



Destination Innovation

Posted by Joe Fournier

Forbes annually publishes its roster of the [World's Most Innovative Companies](#). The 2018 list is more than a roll call of Silicon Valley tech companies, with Alphabet only ranked #75 while ServiceNow ranked #1. Pharmaceutical, health care services and medical device companies made a respectable showing with Regeneron Pharmaceuticals (#16), Cerner (#68) and Edwards Lifesciences (#55) all ranked higher than Alphabet.

Sipping a coffee at Starbucks (#30) and reviewing a few firm profiles, my core belief that innovation is critical for successful health care organizations was reinforced. Health care leaders and their organizations must address ever changing market conditions and consumer preferences at an increasingly faster pace. Now more than ever, institutions must focus relentlessly on providing outstanding safe and affordable care to their patients and communities with full attention to health equity and innovation.

Over the years as a Chief HR Officer, other senior leaders would tell me that we had to build a “culture of innovation” in our company. To me, that meant that leaders, as stewards of their organization’s culture, had to drive innovation through their *people*. Their comments were a call to action for all leaders as we needed to inspire, support and establish a mindset focused on innovation.

The Intersection of Innovation and Culture

At this point in our history, “doing our best” and “doing more with less” will not be enough—we will need to do “better with less” every day. Indeed, to thrive rather than survive in the future, innovation will be the key. [ServiceNow](#) focuses on people in the workplace as it delivers digital workflows that create great experiences and unlock productivity for employees and the enterprise. The company’s tag line “makes work, work better for people” points to both innovation and culture.

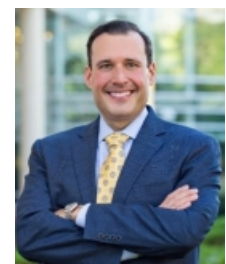
There are thousands of books, articles and blogs written on the intersection of innovation and culture. Many speak about opportunities and barriers on the road. Put simply, opportunities, barriers and cultures are all created by people. And thus, innovation is about people. As Herb Kelleher, former Chairman and CEO of Southwest Airlines, quipped, “The business of business is *people*; yesterday, today and forever.”

[Wonolo](#), a new and innovative company that I admire, has created an online platform that matches business with qualified workers in real time. In his February 19, 2019 [blog](#) post, Yong Kim, self-described Chief Servant and CEO of Wonolo, noted that “Culture is often regarded as a fluffy word, something amorphous, abstract, and intangible. As a result, companies spend more time discussing strategies and execution plans than focusing on getting culture right. However, culture is actually visible, definable, and tangible. It’s the very DNA of a company and the way things get done. It’s unequivocally the most powerful thing every company needs to develop, embrace, and protect.”

An Innovation Roadmap

Establishing and fostering a culture where innovation thrives sounds simple, but it is not an easy task. It requires an unwavering commitment from the CEO, every leader and every employee to a few key strategies, principles and behaviors:

- **All Aboard!** Simply telling people to think outside the box and to innovate is not enough. Leaders must be clear about what and where they are headed on the innovation journey. There are literally hundreds of areas ripe for change - from simple back office processes to major transformation in the way health care is delivered to patients. When team members



are encouraged to think about how to innovate while doing their daily work, the results can be stunning.

- **Chart a Path to Better:** Take time to turn the tables on legacy thinking. Have you heard, “that’s how it’s always been done” and “if it’s not broken, don’t fix it.”? Legacy thinking is especially powerful during onboarding of new staff. Such statements are often a sign of individual and collective complacency. Every person must believe that there is always room for improvement. Encourage a look toward the horizon and sunset past practices that impede innovation.
- **Create Safe Space, Blame Free Environments:** Innovation means experimenting, trying new things and experiencing failure along the way. It seems like a relatively simple concept to understand, i.e. a straight road ahead. Yet when things go wrong at work, people fear the consequences of being blamed, so they avoid bumps and turns that might lead to an unfamiliar destination. People must know (and feel) that innovation is encouraged and is rewarded for moving forward. Teams must recognize that failure or getting lost along the way is an opportunity to learn—and often an opportunity to celebrate.
- **Talk the Talk and Walk the Walk.** Leaders and employees must model positive and innovative behavior for each other. Sometimes it’s hard to celebrate or learn from a tough failure. Make no mistake; everyone is watching to see how leaders react to both success and failure. And for a culture of innovation to take hold, leaders need to do more than just speak to innovation. Effective leaders openly support travel along what is likely to be an unfamiliar road as they give people the time, resources and freedom to innovate while celebrating the learning that comes from success and sometimes failure.

For Leaders and HR Professionals

Health care leaders and HR professionals have an unprecedented opportunity to build and foster innovative cultures in their organizations today and in the future. Leaders have an opportunity to draw their own innovation roadmap as they model and support the principles noted above. Human Resource professionals must plan for the future by assessing and defining the talent needs of their organizations through workforce planning, education and development and organizational designs that support innovation.

What actions are you and your leadership team taking to improve the IQ - innovation quotient - of your organization? Does your culture match your desire for innovation? Does your Human Resources team have a plan to steward a culture of innovation? Join me on the innovation journey as I continue to blog about innovative leaders and companies shaping the business of people and culture. Free to email me with your thoughts and comments at fournierj@inveniaspartners.com.