

Learn to love 'renegade' employees

A hybrid approach to leadership harnesses the talents of risk-takers while continuing to nurture team builders

There are some people who produce their best work by building relationships with other people. In essence, they think out loud. They gather colleagues around to help them form their ideas more fully, and they do their best work in groups. In situations in which their talents and expertise are critical to the success of a new program, companies should place these people in teams charged with long-range strategic planning or research and development.

Then there are the mavericks. These are people who prefer to act as "venturers" — they become energized when they are driving change and they are willing to confront their colleagues in order to achieve it. When companies are facing a cataclysmic situation, such as reduced market share due to a competitor's new technology, these people should be put in charge of building and leading short-term crisis management, product management or marketing teams.

Their value lies not so much in the ability to assemble a group of experts, but in being able to quickly synthesize a team's viewpoints and then charge forward. When fast action is in order, venturers cut through complexity and maintain momentum even with ambiguous decision-

support information. In a cross-roads situation, they are critical to a company's immediate and long-term future.

The key to leading a fast-growing company is having "renegades" on the team and keeping them energized even within a team environment. Global companies that want to grow quickly through innovation need to nurture mavericks, despite any rough edges they may have or their lack of respect for traditional consensus building. They are the ones best suited to lead a company forward quickly.

Companies need to adopt a hybrid approach to leadership, harnessing the talents of risk-takers while continuing to nurture teams. Effective, well-run and cross-functional teams are necessary. They increase the level of buy-in on major decisions, jump-starting the likely achievement of new business goals.

However, there is a twist to team building that organizations must also acknowledge. To encourage significant change and growth, companies must free up mavericks to defy some of the consensus-building rules of teamwork.

Companies renowned for success and innovation, from Virgin Atlantic to Staples, have leaders who aren't afraid to stir the pot. Companies need to empower

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renegade managers and executives to do the same. Renegades are not energized by consensus — ideas carefully contrived and ironed out by teams until every last wrinkle has been smoothed. Renegades become motivated when they see an opportunity to take a chance, to champion a new idea that has the potential to make a significant contribution to the company.

To lead mavericks, it's important to have a genuine understanding of the organization's people, and to structure teams according to the individuals in the mix.

Many businesses are adept at structuring permanent teams so that the organization's venturers are continually motivated, while at the same time encouraging and fostering teamwork. A mid-sized New England general contracting firm relies on strong team-oriented partnerships with building owners, architects, subcontractors and tenants for success. However, it has several talented venturers that it needs to nurture. The solution? The organization separated itself into multiple businesses and placed the venturers in charge of them. Each can satisfy his need for self-direction while supporting a collaborative culture.

Certainly, there are circumstances in which highly charged

venturers do need to rein themselves in. This is especially true in the boardroom. If a CEO unilaterally makes a decision that should require extensive input from the CIO, CFO, HR and the vice-president of marketing, then damage is done three ways: by moving forward without a full view of the implications, undercutting creativity, and reducing the authority and long-term motivation of colleagues on the senior management team.

But companies that are overly dependent on a team culture run the risk of homogenizing staff, and eventually weeding out the most creative thinkers and aggressive achievers.

As technology and global competition increase the pace of corporate change, retaining these maverick individuals and capitalizing on their talents is essential.

A company's competitive advantage lies in its people, both the renegades and those who work best as team members.

Organizations that achieve greatness are the ones that encourage entrepreneurs to move in new directions, while still maintaining and supporting teams.

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