

Getting those innovative juices flowing

GROW OR DIE — this is the mantra of today's organizations. Easy to say, hard to do.

It's hard because it involves change and many employees, especially the most senior executives, are averse to change because it is associated with risk.

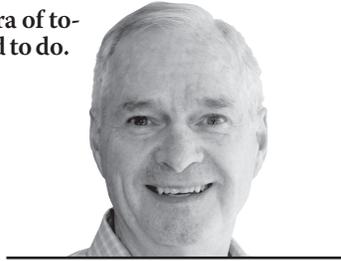
Take the person at the very top, for instance. Why would she welcome change? She thinks she has the most at stake and, in her mind, there is only one way to go — down. So, instead, many executives just sit there, watching the world go by.

And the world is definitely going by, whether they like it or not. We have only to think of Sears, IBM, Motorola and even McDonald's, for example. Can you imagine the amount of brain-power each of these companies possesses and how each could have used it much more effectively?

The only way these companies are going to get back in the game is by buying their way in, through acquisitions. It would take too long to reinvent their way back or try to change their current cultures.

It's hard to imagine how they must feel when they witness what young startups are able to accomplish on shoestring budgets — feats these old stalwarts could have financed out of petty-cash alone, but didn't.

Look at BlackBerry. Once the world's leader in smartphones, now it's having to completely reinvent



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LEADERSHIP IN ACTION

itself from the ground up, just to stay alive. Luckily, a few years ago, it bought QNX Software Systems, which is now enabling BlackBerry to completely metamorphose itself from being a hardware company to a software and cloud services provider.

The one key common component each of these companies lacked was a culture of innovation. In order to grow, companies must change; and to change, they must innovate; and to innovate, they must create an innovative culture.

How? Well, they have to tackle these three requirements in reverse order — beginning with culture, because without a culture that embraces innovation, the other two preconditions are impossible.

But are employees receptive to working for organizations that are constantly changing? As an answer, just ask Google (or Alphabet as it's now called). Here's a company that started off as a simple search engine

provider that now boasts at least 186 subsidiaries.

This kind of innovation and growth explains why there is a steady stream of bright, talented, hopeful people beating a path to Alphabet's door, eager to shape the future of the world. It's certainly not because Alphabet has the best ping-pong tables or the best hot lunches. It's because Alphabet is changing our world and these people want to be a part of it.

People are driven by their emotions. Consultants such as Brady Wilson and his aptly named company, Juice, know that in order to create a culture that encourages and rewards people to go beyond their normal engagement level to one of passion, they must be energized. And he lists 10 ways on his website.

Here are a few other suggestions to get the innovative juices flowing:

Practise equality: No matter what a person's position, he must know his job is no more important, nor less important, than anyone else's. Each person just has different areas of responsibility.

Include everyone in goal-setting: To maximize buy-in from all employees, they have to feel committed. How? Have them actively participate in creating the plan.

Balance responsibility with authority: When an employee is assigned a set of responsibilities, she must also be given the authority to carry these out.

Change is constant: Getting

people to step outside their sphere of comfort can be challenging. So management should think of the change process as a series of concentric rings on a disc. The goal is to help this person move from the outermost ring to the innermost. Because of a person's sensitivity to change, the best approach is to help him move to the next adjacent groove only. Before long, the centre and final ring is reached. Then, the focus should be on what was accomplished overall, and the typical response is "Great, let's keep going."

Change perspectives: Look at the organization through different eyes; through various employees' eyes, customers' eyes, suppliers' and the other stakeholders involved. What would each of them like to see done better?

Be proactive: Being reactive is a loser's game. Only by proactively innovating and moving forward can a team truly gel and achieve sustainable success.

Every employee wants to make a difference. Every organization wants to survive and grow. It's up to management to marry these desires together and release the passion to make it happen.

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