

Don't Block Good Ideas from Getting to You!

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Often the best ideas to solve problems, cut costs, and improve sales come from your own people—but they never get to you. Why? Because you have inadvertently allowed your company's structure to prevent them from doing so.

Employees, vendors, and customers are loaded with good ideas to help you succeed. But are you willing to listen? If you think you know more about your product than anyone else, or that accepting ideas from others is somehow implying that you, the product creator, don't have all the answers, you may be losing out on a goldmine.

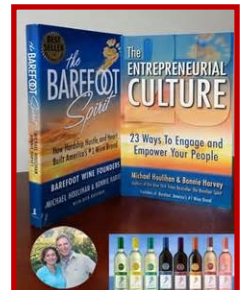
The mindset is counterproductive to improvement. You may be making a statement, but losing a deposit.

You may think, "Oh, that's not me. I want every good idea I can get my hands on!" But you may have permitted subtle roadblocks that effectively block those good ideas. If you unintentionally allow your company to grow into a "know-it-all," top-down structure, you are blocking good ideas from getting to you and your decision makers.

When we are helping a company with positive suggestions to improve their product or service, we often hear, "Nobody ever told me that before," to which we respond, "Well, you can't say that anymore!" But now we know two things about this company first, "good" ideas do not flow easily; and second, they believe customers only complain and never offer useful suggestions.

It is easy to see how this happens. Production is charged with taking raw materials and developing them into products, which they hand down to Marketing. Then, Marketing develops plans to sell the products and hands them down to Sales. Then Sales is charged with executing those plans. And then, if there

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are any complaints, they go to Customer Service who is charged with resolving their complaints.

This is the classic pyramid structure. We say, *“Pyramids are for dead pharaohs—don’t bury your good ideas under one.”*

To remove the road blocks that prevent good ideas from getting through a top-down structure start with a bottom-up philosophy and let it percolate into every level in your company structure.

Start by putting the customer on top. Every company says they put the customer on top. But doing this in practice requires turning that pyramid upside down.

Every call from your customers is a golden opportunity to get good ideas. So, change Customer Service from “complaint resolution” to “customer intel.” Create a formal upward path of communication that regularly allows those ideas to get to your production and marketing people.

Salespeople become more than the folks who execute the marketing plans. They get customer feedback, they witness market dynamics, and they see competitors’ strategies. Sales must be encouraged to collect and pass on this critical info to marketing and production.

Well-meaning Compliance, HR and even 1st and 2nd line Managers can discourage and even stop good ideas coming from your own people. Good ideas wane when not acted upon quickly. To speed up the process, ask your compliance people to identify parameters inside of which staff suggestions can get fast tracked. Then, actively encourage suggestions, followed by written memos of appreciation to those with the best ideas. Copy the entire team. This acknowledgement gives your people more appreciation for what that person did, and they all know that if they do the same, they too will also get acknowledgement. This encourages them to be engaged and creative.



Your customers, employees, and vendors have valuable suggestions that can help you succeed—if you only let them. Get out of the way and let ideas flow!

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