a leader, we can stand in self trust with integrity and build a safe environment for people to risk a creative idea. But we must go first - we have to give first in order to get. Speak the truth and deal with it even if it is uncomfortable. When we are tough and stand up to scrutiny we demonstrate that we are willing to do that which we ask of others. When we hold an expectation that our team is trust worthy, hold them accountable and continue to expect them to perform - they will. It takes time but it is worth it.

People are by definition creative whether they believe it or not. To have innovation, we must allow people to make mistakes and not punish them for it. People don't share their ideas for fear of being dismissed or laughed at. The safe thing and most common way people respond is keep their mouths shut. To coax your staff into sharing their brilliance incentivize them for it and then put in place some method for managing the forthcoming ideas. I can tell you that it can get overwhelming when you are suddenly swamped with new suggestions. You will likely not be able or want to use every creative thought. To sustain this momentum, you must be willing to acknowledge and respect the contributor and consider the usefulness and applicability of the idea even if you think that it will never work. You need ask yourself if your attitudes toward new ideas stop the flow.

How will you invest the money you generate from your next innovation? Karen Mathews & Associates can help you build an organizational culture that is innovative at its core. Call us at 408-988-2361 or email [info@karenmathews.com](mailto:info@karenmathews.com) for a free consultation on getting your organization to achieve at its optimum innovative level.

We all have blind spots and sometimes we use very subtle communications that undermine our goals. This sends very powerful conflicting messages to our co-workers and as their leader; they are very sensitive to us. For example, your assistant suggests at your encouragement three ideas about how to streamline a communication process while improving it. When you sit down with her are you keeping an open mind? When you hear the second suggestion, do you think, "This will never work" or "We've tried this before"? Whether you realize it or not, you probably have a distinctive facial

expression that accompanies that thought. Subtle, yes, but she has already picked up on it. Unless you have a great deal of trust and openness in the relationship, she will likely stop there.

See how this works? You can destroy innovation in its tracks or build it up to be your crown jewel. To have the latter, be aware and intentional of what you bring to create an environment that promotes the safety needed for innovation.

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**• Leadership Tip (Read time: 2 minutes) Leader as a coach - Dealing with the Worst-Case Thinking syndrome**

Sometimes people get into a negative thinking mode and start toward a downward spiral with ideas that the worst case scenario is impending. Fear is often insidious this way, getting rational people into a worst case scenario mode. They can see themselves going from success to abject poverty, loss of loved ones and security. You can recognize it by black and white thinking, no real solutions to the problem and extreme consequences. To effectively deal with this person, get into your best objective listener and coach mode and be present with her or him. Withhold offers of quick solutions or judgment; just listen until they have fully expressed their concern.

Then ask them if they are caught in the worst case scenario thinking. If they don't know what you mean, explain. Then gently suggest that there are likely some other possible outcomes or solutions and ask if they can think of some. You can get the ball rolling by suggesting a couple that you can think of. The goal is to help the person stay connected with others and lessen their anxiety.

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