**Manager – Listens to ideas**

#### What to Know:

Employees who are closest to the work are often the ones who have the best ideas for changes, improvements and problem-solving. Asking employees for their input on a regular basis is empowering and sends the message that employee expertise is valued and leveraged.

Changing the way we do things is always hard so our first reaction might be to think of all of the reasons we can’t do it a new way. Practicing “yes, and” thinking where we build on an idea instead of rejecting it outright can build trust and creativity on a team. “Yes, and” thinking is practiced by improve actors and has been widely applied in business. When new idea is presented instead of saying “But,” and listing all of the ways the idea won’t work, try “yes, and,” building on the possibility.

**Mythbusters:**

Receiving a new idea with “yes, and…” doesn’t mean you will have to implement something unworkable. It gives the idea time to come forward and be refined. Then use solid decision making criteria to see if it will work.

Change is necessary, but reinventing the wheel isn’t. Before jumping into a big change or deciding to move forward with a new idea, challenge yourself and others to think through the pros and cons. Consider the anticipated and unanticipated impact. Identify who else the change may affect and invite them into the conversation. Welcome and encourage all new ideas and be thoughtful about taking action.

**Questions to Ask:**

* Think of a time when you felt listened to. What made that a good experience? How can we do more of that?
* What does good listening look like? What behaviors would you like to see? What do we do well and where do we fall short?
* What is the best way to ask for employee input? For what topics would the team most like to have an opportunity to share their thoughts and ideas?
* What gets in our way of being good listeners? What role can all of us play in improving our listening?

**Best Practices:**

* Focus on listening fully before responding.
* Repeat back what you heard to check in and make sure what you heard is consistent with the intended message.
* Ask employees for their input, especially around changes that will impact them personally.
* When an employee raises an idea, let him/her know what you will do with that idea and be sure to follow through and let the employee know the outcome.
* Be up-front with employees that while they may be raising a great idea, it is just not possible to tackle everything at once. Help the employee understand how ideas will be responded to and prioritized.
* Ask someone you trust to observe your listening skills in different situations and give you feedback. When do you listen well? When might you be perceived as not listening?

#### What Managers Can Do:

Publicly recognize and reward new ideas, even if they are small incremental changes.

It is important to create an environment where new ideas are welcome, personal risk taking is encouraged, and creativity is valued. Stress the importance of creativity and set aside time for brainstorming in meetings.

When new ideas are being generated, practice giving the additive feedback of “yes, and…” in response to an idea rather than “no, but…” This can unleash positive energy that builds a collaborative climate.

Having fun with colleagues and trying new activities together can help us to look at things in a new way. One great way to spur new ideas is to create a competition for the most innovative approach to solve a particular problem.

Provide the resources needed to implement the ideas worth acting upon and recognize those responsible for generating the idea.

#### What Employees Can Do:

Sometimes we propose new ideas that are great but not aligned with the priorities of the organization. Other times, the team may not have the bandwidth to take on something new. Check with your manager or team to see where your efforts will be most appreciated – where do others see the greatest need for change? Are there initiatives on the backburner that you can take charge of and own?

You have great ideas and others do too. When you come up with a suggestion, run it by others to see if you can tweak and refine the idea before bringing it to your manager and/or other teams.

Confusion, slow processes, lack of information, or interpersonal conflict may be red flags that you can improve the workflow. When you feel frustrated or stuck, ask others for their ideas. See if you can put your heads together to come up with new or modified approaches.

#### What Leadership Can Do:

Set the tone for what employees should be innovating around. Is it the customer experience, products, process improvement?

Share stories of not only successful innovations, but also situations where employees may have taken a risk that failed. Employees are more likely to try out new ideas when they feel comfortable that it is ok to try something and potentially fail.

Use social media as a way of posing questions and ask for solutions. Ask employees to vote on the best idea.

Provide the resources needed to implement the ideas worth acting upon and recognize those responsible for generating the idea.

**Watch:**

* [Job Crafting - Amy Wrzesniewski on creating meaning in your own work](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C_igfnctYjA)

**Read:**

* [*18 Ways to Actively Encourage Company Innovation*](https://smallbiztrends.com/2015/09/encourage-company-innovation.html)
* [*Groupthink: The Brainstorming Myth*](http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2012/01/30/groupthink)
* *Coaching for Innovation: Tools and Techniques for Encouraging New Ideas in the Workplace by Cristina Bianchi and Maureen Steele*
* *Ideaship: How to Get Ideas Flowing into the Workplace by Jack Foster*