



Vol. 5, No. 5, May 2008

Focus on Innovation

Focus on Innovation is a monthly electronic newsletter designed to provoke thoughts and ideas on how to bring innovation to life within the organizations in which we work.

For Those on the Run

Could you be squelching your own or someone else's creativity and not even know that you are doing it? Read this month's newsletter to identify the idea squelchers that could be blocking creative thinking within yourself and others.

Idea Squelchers

It's bad enough to be uncreative however it's even worse to squelch your own or another person's creativity. During a brainstorming session or any group ideation process, the greatest threat to creativity is squelching. The word "squelch" is defined by the Merriam-Webster.com dictionary as...

1. to fall or stamp on so as to crush.
2. the act of suppressing; *especially* : a retort that silences an opponent.

With just one single statement your own creativity or that of another can be destroyed. For example, in meetings we see squelching whenever a person criticizes ideas of others. The criticism might be direct: "what a stupid idea!" or indirect: "oh my God! There she goes again!" or: "you'd never get the budget for that!" Sometimes it is nonverbal, i.e. a groan or a raised eyebrow. This type of squelching can be very demotivating causing group members not to come forward with good ideas and/or sending the message that out of the ordinary ideas is not welcome here. Squelching, whether it is of our own ideas or that of others, essentially stops the creative flow.

Below you will find a list of idea squelchers. When reviewing the list, tick off or circle any of these comments you have a tendency to make.

- We've never done it before.
- We've already tried that before.
- It can't be done.
- It won't work.
- Let's not reinvent the wheel here.
- Too blue sky.
- No way.
- Are you nuts?
- It's a waste of time.
- I'm telling you, it won't work.
- I just know it won't work.
- What will the parents think?
- Somebody would have suggested it before if it were any good.
- Too modern.
- Too old-fashioned.
- Not that way.
- Let's discuss it at some other time.
- This is the last try.
- You've got to be kidding.
- You ask too many questions.
- You don't understand our situation.
- You don't understand our problem.
- We're too small for that.
- We're too big for that.
- We're too new for that.
- Let's not bother.
- We have too many projects now.
- It's been the same for 20 years, so it must be good.
- This is how it's done.
- Let's use proven methods.
- What bubble head thought of that?
- That's trouble.
- Don't rock the boat.
- We have to be practical.
- It's not in the plan.
- We did all right without it.
- It's too early.
- It's too late.
- See? It didn't work.
- It's not in the budget.
- It has limited possibilities.
- We're not ready for it yet.
- All right in theory, but can you put it into practice.
- Won't we be held accountable?
- Let's form a committee.
- Let's put it in writing.
- We need more lead time.
- Walk, don't run.
- You'll never sell it to the union.
- Don't forget the chain of command.
- Stay on their good side.
- Don't step on any toes.
- Be practical.
- Let's wait and see.
- I don't see the connection.
- It won't work in our department.
- We can't do it under the regulations.
- There are no regulations covering it.
- That's not our responsibility.
- That's not our department.
- That's not our job.
- That's not our role.
- It's low in our priorities.
- It will offend.
- What's the use?
- Why bother?
- It doesn't matter.
- Our people won't accept it.
- You can't teach an old dog new trick.
- Have you checked with...?
- And you stand there saying...
- No young person is going to tell me how to run this operation!
- You can't argue with success.
- It will mean more work.
- If it ain't broke, don't fix it.

Ideas to Squelch Squelching

- ✦ **Become "squelch" aware.** Identify which idea squelchers you tend to use and work to eliminate them from your vocabulary. For one week, keep tabs on what and how often you squelch ideas. Once you become aware of which ones you use it will be easier for you to stop using them.
- ✦ **Help your team/colleagues become "squelch" aware.** Distribute this list to your team/colleagues so that they can become "squelch" aware. Hold a meeting to discuss the idea squelchers you use as a team and what you can do together to stop using them.
- ✦ **Eliminate squelching from your meetings.** Make it clear at the beginning of the meeting that squelching is not allowed. Put up a large sign saying "NO SQUELCHING" before starting the meeting. Make sure everyone knows what you mean by squelching. Then, during the meeting, if someone does try to squelch (and it almost always happens early on), gently point a finger at the squelcher and say dramatically (but with a smile): "no squelching!"
- ✦ **Learn to fertilize ideas instead of squelching them.** Catch yourself as the squelcher is coming out of your mouth and replace it with "That sounds interesting, tell me more." or "Help me understand..." Encourage ideas and help people think through their ideas with open-ended questions.

What's the Bottom line

Squelch the squelchers before they squelch everyone's creativity.

Source: This newsletter was adapted from *Chapter 2: Barriers, Blocks, and Squelchers: Why We Are Not More Creative* of Gary Davis's book *Creativity is Forever*, 4th Edition.



Please feel free to pass this newsletter on to others.

If you would like more information about the ideas and topics listed in this issue, contact Judy Laws, Ph.D. at jlaws@foursightconsulting.com.

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