



# Free your mind

## Five tips to help you hone your most creative employees

Believe it or not, many people within your organization possess creative genes. Unfortunately as leaders, we often don't allow them to surface by overloading them with ongoing day-to-day tasks. Sound familiar? You should know they are a critical component to any business's success.

**O**K, they may be a tad moody or eccentric ... but they are an integral part of the fabric of your organization. Although every organization claims to care about creativity and innovation, very few are willing to do what it takes to keep their creative people happy. So, what are the keys to engaging and retaining creative employees?

Like them or not, here are my top five:

### Spoil them and let them fail

Like parents who celebrate their children's successes, show your creative associates unconditional support and encourage them to do the absurd ... and perhaps even fail. Promote risk-taking at every turn. Of course there are costs associated with these "experiments," but these are lower than the cost of not innovating.

### Surround them with people unlike them

The worst thing you can do to a creative employee is to force them to work with someone like them. They will compete for ideas, brainstorm eternally or simply ignore each other.

The solution is to support your creative associates with colleagues who are too conventional to challenge their ideas, but unconventional enough to collaborate with

them. That's the formula. And, yes, it's easier said than done.

### Don't pressure them

Giving people more freedom and flexibility at work dramatically enhances creativity. If you like structure, order and predictability, you're probably not creative.

However, we are all more likely to perform more creatively in spontaneous, unpredictable circumstances. Don't constrain your creative employees.

### Be spontaneous

Few things are as aggravating to creative individuals as boredom. Indeed, creative people are prewired to seek constant change, even when it's counterproductive. They take a different route to work every day, even if it gets them lost, and they never repeat an order at a restaurant, even if they really liked it.

Creativity is linked to a higher tolerance of ambiguity. It is therefore essential that you keep surprising your creative employees at every turn.

### Make them feel important

Why do creative people fail? Answer: Others fail to recognize them. Fairness is not treating everyone the same, but like they deserve.



If you fail to recognize your employees' creative potential, they will go somewhere where they feel more valued.

Natural innovators are rarely gifted with leadership skills. Steve Jobs had better relationships with gadgets than people. We could all learn from Mark Zuckerberg, who brought in Sheryl Sandberg as COO to make up for his leadership deficits.

Research confirms that corporate innovators exhibit many of the characteristics that prevent them from being effective leaders: They are rebellious and anti-social with record low levels of empathy. Put another way, they will be a challenge to manage and will take you, as management, out of your comfort zone. Some days, they will simply drive you crazy.

Properly managed, however, their innovation and ability to look at things through a different lens will be central to your company's ongoing success. ●

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