



“Thinking about things”  
is just as important as  
“building things.”

Keep in mind there is no magic in this space. The magic is in unlocking the creative genius in every one of your employees. The innovation space only facilitates this. Before you build your space, be sure you have taken the above steps in creating the culture and providing people the tools and training to innovate.

## 5. Celebrate, recognize, and reward innovation

Recognizing innovation will change workplace culture for the better and reinforce positive behaviors. Rewards needn't be expensive. You might invite the best innovators out to breakfast, offer them coupons for restaurants and get-aways, or have a professional photographer take photos of the team to mark their achievement.

Praise innovative efforts every chance you get in every way you can think of. Be, well, *creative* in how you recognize people. Send them on hot-air balloon rides. Hire an airplane sky-writer. The crazier the ideas you come up with, the more they'll ignite imagination and encourage further innovation.

## 6. Fight fear and resistance

Do you remember Woolworth's, the five-and-dime retailer? No? That's because it was out-innovated by Walmart and went belly up – likely because it stayed in its comfort zone until there was nothing left to do but close up shop.

Regardless of how long your organization has been around, it's imperative to keep the creative wheels turning. The logistics may seem daunting, yet the biggest risk isn't a technical one; it's organizational. People fear what they don't understand, and they'll kill a project they're afraid of. You have to get out in front of that resistance and fight it early and often.

As you move your organization toward more innovative thought, be prepared for some pushback. Also, be ready to restructure your organization and even cut people loose if necessary. You need to surround new developments with people who believe in innovation. Otherwise, you'll be left with those who'll do little more than look for flaws. 

---

*Steve Blue is president and CEO of Miller Ingenuity (MillerIngenuity.com) and author of American Manufacturing 2.0: What Went Wrong and How to Make It Right. He is a nationally recognized transformation expert and speaker.*

## Be a Better Stormer

“The best way to get a good idea is to get a *lot* of ideas,” Linus Pauling has noted. That's the concept behind brainstorming and “question-storming” (in which the group generates ideas in the form of questions). Storming is a skill you can learn, and Tom Kelly provides top-notch instruction in *The Art of Innovation* (penguinrandomhouse.com):

**Storm often.** You need to keep storming muscles in shape through frequent practice. The design firm IDEO holds hour-long storming sessions nearly every day, according to Kelly. You want the buzz of creativity “to blow through your offices as regularly as a breeze at the beach,” he says.

**Create a problem statement.** Before you begin question-storming, be sure everyone knows the problem you're trying to solve. Focus your problem statement outward, on the people who will benefit, rather than inward on some organizational objective.

**Ask people to write down as many questions as possible** related to the problem statement. Then share people's questions with the group.

**Number each question.** It's helpful to decide beforehand how many questions you'll come up with in your session. The group facilitator can scrawl down the numbers and questions on a whiteboard or other medium that's visible to all.

**“Build and jump.”** Urge participants to build on each other's questions and “jump” to a variation or slight twist of their own.

**Prioritize the questions.** At the top of the list should be those questions people are most eager to pursue.

**Don't forget to follow up.** Select a few of the most promising ideas, and schedule a time to follow up on them. Don't let your question-storming time go to waste. Be sure to bring your new ideas to fruition.

## Stay Ahead of the Curve

For more on obtaining a creative edge, see these articles at [NonprofitWorld.org](http://NonprofitWorld.org):

**Transforming Your Organization from the Inside Out** (Vol. 25, No. 4)

**How to Change the World by Changing Your Culture** (Vol. 31, No. 2)

**Outside the Comfort Zone** (Vol. 25, No. 3)

**Creating a Climate for Innovation** (Vol. 29, No. 4)

**When It's Time for a Turnaround** (Vol. 26, No. 2)

**Dealing with Change in A VUCA World** (Vol. 37, No. 4)

**If You're Not Growing, You're Dying** (Vol. 22, No. 5)

**Gain Extraordinary Impact** (Vol. 32, No. 4)

**Creating Breakthroughs** (Vol. 26, No. 4)

**The Best Leaders Are Change Agents** (Vol. 34, No. 1)