LIFESTYLE TIPS

Timely Information for Personal Success

Innovative Work Cultures are Not all Fun and Games

By Mike Jacquart

You've probably heard how much fun employees have at innovative companies. Perks might include free lunch on Tuesday, casual dress Fridays, even an on-site bistro that rivals the best one in the neighborhood. In addition, workers are not only allowed, but encouraged to work flexible hours at times they work best to maximize efficiency.

Sounds like a great place to work, right? But innovative work cultures do not come about by accident. Fun is more a byproduct of an innovative, creative environment, than it is the innovation itself. The truth is: Innovative work cultures require brutal candor, strong leadership, and individual accountability. Let's take a closer look.

❖ **We all want to be heard in a planning meeting, but if it's safe for you to criticize someone else's ideas, they must also be free to criticize yours!** Comfort about "constructive criticism" can prove difficult. While some people have a "thick hide" that doesn't mind their idea being "shot down" in a planning meeting, others are more sensitive to criticism. Moreover, in some organizations discussion about opposing views might be reserved and polite – while in others it might involve being more straightforward – as the employee must articulately defend his or her idea.

The key lies in respect. An employee in an innovative culture can be critical of a colleague while still being respectful of this individual. Don't beat around the bush, but don't be overly harsh either. Candid debate is seldom easy, but maintaining an environment that's professional and respectful of opposing views will help.

❖ **Recognize that collaboration and individual accountability go hand in hand**. Collaboration on an important project can be an innovative endeavor. But it isn't about working together to arrive at a consensus. A culture of accountability is one where individuals are expected to make decisions and *own* the

CLIP-N-SAVE!

Healthy Recipe: Turkey Panini

INGREDIENTS:
• 2 slices Italian bread
• 1 teaspoon olive oil
• 4 thin slices, peeled and cored apple
• 4 springs watercress, large stems removed
• 1 slice Asiago (or other favorite) cheese
• 2 slices (about 2 ounces) cooked turkey
• 1 tablespoon cranberry sauce

NUTRITIONAL VALUE:
• Calories per serving: 388
• Carbohydrates: 39 g.
• Protein: 27 g.
• Fiber: 2 g.
• Fat: 14 g.
• Saturated fat: 5 g.

DIRECTIONS:

❶ Brush one side of each piece of bread with olive oil and lay the bread oil-side down on a work surface.

❷ Place turkey, cheese, apple slices, and cranberry sauce on top of one of the slices of bread. Place the second slice of bread on top, oil-side up.

❸ Heat a grill pan over medium heat. Grill sandwich on one side until golden brown, about 3 to 4 minutes per side.

❹ Transfer the sandwich to the work surface, lift one piece of bread and arrange the watercress inside, then replace the bread. Slice the sandwich in half and serve.

Questions and Answers

Limiting Screen Time

Q: I manage 12 full-time employees in an office. For the most part, they are quality conscious and do fine work. But sometimes it seems like they're spending more time scrolling on their smart phones than they are working. What can I do?

A: Online "screen time", be it on a computer, smart phone, or some other device, is one of the most vexing problems in many workplaces today. Be too harsh, forbid electronic use entirely, and employees are likely to rebel, perhaps even quit. But being lenient isn't the answer either as it encourages "goofing off" and an increasing lack of productivity.

The solution lies in finding some sort of middle ground. Being FAIR is the key. Allow "Jim," the star salesman to scroll away, with nary a word, anytime, while telling "Ginger," a known slacker to tone it down is likely to ruffle some feathers. What is proper use of "screen time" for one employee must be the same for all.

How much is too much? Some workplace policies allow Internet surfing and other online use just before work, or on lunch time and breaks. Any other use, unless of course it's an emergency, is forbidden.

Another thought is: If you're a parent, chances are you limit (or try to limit) screen time for your kids. What kind of example do you set if you can't do the same – especially at work!

As in so many aspects of life, moderation is paramount. ■

consequences. There is no hiding. The decisions, for better or worse, are *yours*.

A strong business leader can provide a great role model in accountability. A strong leader doesn't blame others. Such leaders admit that "the buck stops with them."

❖ **Innovative cultures have strong leaders more concerned with results than company hierarchy or an individual's title.** Management provides clear priorities, direction, and goals. Their employees enjoy a high degree of autonomy to pursue innovative ideas. Managers may know flow charts, profit-loss statements, and other business acumen, but strong leaders also know *people.* They are not hands-off, locked in an ivory tower, they like to be close to the action.

Summary
In conclusion, innovative cultures are not all fun and games. But organizations in which candor, leadership, and accountability are present usually remain great places to work because everyone – not just upper management – has a say in how things are done. ■

Mike Jacquart is the editor and publisher of "Employee Assistance Report" who enjoys using his 30 years' experience at various sized companies (mainly in publishing) to share insights into various work cultures; some good, some bad, some in between. He may be reached at mjacquart@writeitrightllc.com.