

Adopting a Startup Mindset

Every year, the National University of Singapore sends students in their junior year abroad to work as interns with small startups in major hubs such as Silicon Valley, Beijing, and Tel Aviv. After completing a year with the startup, they return to Singapore to finish their studies and eventually start their own business.

And why would Singapore choose small startups as a place of education? If you're looking to fuel an economy with innovation, there's no better place to learn. Startups aspire toward innovation, and do so through a work culture that encourages active participation from all employees in achieving that goal. The startups that the National University of Singapore look for range in size from 10 – 20. At that size, it's common for all employees to "wear many hats." They might be working on software development while also participating in sales and marketing strategy. As a result, every employee gets a sense of the company from top to bottom.

This model develops a sense of ownership and responsibility. As a result, employees are thinking about the direction of the company. Startups ask you to have a voice and give you the space to confidently speak your opinion about this direction. Because who knows where the next big idea will come from?

For the students of the National University of Singapore, the program creates a class of entrepreneurs who are ready to create a thriving economy of innovation in their home country. It's not just Singapore that has a lot to learn from startups, however. A traditional corporation could gain a lot if it started incorporating the insights of startup culture into its daily operations.

The National University of Singapore developed this program because it realized that its education system was not developing an entrepreneurial mentality. It demanded rigor and discipline, but not creativity. While there is nothing wrong with rigor and discipline, there is a danger to any corporation that lacks creativity.

In today's market, disruption is a common occurrence. New innovations push out old vendors, old products, and old ideas. The key is to be the disruptor, not the disrupted. But this is easier said than done — especially if you don't encourage innovation within your workplace.

It may be difficult for a corporation to develop this spirit the same way startups do. In a larger corporation, employees often wear one very narrow hat. The best you might be able to do is help them know how all the different departments fit together. A little easier is giving them a voice. Rather than restrict major decisions to a few higher-ups behind closed doors, make sure to include employees from all levels in the discussion. While executive decision may still fall on a select few, their decision can be informed by a more comprehensive understanding of the business.

There are, however, unique ways for larger corporations to encourage creativity and innovation. At Google, employees are encouraged to take time out of their day (and their traditional role in the company) to focus on pet projects. This is how such a staple of Google's services as Gmail came into being. Your employees know your company best — why not let them take a crack at envisioning new directions based on their experiences?

Salesforce is another example of a company that actively promotes innovation. In fact, they've been recognized by Forbes as the Most Innovative Company for the past several years. In addition to constantly asking their users for feedback, Salesforce has also setup hackathons within the corporation, where developers and other employees work to design the new innovation that could bring salesforce down. Rather than let another company push them out, Salesforce is actively looking to be their own biggest rival.

These are just a few examples of how you can jump-start your own entrepreneurial culture within your company. The best part about startup culture is that they are constantly innovating — this includes innovating how we innovate. Maybe your company will lead the way not only in your industry but in best practices for creating a thriving creative work culture.



About the Author:

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