



## Improving Innovation: Two Ground Rules & One FAQ

**1) Tell the truth.** Trust is King in environments of innovation. Encouraging people to “tell the truth” builds trust. It usually means asking questions in a non-threatening, open-minded manner. Name the Elephant while not being harsh with the Elephant. “None of us want to give the customer a promise we can’t keep. Let’s take the time to discuss this thoroughly, create a realistic plan, and be totally honest about what we can and can’t do.” When a Leader needs a promise from a team, an inquiry approach will create better dialogue and openness (versus “telling”):

- "Tell me more about what you think will work?"
- "Do you have any concerns if this will conflict with other priorities you have this week?"
- "Is there anything you need from me to make this possible?"

Ask for the Truth .... Tell the Truth ... and BE OPEN to hearing the truth without blame or judgment.

**2) Agree on a common purpose.** Too often, there is no agreed purpose, or it’s way too high level, open to interpretation, and people say promises without intending to *do* them: “Satisfy the customer.” Remember, Innovation outcomes are different than Efficiency outcomes. Be clear about which you are supporting, and which stage of the work effort you are in.

- “What is the purpose for us all in this next stage? Are we seeking a breakthrough idea or are we on a tight deliverable with a non-flexible boundaries? Keep asking the question until everyone agrees with the answer.
- To clarify agreements Leaders can ask:
  - "If *you* were talking directly to the customer, what could you comfortably promise about the next steps, that builds trust and avoids us going back again with disappointing news?"
- Team members might ask:
  - "What day next week do you need something from us, and what do you think would give the customer a sense we are working on the solution?"

### One Simple Experiment To Improve an Innovation-Friendly Culture

- Put the above two Ground Rules on a post-it note in your desk area this week, with 2 columns next to each:
- Yes and (2) No.
- Ask these two questions of yourself, every time you communicate with a colleague, your boss, or an employee. Just make a slash mark in Column 1 if the answer is "Yes," or in Column 2 if it's "No." Nobody is going to check your work. Be honest.
- Ask yourself at the end of the week:

“What did I learn?”

**And that is the ONE top FAQ for any individual or team in which innovation has become a true habit.**