



A Culture of Wellness and Innovation

Posted by Joe Fournier

The Ideas Economy emerged a few years ago in a marketing campaign for Hewlett Packard Enterprises. Meg Whitman, then CEO of the company and now CEO of entertainment platform [Quibi](#), noted “that disruption is all around us, and the ability to turn an idea into a new product or a new industry is more accessible than ever before.” Recently, I discovered and watched an interview with Steve Jobs where he stated, “If you want to hire great people and have them stay working for you, you have to let them make a lot of decisions and you have to be run by ideas, not hierarchy. The best ideas have to win, otherwise good people don’t stay.”



Each day, InveniasPartners talks with leaders who stay with their companies and those who are planning to leave for brighter opportunities. While some turnover is always anticipated, boards and management grow concerned when top talent leaves and good ideas fail as a result. If the key to hiring great people were as simple as Mr. Jobs suggested, every company would put a priority on ideation. Reflecting on the popularity and volume of scholarly articles, surveys and blogs written on innovation, I believe the research, cases, and commentaries are woven together by a common thread—innovation is all about **people**.

Fresh Ideas

As I talk with business leaders about how leaders shape innovation at companies, the conversation gravitates toward people—especially wellness initiatives. [The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation](#) (RWJF) believes that business plays a key role in shaping American culture and scaling innovative ideas, so they recently teamed up with experts at the [Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health](#) and [Harvard Business School](#) to launch a course titled “[Improving Your Business Through a Culture of Health](#).” The goal is to help business leaders better understand how to prioritize health and well-being, make the case for why it is important, see what it looks like in practice, and understand how to measure progress. A fresh idea on wellness and leadership, in my opinion.

One organization that believes keeping people well is critical to innovation is [WHEN®](#), a rapidly growing company based in Phoenix, AZ. WHEN is leading the way with an innovative approach to corporate wellness focused on improving people’s lives through overall personal wellness in their career, health and being. According to their founder and Chief WHEN Officer, Randy Miller, “Our mission is helping everyone to achieve their full potential in the three most important areas of their lives while finding greater peace and joy in the process.”

During InveniasPartners’ recent interview with Mr. Miller, he was clear that to help others achieve personal wellness, WHEN’s culture has to be firmly grounded in helping its own staff members make, and fulfill, a commitment to living a balanced life. He noted, “WHEN views innovation as a process of investing in personal growth first.”

The firm’s corporate culture is also a catalyst for organizational growth. The founder believes that “When an individual employee, a team and the culture of an entire company are healthy at every level, it unleashes confidence, trust and creativity that can truly manifest in things that have never been done before. Our approach equates innovation with courage. By investing in physical health, career engagement and state of being of their employees, our clients discover corporate innovation is an inevitable outcome when a company’s workforce overcomes the fear of making personal changes.”

The Road to Innovation

As innovation accelerates, all industries need leaders who are ready to shape the future of their organizations. In my last [blog](#) post, I noted that establishing and fostering a culture where innovation thrives requires an unwavering commitment from the

CEO, every leader and each employee to four basic principles – clarity, forward thinking, creating blame free environments and modeling innovative behavior. In a nutshell, leaders are called on to create a safe space where innovation can grow and to close the gap between the present and the future. Over my career, four key principles have helped me to prepare people to embrace innovation:

- **Build on the Foundation** - It is important to respect values, foster culture and understand institutional history. Take the time to really discover the origin story, i.e. who built your organization for what purpose when. Acknowledge the past contributions of leaders and celebrate the impact staff has made. People embrace traditions – both old and new - and they crave a solid foundation to stand-on as they experiment and grow in new directions.
- **Meet People Where They Are** - Innovation is a journey which has a starting point, a trail head. The chase to get a team ready to drive transformation appears to be similar, but there isn't a single starting line on the racetrack. Stating that you want people to be innovative will never be enough; people across the organization are starting from different places. It is critical to meet people where they are on that journey and then move forward together.
- **Communicate Relentlessly** - While this sounds simple, it's not so easy. Authentic sharing of ideas and listening underscores every respectful relationship – up and down the ladder, peer to peer. Have you ever heard a leader state, "I've already communicated about that through an email announcement?" So often, leaders have been thinking about the future for months that it becomes crystal clear in their minds. Yet the vision hasn't fully soaked in with the team. Important messages must be communicated repeatedly before they take hold in the hearts and minds of your people.
- **Take Care of People Along the Way** - While a brand is fueled by its consumers, customers and clients, an organization draws energy from its people. Consider the power that an inclusive culture generates. Think about the mission impact that stems from collaboration and camaraderie. Taking care of people means empowering them and engaging with them to celebrate their ideas. It goes much deeper than a department outing and an annual picnic. It means supporting them through setbacks and learning moments.

Imagine Your Future

Where are you positioned as your organization plans for its future? And who is by your side? Are you embracing wellness as you make progress towards destination innovation? I look forward to meeting with you, and assisting you, on the road to innovation. I'm especially interested in learning more about how you lead a corps of people ready for the challenge of transformation. Free to email me with your thoughts and comments at fournierj@inveniaspartners.com.