



turning managers into leaders

Merge's Monthly Mega Minute – August 2013

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Merge Gupta-Sunderji turns managers into leaders. Through engaging keynotes and facilitated workshops, she gives people specific and practical tools to achieve leadership and communication success. Contact her at www.mergespeaks.com or 403-605-4756

What the "Fosbury Flop" teaches us about innovation

In 1964, Dick Fosbury revolutionized the world of high-jumping by turning the sport upside down ... literally! Until then, athletes used either the straddle technique (in which the jumper lifts his legs individually over the bar while facing down) or the less popular upright scissors method (in which he runs upright towards the bar and lifts his straight legs over one at a time). But Fosbury did it differently – he went over the bar, head-first and on his back, curving his body and kicking his legs up in the air at the end of the jump. The "Fosbury Flop", as it came to be known, is why he not only took the gold medal at the 1968 Olympics in Mexico City but also set a new Olympic record of 7 feet 4-1/4 inches. His success silenced the initial skeptics in the high-jumping community, but the true proof came in the following years – seventy percent of the athletes in the Munich 1972 games used the Flop, and that number rose to eighty percent by 1980. Today, it is the most popular technique in the sport of high-jumping. It's worth noting that Fosbury was mocked and ridiculed when he first starting using his new technique; in fact, one newspaper at the time captioned him the "World's Laziest High Jumper" and another said that he looked like "a fish flopping in a boat" (ergo the name Flop). Yet Fosbury persevered. He challenged conventional wisdom, tolerated (and sometimes ignored) the naysayers, and eventually turned the sport of high-jumping on its ear. My point is that his road to success was fraught with many speed bumps, most of which were created by the negative attitudes of others.

Which is worth keeping mind if you are a leader who is trying to build a culture of innovation in your organization or department. Unusual and atypical ideas will always bring out the cynics and pessimists in droves. If you want to create an environment that fosters originality in thought and action, then it's your job to keep the doubters at bay and to buffer your employees from the skeptics and disparagers. It's up to you (and sometimes you may be the only one) to

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encourage your employees to think unconventionally, laterally, and perhaps even upside down, despite negativity in others.

Well, what do you think? What does it take to create an environment of creativity and ingenuity? Where do you draw the line between encouraging innovation and allowing inefficiency? Please share online at my blog at: www.mergespeaks.com/blog.