

News and Views on Creativity and Innovation

creative4business

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Dear Dave,

Here is an opportunity to air alternative suggestions that might help or even solve some of our issues. Although called 'Dear Dave' because of our Prime Minister you can send your suggestions for your own country.

In the UK our unemployment figures are increasing at an alarming rate. This costs money in terms of Job Seekers Allowance and other benefits. It also means that companies are folding and skills are lost. Less money in our pockets means that spending in local businesses decreases too. Why can't we subsidise businesses to keep

Dear Reader,

Welcome to the March edition of **Innovation Matters**.

Unfortunately our new improved website is still not live. There have been a few technical issues with themes and our shopping cart which are almost resolved. We hope to have good news very shortly.

A number of readers were interested in the work of colleague **Dr Paul Thomas** and his BBC programme '**Ban The Boss**' so this month there is a brief update on the results of his work with the Environmental Services Dept at Blaenau Gwent CBC. For readers in Wales, Paul will be part of an exciting speaker line up at [Spotlight Mid Wales](#) on Friday, March 9th.

The remaining articles this month take a look at why **traditions and habits** can be **bad for business** and there is a different outlook on **recruitment**. How can we breathe a little life into the way we hire **new employees** so that we actually **improve** our organisation and not just simply fill a gap?

Don't forget that you can also take a look at previous issues of Innovation Matters by visiting our website and navigating to the [archives](#) page.

Happy Reading,

Derek Cheshire



people on so that we maintain tax revenue and spending in our local shops whilst retaining vital skills? Has anyone done the sums?

Please send in your suggestions and they will be published in future editions along with any other ideas that we stumble across.

Ban The Boss - update

Recently we brought to you the story of Dr Paul Thomas' work with Blaenau Gwent CBC Environmental Services. Here we give you another chance to watch the BBC programme and also a brief update on what happened afterwards.

In 2008, colleague Dr Paul Thomas started working within Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council and was filmed by the BBC. This resulted in the BBC programme 'Ban The Boss' which can be viewed by clicking [here](#).

The programme follows Paul as he applies Complexity Theory whilst working with the Environmental Services Department (Highways, Refuse and Recycling, Litter-picking, and Street Cleansing).

The bin-men viewed management, 'innovations', 'new ideas' and cost-cutting, job losses and more-work-for-less with great suspicion and didn't trust anyone (even the BBC film crew). With change comes risk and uncertainty and the biggest challenge was the acceptance that uncertainty is a natural part of the process. For example, inspiring frontline staff to choose their staff uniforms, arrange shift-patterns, or order equipment, gradually increasing responsibility.

So what happened? The Bin-men were released from filling in a number of forms before they left each morning, this was replaced by a simple checklist. Environmental Services has no managers at all, just leaders. Apart from one manager who chose to leave, no staff were forced out of the organisation. They were moved to other areas where their talents were better utilised. Staff were encouraged to provide input into routing, rostering and how to increase the amount of recycling within the Borough.

The money saved by this intervention, estimated to be in excess of £1m is being re invested in frontline services, decided by the staff themselves. They were also recognised as the best refuse collection service in the UK, not missing a single collection in the 3 months of the snow disruption. Anyone who knows the steep valley roads will realise that this was no mean feat. Oxford in comparison, a fairly flat region, lost 6 weeks in collections. Recycling rates are also soaring thanks to the hard work of the staff in educating residents and school children. The mechanics in the workshop are also happier and generating revenue for the council by working on, and MOTing vehicles from outside the Council.

As part of this project staff were asked a number of questions, the answers speak for themselves:

| | | |
|--------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Do You Trust Management? | Before 94% - No | After 91% - Yes |
| Do you feel empowered in work? | Before 78% - No | After 94% - Yes |



| | | |
|--|-----------------|-----------------|
| Are you in a Trusted Workplace | Before 98% - No | After 83% - Yes |
| Are you able to make suggestions in work to improve service/outputs? | Before 68% - No | After 87% - Yes |
| Do you feel BGCBC appreciates the work you do? | Before 89% - No | After 96% - Yes |
| Do you feel you have the 'tools' to do the job? | Before 63% - No | After 82% - Yes |
| Are you delivering a 'Good Service' to the Public of BGCBC | Before 67% - No | After 89% - Yes |

Staff Response Rate - 92%



Creativity - why we must break with tradition

It's time to deeply question the traditions of the past and focus on reinventing the future. It's time to question, imagine and create.

