

# 8 Ways Your Company Can Boost Workplace Innovation

With today's shortages of top talent, managers should be prepared to make their company stand out from the competition. But how do you do that?

Not only should you pay well and move quickly to scoop up top performers, but you also need to brand your firm as a nimble, forward-thinking organization. Downplay the importance of innovation, and you could be losing out on skilled talent.

A recent survey from global staffing firm Robert Half bears this out. Of the workers polled, 87 percent said a company's reputation for innovation is important to them when evaluating potential employers. So when that brilliant financial analyst evaluates your job offer, sure they'll be considering the overall compensation and benefits package. But alongside that, they'll be looking at how creative and progressive your organization is. The problem is, there are barriers that can stand in the way of being more innovative.

## What's Hinderling Innovation?

To find out, Robert Half asked more than 2,000 CFOs what is preventing their firm from being more innovative. Respondents cited:

- too much bureaucracy, 30 percent
- being bogged down by daily tasks and putting out fires, 27 percent
- shortage of new ideas, 25 percent.

Are these barriers insurmountable? Not at all. Here are eight ideas for jumpstarting innovation within your department or company.

**1. Make innovation the new normal.** Business as usual keeps you in the game, while fostering a culture of creativity can put you ahead of the competition. In big and small ways, let workers know how much you value their ideas. Make innovation one of your company values. Talk it up during staff get-togethers and all-company meetings. Hold regular ideation sessions.

**2. Bring people together.** While it's possible for innovation to occur in a vacuum, more often than not it requires collaboration. Don't be afraid to promote socializing. One trend in **workplace design** is to create hubs where workers can hang out and hash out ideas. Think cozy corners or intimate conference rooms equipped with whiteboards, AV equipment, comfortable chairs and plenty of coffee.

**3. Simplify approval processes.** Some bureaucracy is a necessary check and balance, but too much red tape can smother innovation. Reduce the steps it takes to go from budding idea to implementation. You could assign one manager to shepherd the process to fruition, or create a fast track for especially promising proposals. The goal is to first allow good ideas to rise quickly to the top and then create clear pathways to implement them.

**4. Cut down on the workload.** Innovation can't take root if employees are weighed down by their daily tasks and the need to put in long hours. People are at their most creative when they're busy but not overwhelmed. Make sure your company or department is adequately staffed so workers have the mental space and energy to be inventive.

**5. Be available.** Are you and other managers frequently holed up in your corner offices? If so, it's time to be more visible and interact with your team. For your staff to

be truly innovative, they need your cooperation, counsel and participation. Make sure you're accessible and approachable. Take it a step further and offer words of encouragement. Let them know you're available and happy to have them bounce ideas off of you.

**6. Cross pollinate.** The more variety and points-of-view your employees encounter, the more innovative they are likely to become. You can introduce workers to new concepts and ways of thinking with **job rotation** and ensuring teams incorporate people from different **backgrounds and generations**. Maximize diversity, and you maximize innovation.

**7. Reward innovation.** When you celebrate people who show creativity, other employees take notice and are encouraged to repeat or emulate their behavior. It's important to publicly recognize people on your team who demonstrate innovation and help make the company more competitive.

**8. Introduce new blood.** Even the best team needs an occasional outsider to bring in fresh perspectives. One way to do this is to hire new employees whose background differs from that of your existing staff.

Creativity is like a muscle: If you exercise it regularly, it becomes stronger. So remove the barriers and start boosting innovation in your workplace.