

The Biggest Barriers to Team Innovation

Most leaders profess to want innovative teams. And, while I believe that is what they want, they don't necessarily act as if that goal is important to them. Not only that, when they want innovation (and aren't getting it) they look at their team and say (or think) things like: "They just aren't very creative," or "What can you expect from a bunch of X's? (enter the profession of choice)."

Given this, it wouldn't be hard to say that the biggest barrier to team innovation is staring at you when you look in the mirror. More specifically, among the many potential barriers, there are two that are connected, insidious and not necessarily obvious. What are they? Belief and trust.

Do you believe that you can create new ideas, make the changes and generally feel that innovation is within your grasp? If you don't, you won't innovate much (or even try). What about your team members? Do they believe in their individual ability to create and innovate? If not, you are all in the same boat. And lastly, do you believe that your entire team can innovate? If you see the spark, the ability or capacity, you can help turn the tide for them through your encouragement and trust. If you are making statements like I mentioned earlier, I'd question your belief — and I'd encourage you to think deeply about it.

Even if people believe in their ability to create and innovate, if the environment they are in doesn't support that belief; if they aren't trusted to try, they won't in most cases.

Along with belief comes trust. Do you trust your team enough to let them try something without a guarantee of success? And if you do, do they know that? After all, innovation seldom comes with a guarantee — except that it will be messy.

As leaders, we must be in the barrier removal business, and two of the biggest barriers to innovation (and much more as it turns out) is your belief in and trust in your team members. Make sure you do trust them (or go on faith). Make sure the team senses your trust (it is their perception that matters as much as the "fact" that you trust them).