

The Courage to Innovate

by Joe Calloway

If someone at your organization suggests a new idea and everyone agrees that it's a good idea, then the chances are that it probably is, in fact, a good idea. But what are the chances that it's truly innovative? The reason we don't innovate is that truly innovative ideas are invariably met with resistance, even downright scorn and derision. We say it's crazy, it's never been done that way, it'll never work. And, so we play it safe and do only those things that will produce, at best, a slight improvement.

Innovation means you go first. Innovation means trying something without knowing for sure whether or not it's going to work. Innovation takes courage and the willingness to let go of the way you've always done it. Some organizations think that innovation means doing what their industry leaders do. No. That's called copying, and it assures that the best you'll ever attain is second place.

We need to take another long look at those ideas that at first seem impractical or impossible. The mantra of truly successful organizations is, "What if? Why not?" Innovation means taking the first steps towards seemingly unreachable goals in order to put possibility in motion. It is as Goethe wrote, "Whatever you can do or dream you can begin it. Boldness has genius, power, and magic in it."

There's nothing wrong with tweaking or making small improvements. But to create significant improvements and to become a true leader in your field, you must have the courage to innovate. We forget that the most outrageous innovations, once they are accepted, become the way everyone knows it's done. What were once impossible ideas are now the way we conduct business everyday.

At your next brainstorming session, invite people to offer up those ideas that seem ridiculous. Remember what Albert Einstein said, "If at first an idea doesn't sound absurd, there's no hope for it." Stop giving innovation lip service, and have the courage to go first.