What are you having for your Sunday lunch this week? If you live in the UK I would lay odds on the reply being a Sunday Roast with all of the trimmings. And if I asked you the same question in a month or two the answer would more than likely be the same. If I asked the question a third time you would wonder what type of idiot I was. "Of course I am having a roast dinner" you would say. You are following a good old fashioned tradition and have become a creature of habit. There is no need to even think about what you eat every Sunday lunchtime.

While traditions might be nice in a family or community setting, they can be less than helpful in the business world. Tradition and habit can cause us to switch off our brains. This becomes the easy option, no need to think critically about what you are doing, no need at all. You will just do as you have always done, and will get the same results!!

If your business is more than 12 months old, it will have traditions or norms and you and your colleagues will have developed habits. These will may not be helping to move your business forward. Ideas, processes, techniques, and past habits will hold you back in today's competitive (and dangerous) economic climate. Even Worse, your workers may be turning off their minds and failing to create new ideas at the time you need them the most.

Great leaders are advocates for change, they acknowledge the past but they win by adapting to the present and creating for the future. They are open minded and brimming with curiosity. They love to challenge the status quo whilst focusing on what is possible.

Charles Handy gives a good example of this in his book "The Age of Unreason". Does our NHS have to keep paying consultants higher salaries? Habit says that we pay them more (if we have the money to do so) but critical thinking asks "what is it that consultants want?". They may want more money but how can they get it? Handy's suggestion is to let them work less for the NHS so that they can work in private practice (or even play more golf). We can then use the money that we save to employ more junior doctors, spend it on hospital equipment or perhaps training.

With fierce global competition, we must question past habits and focus on inventing and shaping the future. What do we want the future to look like, how can we make it so? The alternative is that the future is merely an extrapolation of the past. It's time to question, imagine and create. Each one of us has an unbelievable creative capacity which can be used in our jobs on a daily basis if the leaders and managers in our organisations allow it.

So whether you're passing the gravy at Sunday lunch or at the office, now is a perfect time to break with tradition.

Creativity - hiring the right people

If you want to make your organisation more creative, you might be thinking of hiring some staff to help you with this. If these people are likely to be creative then you must keep a tight rein on them and make sure that their job descriptions are comprehensive, right? Wrong!

If we hire people against a strict job description then we run a risk of several things happening:

1. We hire people who only do what it says in their job description
2. We are unable to be flexible about how we make use of these people
3. We will hire people in our own image (since we have created the job specification) and will fail to inject the free thinking that we require



So what can we do? First of all think about what it is that you want these people to actually do or the areas in which you want them to work. If you were a bank and wanted new staff to help you work on making your branches a better place to be you might be thinking of reducing queues. Previously you might have looked at someone with project management or mathematical skills to work out how much time a cashier should spend with a customer. If you wanted your branch staff to allocate more time to satisfying customers then customers will get stuck in queues. So why not make queues a better place to be? Hire someone who has worked at a theme park such as Disney World or Alton Towers. They have huge queues but people do not mind being in them because when they get to the front they are not disappointed by their experience.

When asking for applications, try asking for something different. Ask a potential manager to draw a picture of the sort of workplace that they will create as a result of the changes they will implement or ask customer service staff what a satisfied customer looks like. Make interviews practical experiences if possible, potentially throwing people into completely unfamiliar situations.

By doing something different we can expose the hidden but creative qualities that we are actually looking for. If we always hire the same type of employee we will always be muttering "you can never get the staff these days". By varying the staff we hire we can easily find out the type that best fit our business whilst bring fresh ideas and energy. If you are averse to the risk of hiring in this way you can always experiment a little by bringing in contract staff and then making them permanent or hiring staff similar to the ones that have helped drive your business forward.

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