Blocks to Creativity and Innovation

There are many things that can stifle creativity and innovation at work. People who drive businesses forward will recognise and challenge these blocks and barriers, and overcome them wherever possible.

1. Routine. If you keep doing what you've always done, you'll always get what you've always got. If you can't change what you do, change how you do it, where you do it, when you do it, and who you do it with. Sometimes doing things differently gives unique insights that can be the spark that sets innovation off.

2. Fear. You are scared of failure or appearing foolish to work colleagues. No-one made an omelette without breaking eggs. If you never try, you will never know. Ask yourself, 'what's the worst that can happen? If vanity is holding you back, you need to consider your role as a leader.

3. Past Precedent. If you never challenge because when you did in 1992 your ideas were knocked back, you need to get over it. Things, people and companies change. Identify what is different now. If so many things are different, why would you get the same response? Not every suggestion will be taken up, but if you never make any, none of your ideas will ever see the light of day. If you make 6 suggestions, maybe one or two will be taken on board.

4. Expectations. Maybe you think it is not your job to make suggestions for improvement, but who knows your job and your environment better than you? Those who are closest to the job can see far more opportunities than those who are distant from it. If you wait for someone else to make improvements to your job/department, you could be waiting a very long time.

5. Too Busy. Everyone is busy at work, but sometimes we have to accept short-term losses in order to make long-term gains. Think about the big picture and make time for what is important.

6. Communication. If you have great ideas but find it hard to express them, or don't know who to tell, just start by telling someone. You don't have to have detailed presentations and business plans. Show someone what the problem is, and how you think the situation is improved. Ask who you need to speak to, or ask if someone can speak on your behalf. If your idea is good it deserves to be heard.

7. Risk. First, remember that nothing worthwhile was ever achieved without taking any risk at all. If your idea requires a risk to be taken, complete a risk analysis and discuss it with other people. If the benefits outweigh the risk, then focus you energy on minimising the risk. Break your idea down into a series of smaller steps that can be slowed down or even stopped if necessary.

8. Process and Procedure. If introducing a change is likely to be lengthy and cumbersome, become a crusader for your idea. If you don't push it through the system no-one else will and it will just stagnate and die. Talk about your idea and the benefits as often as you can, get support for it (especially from your manager), and this should accelerate its progress through the system.

9. Lack of Support. If you manager is not supportive, find out why. Discuss it with other people and canvass more opinions, and then take it back to your manager. Are there other channels you can use without damaging the relationship with your manager? Listen to your managers views (afterall, you idea may be fundamentally flawed), and use this to learn, develop and refine your idea.

10. Culture. If there is a culture of 'if it ain't broke, don't fix it', then it will be broken eventually. The trouble is that if people and businesses only every look inwards, they won't realise when things ARE broken. By the time they do, it will be too late. Get into the habit of saying "Why shouldn't we...?" instead of "Why should we...?"