



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.