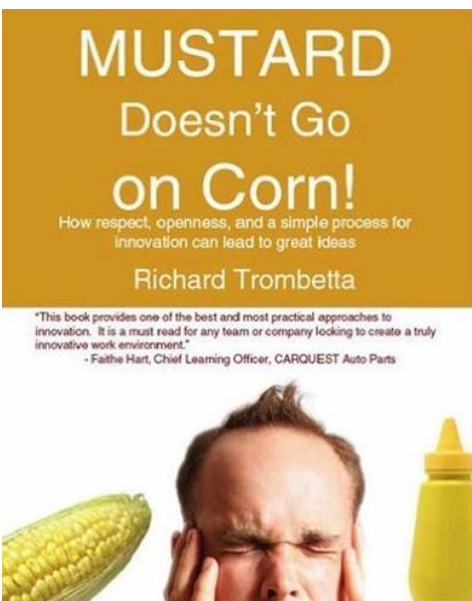


THE INNOVATION COMPANY



Chapter Two of *Mustard
Doesn't Go on Corn!*

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Unleash everyone's creativity, work on real life scenarios, AND produce tangible results. It's EASY and only takes 1 to 2 hours. The Innovation Company - home of the PRE-NOTE™ and the POP! Culture® Workshop.

Excerpt from Chapter 2: You may be asking at this point, ‘so what’s up with the title of this book, *Mustard Doesn’t Go on Corn!* and what could mustard and corn possibly have to do with innovation?’ On the surface, it may seem the answer is ‘nothing.’ However, as you will see, they have *everything* to do with innovation.

I once brought my young daughter to a small children’s museum. Everywhere I looked I saw words like explore, discover, and imagine. In one section of the museum there was a small play kitchen that could accommodate about 10 kids. I was watching my daughter have a grand old time putting plastic grapes in the play oven when I saw a remarkable event. There was a little boy about 3 or 4 years old who had a plate with some plastic corn on it. He said to his mom, “OK, mom, I’m going to put mustard on your corn.” Just as he was about to do so his mom said, in a semi-nurturing voice, “mustard doesn’t go on corn.” The kid’s face dropped. What made it worse is what happened next. Another little kid very emphatically said, “No, mustard doesn’t go on corn.” You may be asking ‘what’s the big deal here?’ But it was a big deal – to that child. And, it was at that moment in time I realized why innovation is often so difficult for companies and our society. Here was a little kid seeing words and images encouraging him to explore and be creative, and the second he does, boom – ‘mustard doesn’t go on corn!’ In a matter of seconds the kid had his idea shot down by an authority figure and was piled on by a peer. Sound familiar?

Being the instigator I am, I could not just sit back and watch this happen. I said, “I like mustard on corn.” The kid looked confused. “I do. I put mustard on everything I eat.” Still looking confused and a little hesitant he asked, “You do?” “Yup, even on spaghetti.” Suddenly a slow rolling energy started to take over that little kitchen and within seconds other kids were getting involved. Suddenly mustard on corn didn’t seem so foolish. “How about Cheerios?” someone asked. “Every day,” I responded. And on and on it went, eventually with the other child who had originally dismissed such a ‘foolish’ idea joining in on the fun.

Let’s play out this same scenario at work. A company has an ‘innovation initiative’ and puts up signs and banners with phrases like ‘every idea counts’ or ‘innovation is king.’ A person (the child who suggested putting mustard on corn) suggests an idea. The boss (the mother in the story above) publicly says ‘that won’t work.’ A co-worker (the other child) then says, ‘yeah that’s not a good idea.’ Now, imagine that a person like me was not there for support. *The idea dies.* Just like a seed thrown on a cement sidewalk, there is no chance of it growing. And, as described earlier, the answer to this issue is not contained in a PowerPoint slide from a weekend seminar at Harvard. It exists in the simple premise – and one that is supported by science and research – that it is simple behaviors coupled with a clear process to bring ideas to action that enables companies to become truly innovative, not pouring countless amounts of resources into glamorous posters, sophisticated presentations, and high priced advice – all of which are not needed. Just like the Twinkie or the designer shirt, you don’t need a personal trainer with a PhD in nutrition to tell you fruit is better than Twinkies (wow that is tough to admit) or an MBA degree to calculate you don’t have enough money for the shirt. In this workplace example, just as with the child at the museum, it is obvious - be open to ideas and respect the input of others. If your organization’s culture does not promote an atmosphere of sincere

respect and openness, how can you truly expect people to come forth with ideas? How can you have a workforce that is engaged and contributing more than simply doing their work? How can we focus on implementation of ideas when we don't even have ideas to implement?

In 1992, Psychology Today published an article titled *The Art of Creativity*. The authors stressed the importance of "Vanquishing negativity" to enable the creative process. They wrote "Apart from the structure of a company, the attitudes that pervade its operations can enhance or thwart creativity. One of the keys is building feelings of trust and respect to the point that people feel secure enough to express new ideas without fear of censure. This is because in the marketplace, imaginative thoughts have financial value. But an unimaginative, unreceptive attitude destroys opportunity. Someone who judges your imaginative thoughts, who refuses to listen to a new way of thinking or simply criticizes it, is a creativity killer of the first order. Cynicism and negativity are enemies of the creative spirit." (Goleman, Kaufman, Ray, 1992) ¹⁰ They go on to add that "But the degree of creativity is influenced by our feelings: our belief that we can speak without fear of retribution, our feeling of being trusted by others, a confidence in our own intuition. All affect how we respond to the information before us." Leigh Branham, in the book *The 7 Hidden Reasons Employees Leave* specifically mentions "being treated with disrespect" as one of the ways employees feel devalued and, ultimately drive their decision to leave a company. ¹¹

But what if you are not creative? Well, as of this moment, that notion is to be put to rest. EVERYONE is creative. *The Art of Creativity* article explains that "Our lives can be filled with creative moments, **whatever we do**, as long as we're flexible and open to new possibilities - willing to push beyond routine. The everyday expression of creativity often takes the form of trying out a new approach to a familiar dilemma. Yet half the world still thinks of creativity as a mysterious quality that the other half possesses. A good deal of research suggests, however, that **everyone is capable of tapping into his or her creative spirit**. We don't just mean getting better ideas: we're talking about a kind of general awareness that leads to greater enjoyment of your work and the people in your life: a spirit that can improve collaboration and communication with others." (Goleman, Kaufman, Ray, 1992) ¹⁰

Harvard Business School Professor, Teresa Amabile, a leading researcher in the study of creativity, supports the statements above by noting that "Everyone is capable of producing novel and useful ideas. Anyone can do some degree of creative work." ¹² You – yes you – are creative and have something to offer.

Vanquishing negativity. Feelings of trust and respect. Speaking without fear of retribution. Open to new possibilities. Acknowledging that everyone is creative. *These* are the keys to innovation and building an innovative culture.

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