

Episode 119: What is the role of creativity at work?



A Time Magazine survey asked what characteristic people valued in colleagues. Top of the list was creativity, followed by intelligence and compassion. Yet many people find it hard to be creative in a work environment. Let's look at why it's important, how to be creative and encourage it in others.

1. Why is creativity is important?

Here are a couple of good quotes that may help us understand creativity.

Firstly, the late Steve Jobs said, "Creativity is just connecting things."

Scott Adam, of Dilbert fame, said, "it's allowing yourself to make mistakes."

Both are important, but just as important is the need to do new things.

The problem for many is that doing the new can go against an organization's culture.

There is often risk for an individual to make new ideas and suggestions – worse for the organization if people don't take risks.

It can be hard to think 'outside the box' and hard to get people to listen.

2. How to be creative.

Think of creativity as a muscle – you need to work it to make it strong. If you don't work it then at some point it will atrophy.

We need to take our creativity out for a workout – to do that, declare that you want people to be creative and will reward it.

Give examples of what you want and lead by example. Ask questions like, "is there another way" or "what else would work."

When you get suggestions – don't dismiss out of hand. Discuss them.

Avoid "we've tried that before" – there may be another way to do it.

Take time in meetings to think more broadly – create the space to think.

3. How to encourage it in others.

The most important thing you can do is reward it in others - whether the idea was good or bad, recognize the attempt.

If people are scared to show their creativity, think about how to give anonymity.

Many companies have suggestion boxes where people don't have to give their name.

Another key element is to create diverse groups – people who don't think alike.

While this could be uncomfortable, 'groupthink' can kill a new good idea.

Mostly you just need be open to new ideas and new people.

Bottom line: The most creative organizations are often the most successful ones and helping your team think outside the box may be the most important thing you can do to help them.