

Hey! What's New? 2024-122

Four Outdated Management Beliefs That Kill Innovation

According to a recent article in *Chief Executive*, written by Janie Woolfe, “innovation is a tricky beast. Everyone talks about it, but few know how to foster it – and even fewer know how to avoid killing it. Some of the most innovative companies in the world have figured out that innovation isn’t just about shiny new ideas; it’s about dismantling the outdated beliefs that stifle creativity before it even gets a chance. Here’s why it’s time to toss them and build something better.”

1. Leaders know what’s going on. Leaders, says Woolfe, need to stop acting like they have full clarity from their executive perches. “Spoiler alert: they don’t. The farther you are from the ground, the more you need to acknowledge that your view is – at best – partial. The real story? It’s buried under layers of politeness, surface-level nods and filtered feedback. So, if you want the truth, you’ve got to create systems to unearth it. You’ve got to dig.”

Here’s the thing, she adds, “when feedback gets filtered through layers of hierarchy, what happens? Well, by the time it reaches the top, it’s been cleaned up, sanitized and robbed of its sharp edges. You know, the kind of feedback that’s actually useful. So, cut out the middleman and create a direct line from the people who see the problems up close to the leaders who can actually do something about it.

2. Stay in your lane. Woolfe suggests that cross-pollination of ideas is where you go from “meh” to “wow. As an example, at one organization, the leaders of each department broke away from the traditional pipeline approach and embraced full creative collaboration. “It wasn’t just about passing a baton – it’s about running together.”

3. Don’t break the chain of command. Let’s talk about the old “don’t go over your boss’s head” rule. We’ve all heard it. But, says Woolfe, “it’s past its expiration date. If you’re building a workplace where every idea has to go through a chain of command, you’re clogging the system with bureaucracy. It wasn’t about holding all the power. It was about guiding the team, creating the kind of space where creativity could flourish and hierarchies took a backseat.”

Need proof? Look no further than IBM. Once an AI pioneer, they fell behind in cloud computing. Why? “Too much focus on legacy systems, too little on innovation. Companies stuck in the ‘this is how we’ve always done it’ mode don’t leave room for experimentation. They don’t leave room for breakthroughs.”

4. Naysayers are troublemakers. According to Woolfe, “If your instinct is to manage troublemakers into submission, you’re cutting off your company’s lifeblood. Your so-called troublemakers – those folks who ask hard questions, push back on bad decisions or point out the elephant in the room – are your secret innovation weapon. Embrace them, or lose out on breakthroughs.”

Companies that thrive, that break free from the bottlenecks, are the ones that embrace constructive disruption, she points out. “Innovation isn’t a one-and-done process. It’s a mindset. It’s the daily practice of questioning, of creating a space where people feel safe to speak up, push back, and challenge the status quo.”

The future of your company? Woolfe says “it’s not in the hands of those who follow the rules. It’s with the ones willing to break them (constructively, of course). So, give your people room to experiment. Make space for dissent. And embrace the messy, glorious process of creativity. That’s where your next big breakthrough is waiting.”

Innovation isn’t something you sprinkle on top of a project, Woolfe concludes. “It’s a muscle you build by tearing down outdated management beliefs that quietly hold back creativity. The companies that thrive are the ones that make space for bold experimentation, cross-departmental collaboration and healthy dissent. Leaders need to actively dig for the truth, embrace constructive disruption, and – most importantly – empower the so-called troublemakers who challenge the status quo. That’s where real breakthroughs are born. So, loosen the reins, encourage some chaos and watch your next big idea take shape.”

For more, see [Four Outdated Management Beliefs That Kill Innovation \(chiefexecutive.net\)](http://chiefexecutive.net).