



INNOVATION: HOW TO LIVE AND BREATHE IT IN YOUR FRANCHISE COMPANY

One of my favorite keynote addresses I like to give is all about innovation. It is titled, *"Searching for Excellence: The Never-Ending Journey."*

In my talk, I stress the fact that you are either constantly innovating and improving, or you are falling backwards. We live in a time of rapid change, and change brings new competition, changing customer behaviors, new kinds of automation, and more. The job of the franchise system is to anticipate it.

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Franchisor and franchisee both have a role in the process. Innovative ideas can come from either party. The important thing is to remember that all innovative ideas should be vetted for brand and strategic fit, approved by the franchisor, and field-tested before being rolled out to the entire system

How can you live and breathe the kind of innovation that keeps your franchising concept in the lead? Here are some strategies to apply.

Dedicate a time of year for innovation

It's easy for you to let time to slip by and to fall into in routines or ruts, so it's important to create a certain time of year which is dedicated to reviewing and considering innovation. It should be a process that involves not only the franchise or and staff, but the franchisees too. All franchisees should be invited to share ideas, and the franchise advisory council should be consulted in considering what



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innovations the organization wants to work on.

Ask this big question

If I had the time and money and were going to create a new business that could put my own company out of business, what would it look like? This is a very powerful question. It challenges everything you do. By asking it, you can innovate before someone else puts you out of business. Being late can literally put you out of business, or way behind the eight ball. It's always better to lead.

Create an innovation committee of franchisees

Creating an innovation committee is a powerful way to create innovation within your organization. This committee is charged with developing new ideas, which its members should test and implement. Members of the committee should be pioneers who really enjoy being on the front end of the process of change. Include all age groups and be sure the committee is diverse in regard to ethnicity, the regions members come from, and more. That helps assure all points of view are noticed.

Do customer research

Customer research delivers powerful clues about what you should be changing as you innovate. Remember that because every type of customer base is different, it is good to use different forms of research - surveys, focus groups, and more. As



a member of management, don't avoid reaching out and talking to real customers. A lot can be learned.

Avoid rogue testing

One of the biggest issues franchise systems have is maintaining brand control and consistency throughout the entire system. When one franchisee decides to test something without it being sanctioned by the franchisor, that can create a very disruptive culture. Although franchisees can feel that their independence from the system is not having an impact on the business, that is not the case. Everyone's support of the brand impacts on everyone else. Furthermore, when franchisees are allowed to violate brands standards, that encourages others to do the same. That's when culture starts going out of control.

Become a curious leader

When you personally strive to identify and understand your industry sector and wider business trends, you send a signal to everyone in your franchising organization that you are a company that places a high value on innovation. Make sure you share what you learn! As a leader, having time to be curious makes a difference.

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In Summary . . .

Innovation is exciting. Knowledge is energizing. And curiosity is infectious. I hope the suggestions I have shared in this article will get you as excited about innovation as I am. Let's all get knowledge and innovation flying all around our franchising organizations - up, down, sideways, and in every other direction we can think of.

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