



Stanford eCorner

Maintaining a Culture of Innovation

Aaron Levie, *Box.net*

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Box.net CEO Aaron Levie says that his company spends a tremendous amount of time on building an innovative culture as the organization continues to grow. As many of the individuals they hire today may soon be managers, Box carefully selects whom they bring aboard and sets high targets for performance and results. Levie also describes current initiatives Box undertakes to encourage innovation by employees.



Transcript

So, this is something that we spend a lot of time on. We have a large portion of, not necessarily disproportionate but a good portion of our management attention is on how do we build the culture in the right way as we scale. So, if you think about it, someone we hired today, is he just someone who is going to be an engineer or someone who is going to be in sales or actually, probably if they're really good, be a manager in 6 or 12 months from now? And that means, because of the rate at which we're growing our organization, we have to hire people today that can actually be leaders later. And that's really critical. And so, first is just the criteria of who you're hiring, the qualifications of that individual, our hiring process to make sure we're bringing in people that we want to work with, that we think are skilled enough to be able to really innovate, to be able to work really hard. And we push on people, we set really big goals. So, you can actually start to see what people can't meet those goals. What kind of people aren't fitting in this high-performance, really quick environment because that's the only way we're going to be competitive, right? We're in the business of getting a lot of people together, building really good technology. And the only way we can do that is if we have the best people to do that. And so, we have to make sure we're constantly hiring the best people.

We have some sort of mechanisms that help us do that. And what was the second part of your question? I mean, are you bringing in innovation into the company? Yes. So, innovation is critically important. I actually need to read some more books on this in terms of like what happens to companies when they stop innovating, like why did that happen, that totally sucks, right? As a startup, everything you do matters so much, right? Your leverage is just the people that you're working on that project with. Nobody is there for the paycheck. You're there to really change as much as you possibly can. And so, you want to maintain that when you have 100 people, when you have 500 people, when you have 1000 people. And so, we have a couple of forcing functions that help with that. Facebook has certainly popularized the Hackathon. So, once every three or six months, all of our engineers stay up all night and they can work on any single project that they want to.

It's totally up to them. And that gives us an opportunity to test things that are outside of the sort of day-in-day-out business that lets us figure out what new is out there that we want to work on. Google has 20% time. We do this more like a consolidated period where we're going to put out a lot of work. And so, what comes from that is we are the first company to release HTML5 drag-and-drop file uploading and technology like that in the space. We have this thing that is launching tomorrow, which enables Box to be real-time. And so, it's going to be really powerful. And I'd say it's these kinds of things that just don't make their way on a regular product road map. And so, you have to be able to have forcing functions that say, "How are we going to do this in a completely new way?" Then, I think finally, we're just trying to encourage it across the organization. Every problem that we're trying to solve, we're as collaborative as we can to solve it.

And we look for the best sort of way that we can solve that problem. We don't necessarily just look at what have other organizations done. We actually look at what should be possible and what should we do. So, a lot of stuff go into it. There is not sort of a single way that you do that. But it definitely takes a lot of discipline to make sure it continues throughout your organization as you hire people.