

Luttrell on Leadership
by
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A Culture of Creativity

A principal benefit of strategic planning is the disciplined process of strategic thinking. There are two types of thinking required: analytical and creative. Although many organizations are comfortable and competent at analytical thinking, I believe the next frontier for business differentiation and success will be in the creative thinking arena. Analytical competence and business acumen will get you into the ballpark, but only creative competence will help you hit home runs.

In my 26 years of working with hundreds of businesses of all types and sizes, I have seen many different company cultures. I have seen what works and what doesn't. The organizations where creativity is fostered and ingrained into the culture are more successful over the long-term. They are more resilient, more able to weather the ups and downs of changing business conditions. These organizations are also more exciting and more dynamic, with higher morale and productivity. Business itself can be a form of creative art.

Creativity in business has a variety of applications. Here are just a few:

- Solutions – finding answers to tough problems

- Innovations – developing new products, services, methods, and processes
- Inspirations – powerful ideas that motivate and engage people
- Strategies – intelligent ways of accomplishing challenging goals
- Creations – tangible things, from websites and buildings to intellectual property and inventions
- Problems – re-definitions of a situation, re-framing an old problem
- Insights – greater understanding, fresh viewpoints, new levels of awareness

Although we speak about a business being creative – and certainly there are many fine examples, from Apple to Zappos.com to Southwest Airlines – it is important to remember that it's the *people* in the business who are the source of the creativity. While nurturing creativity can certainly be “institutionalized” and woven into the fabric of the organization, it is the human beings who are the genesis. Left unattended or un nourished, the quiet voice of individual creativity is often overrun by the immediacy of daily demands and the fears of ridicule or failure.

So, the question for leaders becomes, “How do we increase and nurture our capacity for creativity in the business environment?”

First, we must recognize our innate creativity. Remember, being artistic is just one type of creativity. Dr. Howard Gardner

of Harvard, and Thomas Armstrong, author of *Seven Kinds of Smart*, identified many different types of creativity: verbal/linguistic, mathematical/logical, spatial, musical, bodily kinesthetic, interpersonal, and intrapersonal. Most of these are relevant and useful in the business arena. The most obvious applications are verbal and logical. Certainly leaders, supervisors and managers benefit from having intrapersonal and interpersonal creativity, now familiarly known, thanks to the work of Daniel Goleman, as emotional and social intelligence.

Second, we must appreciate the value of directed creativity, or conscious creativity. We must purposefully give ourselves – and our employees – the permission, the opportunities, and the tools to be creative. “Creativity enhancing conditions” must be fostered and encouraged.

Creativity expert Paul Plsek has identified three common principles in all creativity practices. Using as example the familiar tool of brainstorming, we first **focus our attention** by framing a specific, well-formulated question. In the brainstorming session itself, we apply the second principle of **escape** from our tendencies to rush to judgment, to find fault, and to criticize. We also foster **movement** by encouraging a plethora of free wheeling new ideas and “piggy-backing” one idea upon another, building and expanding from the starting point. Later the evaluative and practical considerations can take their rightful place, but the

creative phase requires these different criteria and conditions.

Here are some suggestions for how leaders (and others) can increase their personal “creativity quotient.”

- Increase your natural sense of wonder. Make it a practice to pause, be observant, curious, and interested in new things.
- Focus your creative energy on one or two areas that you care about deeply and work on them purposefully for a dedicated time period.
- Notice the things that make you laugh or deeply moved the first time you hear them.
- Realize that your thought patterns are just that, and they are not necessarily true, correct, or useful.
- Make a deliberate attempt to develop, harvest, and implement some of the ideas you have generated by giving yourself permission to be creative.

By giving conscious attention to a creative climate, you and your organization can reap the many rewards of greater creativity. As an individual, you will find yourself more inspired, delighted and fulfilled by your work. This is especially important for leaders, who are frequently seen as a source of inspiration by others in the organization. It’s difficult to inspire others if you are not inspired yourself.

A work group or team can exponentially multiply the capacity of the group, using

play, humor, and laughter to unlock creative energy. For organizations, incorporating creativity into your strategic planning, marketing, and everyday operations will improve your company's performance and delight your customers. Everyone benefits when creativity is cultivated in the workplace.

The highly creative mind of science fiction writer Gene Rodenberry provided an example of a strong leader in his character called Captain Picard. My recommendations to business leaders regarding cultivating creativity in their organizations are summed up in his disarmingly simple yet brilliant words: "Make it so."

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Mary Luttrell helps business leaders turn challenges into opportunities that move their organizations to new levels of success. With more than 25 years of consulting experience, she is known for her ability to simplify complexity by creating an inspired yet practical plan of action. Ms. Luttrell is a Certified Management Consultant whose firm was named one of the *100 Leading Management Consulting Firms in North America* by industry analyst James Kennedy. To receive her white paper on *The Four Cornerstones of Business Success*, contact Ms. Luttrell at (707) 887-2256 or thecoach@sonic.net.