

## Bold leaders are not afraid of risks

**I**nnovation doesn't happen in a vacuum. Most often, it happens as a result of the collective effort of many people with different areas of expertise who come together to assess market opportunities and determine which ideas could generate the most profitable streams of revenue.

Innovation leaders must possess the skills to draw people out, handle diverse perspectives, synthesize ideas, and facilitate debate. They must also be capable of leading the group through an effective decision process. Most leaders today may possess some of these talents, but not all, and therefore many need to learn how to be an innovation leader.

In the book *"The Game-Changer,"* A.J. Lafley and Ram Charan describe some of the essential behaviors of today's innovative leader:

### 1. Collaboration

Getting the right people together to explore, discuss, germinate and weigh ideas is critical. So is understanding how to guide them through a process that will help them make difficult decisions.

Discussions around innovation often require people who do not normally work together to become part of a brainstorming, assessment and business prioritization conversation.

Bringing people together who have different areas of expertise and perspectives minimizes risk, which is a serious consideration when budgeting a new product or service launch. An innovation leader must know how to draw out their different points of view so the not-so-obvious opportunities can be identified.

Consider these questions:

- » How are you currently developing and nurturing innovative leaders?
- » How do you eliminate fear and encourage free-flowing conversation between cross-functional team members?
- » What are you doing to foster a culture of curiosity and openness where collaboration and brainstorming are promoted?

### 2. Connection

Innovative leaders work productively with others, both inside and outside of the company. They recognize that when innovation teams come together there is often a need to bridge the gap between different functions – technology will approach the situation differently than, let's say, marketing or sales. This is when idealism will bump up against reality. Different

“thinking about possibilities is where the innovative leader lives.”

functions speak different languages and have different, often conflicting, priorities. Helping team members recognize the value of what each team member can bring to the discussion educates and broadens the business acumen of the entire team.

Consider these questions:

- » How do you eliminate bureaucratic- and silo-type thinking from interfering with the creative process?



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- » What are you doing to create connections between team members to make them feel safe and comfortable to speak freely without judgment?
- » How do you promote open communication across business units and with external parties in order to maximize learning and idea exchange?

### 3. Curiosity

Innovative leaders have an intense curiosity. They ask a lot of questions. They look at what is and probe with ...how could we ... or ...what would happen if ... or ...what about .... They embrace learning and love to explore new possibilities.

Consider these questions:

- » How are you igniting curiosity

and getting team members to think different?

- » How do you foster a culture of curiosity and openness?

### 4. Open-minded

Engaging with others for ideas, inspiration, feedback, knowledge and support is how many innovative leaders work. They are willing to learn

from anyone, anywhere, at any time if it makes their product, or service, or work environment better.

They invite feedback from customers and suspend judgment until the path least explored is investigated.

They look to other industries for ideas and applications and ask, "What if we did something similar?" It might not be the right thing but the practice of thinking about possibilities is where the innovative leader lives.

Consider these questions:

- » What outside sources are leveraged to cultivate ideas? Gather knowledge? Test possibilities?
- » What do you do to stretch thinking in novel ways and break-through conventional thinking?

## 5. Courage

Innovative leaders are not afraid of risk. They know how to pinpoint, define and manage it, and are willing to try again. They're not afraid to fail since they view failure as an important part of the learning experience. They are also not afraid to kill an innovation even when they have evidence to justify the investment of time, energy and resources. They passionately follow the path of proof so the empirical evidence needed to justify an investment is documented.

Consider these questions:

- » Do your leaders have the backbone to do what needs to be done? To say what needs to be said?
- » Do they have the courage to lead people where they haven't been before but know, instinctively, it's a path that needs to be explored?

Borrow from Procter & Gamble's ASIA division "I.D.E.A.S." playbook - the acronym that represents the prin-

ciples that guide their innovative thinking process:

**Inclusive:** Reap benefits of diverse thinking and ideas needed to foster game-changing innovation.

**Decisive:** Eliminate organization swirl, debate, and over-analysis to enable faster innovation development, qualification, and commercialization.

**External:** Focus externally to get and stay in touch with consumers, customers, suppliers, and the need for honest and objective benchmarking versus external competition.

**Agile:** React quickly to changing consumer and marketplace conditions, be forward-thinking, and become more comfortable with taking (calculated) risks.

**Simple:** Embrace ongoing streamlining and simplification of work structures/processes to free up more time for innovation.

Innovative leaders are skilled at breaking down barriers. They facilitate others in building bridges between diverse work groups. They foster an environment that supports innovative thinking, collaboration and critical business analysis. They make decisions based on empirical evidence, not feelings.

Innovative leadership needs to happen NOW as well as in the next generation of leaders.

Are you on board? ■

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