



# Lean HR Approach to Creating an Idea-Driven Organization

- 1. Ensure you have a process:** Harvesting ideas requires a well thought out process. Make it easy for team members to communicate ideas and implement them. Because this involves shifting the way work is done on a day to day basis, new processes must be put in place to handle these changes.
- 2. Manage the process with a team:** Have team members drive improvement. Oftentimes, steering committees of leaders try to control the work. As you might expect, this only reinforces the idea that leaders need to direct improvements. Groups of team members better understand how work is done and how team members could be engaged.
- 3. Include PDCA (Plan, Do, Check, Act) cycles:** Handling the implementation ideas with a process managed by a team naturally leads to the need for cycles of learning. At any given point, your processes would benefit from examining weaknesses and pitfalls that can be alleviated with new alternatives.
- 4. Track your progress:** Given that implementing improvements is a behavior you want to encourage, make sure to track them. As the saying goes, what gets measured gets done. If your intent is to make a significant number of employee-driven improvements, you'll want to measure them in a visual manner. Idea-driven organizations often have 50 or more suggestions per employee. The journey to achieving this type of level is highly correlated to counting the implemented ideas.

**5. Celebrate and recognize:** Another way to support the encouragement of these behaviors is to celebrate them regularly in a variety of ways. As is generally the case with recognition, be sure that it is specific and relates the suggestion to the impact it makes towards the higher purpose. Having variety in recognition can make it fresh and more effective over time. While monetary rewards are always an option, they are not necessarily the most effective.

**6. Empower people to solve their own problems:** A mistake many suggestion programs make is assigning implementation to a few leaders. The only way to be truly idea-driven is by allowing the people closest to the work to address problems and solutions. The approach to having team members handle their own implementations often involves carefully crafted authority levels that gradually allow people to make changes, purchases, etc. Ensuring the guideposts are in place and that they continually broaden is core to this step. People's ability to make change is of critical importance.

**7. Benchmark other idea-driven organizations:** Given that being idea-driven represents both skillsets and well-developed processes, it can be quite challenging. One practice that can make a marked difference is to have your team review the success of other organizations. One way to do this using documented research is through *The Idea-Driven Organization* by Allan Robinson. To find organizations to speak with, tap into the broad network of companies that pursue various continuous-improvement strategies.

**8. Educate and involve the entire leadership team:** Being idea-driven dramatically alters the role of leadership. In traditional work environments, leadership is often defined by their role in identifying and solving problems. The necessary shifts in the role of leadership require extensive education to support the process.

**9. Consider opportunities to address every major issue of your business:** No matter what the problem, gathering or harvesting ideas from the broader work team can only enhance your chances of success. You can always stop to consider what the largest problem facing your business is and brainstorm ideas with everyone. Not only does this make them more aware of the challenges, it naturally engages them in the potential solutions.

**10. Think big:** Suggestion programs generally have low expectations on the improvements they will drive, which is obvious in their structure and follow-up. On the other hand, idea-driven organizations expect to dramatically change business results through optimizing the contributions of every team member. If an organization is currently at the level of less than one suggestion per employee, their journey to being idea-driven has just begun. Imagine what a work environment would look like with 10 suggestions for every team member being implemented. What if 20 or 30 suggestions were implemented per team member? What problems might be solved? What achievements might occur?

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