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Awakening Leadership Within

The Artisan CEO – Unlocking Your Creativity and Theirs

Most CEO's will tell you that leadership development and business acumen are pre-requisites for the job. Add something else to the list – Creativity. In a new study by IBM¹, creativity showed up as the most important leadership quality for success in business. Integrity (52%) and global thinking (35%) took second and third place to creativity (60%).

Because of the complexity and uncertainty of our world today, leaders are being called to be open to new approaches that before may have been perceived as radical or unacceptable. A CEO's ability to tolerate risk and disruption needs to be recalibrated for today's volatile business environment. CEO's interviewed were more prepared to break with the status quo of industry and revenue models. In this study CEO's rated innovation as a "crucial capability."

When evaluating top performing organizations in the last five years, the study discovered that top performers were more strategically agile, able to make rapid decisions in response to changes in their organizations. Ninety-five percent of top performing organizations are engaging their customers in new ways, using social media and new technologies to stay in touch and uncover opportunities. These companies are actively seeking new sources of revenue in areas that traditional companies may not be looking. All of this gives new meaning to "thinking out of the box" – there is no box.

What this demands from CEOs is the ability to imagine the future and to articulate a future desired state that is compelling and not subject to past success models. We tend to rely on our past success strategies, as individuals and as organizations, yet this model will only serve to keep you doing the same thing or a version of the same thing. That is not innovation. So what is innovation?

An organization can usually tolerate innovations that are brought about incrementally. These are evolutionary innovations that take what has been and adapts this – a product, a service – but does not fundamentally change it. Revolutionary innovations are often the product of a disruption or interruption in what has been, in the way we have been doing business or behaving. This usually requires more "pain" and new ways of seeing and thinking about our world. There is a great deal more risk involved in revolutionary innovation. It may require creating a new market, new strategies and new organizational structures and processes to support the innovation. Not to mention that revolutionary thinkers have often been dismissed or ridiculed until of course, the world determined that they were indeed "ahead of their time".

So why innovate? Because if you don't you perish. That's simple enough. In order to create or maintain a competitive advantage, organizations must value, encourage and bring to market new products and services. What kind of organizational culture innovates well?

¹ <http://www.ibm.com/ceostudy>

- A culture that is risk tolerant and has determined how to measure viability of an idea.
- A culture that creates intentional environments for creativity to occur. That includes attention to the physical surroundings, creating spaces for connection and opportunities for open conversation and idea generation.
- A culture that keeps open lines of communication and creates feedback loops to reap all its tacit knowledge and wisdom.
- A culture that understands its purpose and whose employees are committed to its mission and vision.
- A culture whose people are rewarded for challenging the status quo and for generating new ideas geared toward better serving its customers.

Rob Levit, an Annapolis based nationally recognized jazz musician, artist and creativity consultant says, "We spend lots of time creating ways to impede (creative) flow and very few to expand it." Creativity is a natural process that can occur if given the support and space. But in our high velocity world little time is devoted to reflection and intentional creativity that generates ideas and innovations. Margaret Wheatley, author, speaker and consultant says, "The things we fear most in organizations—fluctuations, disturbances, imbalances—are the primary sources of creativity." Fear is the greatest enemy of creativity and innovation.

What does this mean for you? What are you doing in your organization to support creativity, new ideas and innovation? What is your organization's future and how will you innovate to meet it? How have you developed your own tolerance for risk and openness to new ideas? These are critical questions to ask yourself in a time where imagination may be your greatest tool for meeting the complexity and ambiguity of the future.

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