Owning Your Own Innovation

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On a macro scale, American business improvements can come in many forms—whether it be on NASA's grounds, or yours.

Innovation doesn't need to come with a multi-million dollar price tag. In fact, it's true worth lies in what sticks—and you know your associates better than anyone.

Let's talk about the meaning of innovation for a second: the idea that modernization of ideas is relegated to the science and technology market makes it feel out of our hands. What about innovation on the plant level?

- New training methods: While the conventional wisdom is to "stay the course" these days, employee training methods to improve throughput can be subtle and cost-effective ways of reducing reactive maintenance downtime. And while not necessarily ideal, times of chaos often actually improve the viability of cultural changes gaining acceptance on the employee level. Use this time as an opportunity to implement new employee idea suggestion programs, communication sessions, or quality checks.

- Capital investments: I recently spoke with a consultant who suggested that the smart companies are those that are investing in automation technology,

> in order to improve their processes in the long term. In an age where buoyancy—or short term viability—seems to be the method of choice, perhaps we need to (forgive the metaphor) *dive in* further with investments in equipment. This means utilizing the skill sets of your employees to drive the implementation and maintenance of these cutting edge methods.

Innovation doesn't just mean pie-in-the-sky, silver bullet thinking. It's also synonymous with a *shift*. At the risk of doling out platitudes in the face of economic danger, we are really faced with a great opportunity to change. And the ripples of change need not simply come by way of billion dollar technology ventures—they can be as simple as instilling a new culture of ideas within your associates. Let them know that change in your company comes on a micro scale as well.

Reading the daily manufacturing news means we run the risk of becoming down trodden over a problem that is so big and seemingly insurmountable that the 'solutions' are perceived as in the hands of the government, our suppliers, and our customers. While admittedly, most of the deck is in these hands, we still have a few cards left. Let's put them on the table—and let our employees know that their involvement is critical to the success or failure of each venture we undertake. Innovation can mean as much or as little as you want it to—either it's yours for the taking, or you can wait for it to arrive on a silver platter from the likes of NASA.

In my experience speaking with plant managers, one of most resonating areas of pride in their facilities are the hands that keep it running. I've never been in a plant where a manager has had nothing but the utmost faith in the folks on the floor. Let's use them to the best of their abilities. Innovation doesn't need to come with a multi-million dollar price tag. In fact, it's true worth lies in what sticks—and you know your associates better than anyone. Why not show the world what they're capable of.

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