



Stanford eCorner

Give Ideas Credit, Not Credit for Ideas

Marissa Mayer, *Google*

May 17, 2006

Video URL: <http://ecorner.stanford.edu/videos/1525/Give-Ideas-Credit-Not-Credit-for-Ideas>

Both the enterprise and the end users are better served by a culture that revolves around rewarding great ideas, rather than the self-promotion of getting others to acknowledge the contributions of an individual. Marissa Mayer, Vice President of Search Products & User Experience at Google, believes that if you fill a room with smart people and give them access to information, brilliant ideas will flourish, and the need for a strict management hierarchy dissolves. A platform for the free-form sharing of ideas promotes an open culture and a flat organization.



Transcript

Share everything you can. And I think that one of the things that's been really fundamental about Google is we have an incredibly open culture. Until we went public, in fact, until about three months before, our VP of sales got up every day and told us the revenue numbers for the company. And it's amazing when you take a lot of smart, motivated people and give them access to a huge amount of information, how well informed their choices are about what they want to work on and what needs to be done. And I think that's been, you know, really amazing, because it's helped us manage the organization in a way that's really flat. So, you know, you may have heard things like, you know, GE has a 1 to 12 rule, which means for every 12 employees there's 1 manager. You know, we've had a very flat organization, so we have situations where we have 40 or 60 employees with 1 manager. And the idea there is we want people, if they can prioritize their own time and manage themselves really well because they have access to a really broad array of information that works well and it gives them the empowerment and feeling of independence that they need to be really successful. And share everything you can also applies to another philosophy that I think is rather interesting, which, you know, it really struck me from a book that was written by Tom Kelly called "The Art of Innovation." And he has a concept there around taking credit. And he'll say that, you know, one thing that happens sometimes is that when people come up with idea, they'll think that they have a really good idea, and they throw it out there to the organization and then they follow it around, because they want to make sure that everyone knows it's their idea, right? And he said that, you know, there will be people who will become so consumed with, you know, does everyone know this is my idea, that they ultimately stop producing new ideas.

And he said that, you know, he made this observation that at IDO he saw this phenomenon where people who just put all their energy into coming up with the most ideas possible and not really worrying about where those ideas flowed inside the organization, or how they got used, or whether or not they got credit, ultimately ended up flourishing more, because they became known as such fountains of ideas that, you know, someone would say, "Well, where did this idea come from?" And they'd say, "Well, I don't know, you know, maybe it was Joe. Joe always has ideas." It was this very interesting concept of not being territorial to the point of actually hindering yourself, and I think it was a really interesting observation, and it's something that we do a pretty good job of practicing at Google, which is not to say that people don't get credit for ideas that they come up with, but I think that people are focused more on the users and on innovation and less on how they themselves, you know, are fulfilled, and as a result they actually have a more fulfilling experience and, you know, are noted for their achievements more.