



Sitting on a Gold Mine: Uncovering Hidden Profit Centers

How can you reveal the treasure waiting right before your eyes?

By Stephen Long

Hidden pockets of profit exist in every organization. The secret to finding them is to get people throughout the organization to trust themselves and their talents. To do so, you need to help workers become their best selves—creative, courageous, autonomous, and self-trusting. That means understanding and caring about the creative process.

Bottling Creativity

Innovative organizations think about creativity in a completely different way than other organizations. They don't focus on the obvious question of what fosters creativity. Rather, they ask a better question: Why *don't* people create and innovate? The noted psychologist Abraham Maslow stated: "We've got to abandon the sense of amazement in the face of creativity, as if it were a

miracle if anybody created anything!"

Innovative leaders expect everyone in the organization to be creative. By removing obstacles to innovation, they establish a culture where people are free to be naturally creative. They expect employees to create efficient ways to do their jobs, to develop and maintain relation-

ships, and to continuously change and grow.

Creativity is related to the ability to withstand a lack of structure, predictability, and control. However, it's not to be confused with a lack of motivation, purpose, or goals. In a creative workplace, people pour themselves into projects and completely devote their energies to success.

Ways to Spur Innovation

1. **Make sure people can express** emotions, thoughts, and ideas without fear of being laughed at, ignored, or belittled.
2. **Form teams** around various projects, and give team members plenty of feedback, praise, and control over their work.
3. **Offer people educational and training opportunities**, followed by the opportunity to discuss and apply what they've learned.
4. **Foster an organizational culture** of authentic communication, tolerance for constructive risk-taking, and openness to new perspectives.
5. **Be flexible** in letting staff members work in the ways, times, and places that are best for them.
6. **Ask employees** often for their input and ideas, and follow through on what they suggest.
7. **Provide opportunities** for collaboration and sharing with as many diverse people, cultures, and viewpoints as possible.
8. **Promote a spirit** of playfulness and fun in the workplace.
9. **Give people clear-cut plans, systems, and procedures** to follow, but be flexible enough to adapt them when circumstances change.
10. **See mistakes** as learning opportunities. After every "failure," openly discuss what can be learned from it and what can be done differently in the future. Then move on without pointing blame or dwelling on the past.

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They have a clear focus.

Multitasking is a creativity-killer. If people try to do too many things at once, they don't do any of them as well as they could, and they don't have the extra space in their minds to come up with new solutions.

Innovation is more likely to happen when people immerse themselves in the present and concentrate on one thing at a time. A narrowing of focus and lack of distractions unleash the creative process. That's when they'll discover your organization's hidden profit centers—better, more efficient ways of doing things and new ideas that will advance your organization's mission and provide new revenues. You can tap into these profitable opportunities by encouraging constant feedback.

Finding a Balance

Most organizations are over-managed and underled. Management is the science of systems that are put in place to control, monitor, and check. While systems do reduce anxiety, an unhealthy dependency

on systems restricts creativity. If systems are too rigid, people can't adapt and improvise. Over-managed organizations suppress creative outlets. These are the hidden costs that prevent innovation.

Establishing a balance between systems and freedoms helps people express their natural inclination to create and be imaginative. As a result, employees' creativity is expressed in all areas, regardless of tasks. They won't be able to turn it off. Creativity is a natural resource just waiting to be mined and turned into pure gold. ■

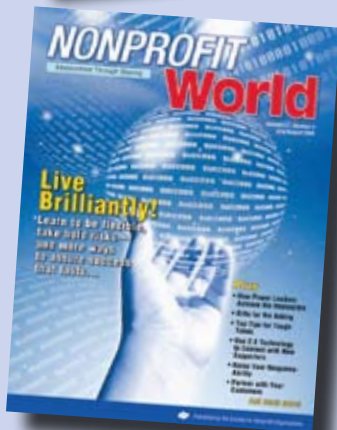
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