



Creating a Climate for Innovation

Renew yourself and your organization.

By Don Knapp

In these challenging times, nonprofits must create a climate that fosters innovation for renewal. Innovation means creating something entirely new. It's different from "continuous improvement," which means making something that already exists better (important in its own right).

"In this world of intensified competition," wrote Harvard Business School professor Rosabeth Moss Kanter in *Learning Organizations* (Productivity Press, www.productivitypress.com), "organizations can no longer afford to be followers, to wait for somebody else to innovate."

Many of us get our best ideas in solitude and away from the office. To choreographer Twyla Tharp, writing in *The Creative Habit* (Simon & Schuster, www.simonsays.com), new ideas are apt to come from the intuitive right hemisphere of the brain and in times of seclusion:

"You're seeking thoughts from

the unconscious, and trying to tease them forward until you can latch onto them. An idea will sneak into your brain. Get engaged with that idea, play with it, push it around—you've acquired a goal to underpin this solitary activity. You're not alone anymore; your goal, your idea is your companion."

To encourage creativity in your organization, remember Frederick Herzberg's "motivation-hygiene" theory. Author of *Work and the Nature of Man* (World Publishing, www.worldpublishing.com), Herzberg believed that employees were more motivated to work because of opportunities for achievement, recognition, advancement, growth, and meaningful work itself than "hygiene" factors surrounding the job (working conditions, security, supervision, social contacts, status,

and compensation). However, "if the hygiene factors aren't competitive you've got a morale problem."

"Once people have enough intelligence to function in their work," Alan Robinson and Sam Stern wrote in *Corporate Creativity* (Berrett-Koehler Publishers, www.bkconnection.com), "one person is just as likely as another to be creative." And, they concluded that most creative acts, as they now occur in organizations, aren't planned for and "come from where they are least expected."

The quality revolution, which began in America in the 1980s, merged the innovative tendencies of individuals with cross-functional teams. Collaboration in teams is an acquired skill for many of us, but

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when it happens it expands the capacity for innovation and problem-solving.

W. Edwards Deming, America's most prolific quality guru, taught that quality and customer satisfaction can be improved by using cross-functional teams of empowered workers with customer input, not as a collection of separate entities but as a system of elements that interact with each other and their environment. He acknowledged in *Out of the Crisis* (MIT Center for Advanced Engineering Study, web.mit.edu) that "teamwork is a risky business," as employees in one department are often not used to working with those in other departments and many are afraid to speak up. But, he believed, "teamwork is sorely needed." Teamwork requires people to compensate someone else's weakness with their own strengths. It calls for everyone "to sharpen each other's wits with questions." It develops a capacity for give-and-take and continuous learning.

Teams, wrote Jon Katzenbach and Douglas Smith in *The Wisdom of Teams* (HarperBusiness, www.harpercollins.com), are "more flexible than larger organizational groupings because they can be more quickly assembled, deployed, refocused and disbanded, usually in ways that enhance rather than disrupt more permanent structures and processes." Teams outperform individuals, "especially when performance requires multiple skills, judgments and experiences," the authors said.

If you offer opportunities for your employees (both paid and volunteer) to be innovative, you will stimulate individual and organizational renewal. As John Gardner wrote in *Self-Renewal: The Individual and the Innovative Society* (W. W. Norton, www.norton.com), "In a society capable of renewal, people not only welcome the future and the changes it brings but believe they can have a hand in shaping the future." ■

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