

# THERE ARE FOUR E'S BEFORE I

THE BIG "I", INNOVATION IS THE RESPONSIBILITY OF EVERYONE IN THE ENTERPRISE

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## INTRODUCTION

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In today's environment of a growing world economy in global, highly competitive markets there is a strong need for innovation in all areas of a business. To stay competitive, innovation is not just the task of the people in R&D, it is the responsibility of everyone in the enterprise. There is demand for not only product innovation but process and procedural innovations. Some very large and highly successful companies were built upon procedure and process innovations, such as Dell Computer and Federal Express. In addition there are needs for breakthrough, distinctive and incremental innovations created in a pattern that matches the market opportunity. Innovation is not a game for just "high tech" companies. It is a necessity to remain competitive regardless of the industry or company stage of maturity. Innovation is the real bottom line.

People, the keys to innovation, are the most precious asset of any organization. Unlike all other business assets, this asset walks out the door at the end of every business day. Moreover, because of the qualified employment crunch in the US the likelihood of this asset not only flowing out the door daily, but actually moving across the street or farther down the road to a more interesting or receptive work environment is more real than ever.

What's an executive or manager to do to get enterprise wide innovation? It is not only a business challenge it is a personal one calling for real leadership and skill. Control over this asset, called euphemistically "human resources," is an illusion. There is no control, only tenuous connections through vision, purpose, goals and values. So how do you utilize this asset to produce innovation and stay competitive throughout the entire enterprise in the most efficient and effective manner? To do so, remember that there are four E's before I. To encourage innovation throughout the enterprise the executive must first ennoble, enable, empower and encourage. These are not just high sounding words. They are, when used systematically and authentically, extremely practical and powerful concepts that will ensure innovation in all aspects of the business.

The process of ennobling, enabling, empowering, and encouraging creates an environment in which innovation can flourish and people are motivated to grow, take risk, and change. The process of motivation begins with ennobling that provides the reason, needs and justification for innovation. Ennobling the people in an organization generates excitement. Enabling provides people with the knowledge, skills and abilities to innovate. Enabling adds the ingredient of intention to the atmosphere of excitement. Empowering builds trust. Trust when added to intention in an exciting atmosphere results in action. It is then the role of the leader to encourage actions that generate outcomes and consequences important to the mission of the organization. That encouragement builds more excitement and the spiral of continuous innovation prevails.

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## ENNOBLE

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To ennoble is to transmit or impart the significance and purpose of people and their work. To ennoble is to inspire, literally breathe spirit into, an organization. Two of the most recognizable examples of ennoblement come from the space program. First is the speech made by President John F. Kennedy stating that, "We will have a man on the moon in this decade." The second example comes during the crisis of Apollo 13, when the Mission Control flight director stated emphatically that, "Failure is not an option."

There are four elements to ennoblement:

- Demonstrate respect
- Nurture dignity
- Expect excellence
- Provide connectivity

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### ENABLE

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To enable is to provide the tools, knowledge, equipment and to develop the capability necessary to accomplish appropriate work. Training and re-training are very important ingredients in enablement. The real world dilemma that managers face in fulfilling this particular requirement is that the more rapidly change occurs, the more there is a need for training. Today's environment is certainly a time period of rapid change. However, today's environment also demands efficiency. It is the role of today's business leaders to expect more from the people in their organization. This efficiency focus can squeeze training into the background providing the basis for a reduction in innovation and an eventual loss of competitiveness. To balance these two factors, training is adopting one of the modern manufacturing concepts. "Just in time" training is providing the training just when a person needs it, what is needed, in the right format and in the right location. This has resulted in the fragmentation of the training efforts and an increased emphasis on the individual to be more responsible for his or her own development.

The enablement of people in organizations will require the investment in new technological solutions to meet today's training needs. In addition, as training is becoming more of an individual responsibility, it is imperative that today's leaders develop the appropriate values within the organization that enable the people to take the responsibility for their own development and their own future. In addition, these values must ensure that the goals and purpose of the organization are met as well. Values provide the only tool available to balance both organizational and individual needs.

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### EMPOWER

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Empowerment is probably one of the most maligned words in the lexicon of modern management ideas. "We tried that and it didn't work!" is the common complaint. Or, "Are you crazy! Turning everyone loose to do what they want to do. It would be chaos!" The problem has been that people tried empowerment without first ennobling and enabling them. With purpose, values and ability in line with the organizations' goals and objectives, it is not only safe to empower people, it is essential in order to gain the maximum potential from all resources.

Empowerment is not like a kindergarten exercise in creative painting. It is much more like the difficult task of creating a new work of art in a frame with limited materials that a mature artist faces. It is "creativity in a box".

People in an organization are empowered by granting them the license for action while at the same time

invoking the responsibility for their actions.

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### ENCOURAGE

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The executive fostering an innovative organization cannot walk away and expect that the results will be delightful. The role of an innovative leader is highly active and interactive with the organization. The leader by presence, decisions and actions must inspire confidence, provide feedback for course correction, mentor the development of more leaders and stimulate further action in an escalating spiral of risk and change.

People grow through their mistakes. The leader's task is to let people make a series of small mistakes, each time learning what went wrong, instead of making one large mistake for which there is no recovery. The challenge is to know an individual's capacity so that tasks encourage rather than discourage their development.

In the classic story of T. J. Watson, the founder of IBM, one of his senior managers had made a mistake costing the company a million dollars. The manager feared facing the responsibility of his actions but eventually approached Watson with his resignation. Watson responded by asking the manager "Why would I want your resignation? I just spent \$1,000,000 educating you!"

Contrary to popular business mythology, innovation doesn't just happen. Nor should it be a random event. Enterprise-wide, systematic innovation is imperative for survival in this highly competitive global marketplace. It makes very good dollars and sense to follow the four E's to the big I.

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