

5 Questions on Innovation with Daniella DeGrace, Procedure Flow

1. How do you encourage innovation in your organization?

Innovation is the backbone of every successful company. It's what sets a business apart from the competition, and helps it grow and prosper. There's many things I do to encourage innovation:

- Give employees a reason to care and personally connect with your business, and its purpose.
- Help every employee understand your customers business and what their success looks like.
- Build a creative, supportive atmosphere in which people feel free to express their ideas without the risk of criticism or ridicule.
- Encourage risk taking and experimentation and don't penalize people who try new ideas that fail.
- Empower your employees to make decisions and take action.
- Promote openness between individuals and teams with a healthy sense of competition.
- Make sure you have processes and events to capture ideas.
- Stress that people at all levels of the business share responsibility for innovation, so everybody feels involved in taking the business forward.
- Reward innovation and celebrate success. Look for imagination and creativity when recruiting new employees.
- Remember that innovative thinkers aren't always those with the most impressive list of qualifications.
- In everyday practice, think bigger than big in everything you do, over time it will come naturally.
- Inspire your employees with passion and drive towards innovation.

2. What are some of the biggest barriers to innovation?

You have to systematically build Innovation into your culture and I think that needs to be known and communicated as part of your vision, purpose and strategies. Too often, innovation is thought to be only the responsibility of the few or select roles in the company. It's critical to help all employees think beyond today. Short-term thinking, constantly shifting priorities and focus can impact time available for employees to experiment with innovation.

Resistance to change and fear of being ridiculed or penalized upon failure I find often is the biggest barrier. There is always a barrier to innovation when people are extremely risk averse. Many people are afraid of failure and taking that first "leap of faith", but this significantly hurts and often prevents innovation. No one likes failing, but often it is an essential part of the learning process and can help guide an organization in the right direction.

Micromanagement can also stifle innovation significantly.

3. Why do you think innovation is important for Saint John and the province?

I think Innovation is important because the future of our economy relies on it. Fast pace-changing markets and global competition are revolutionizing businesses, how we operate, how we sell and deliver on our purpose. Companies need to constantly innovate from their traditional mode of operations to respond to this more fluid and fast pace business environment. This climate brings tremendous business opportunities that have no geographic boundaries in which Saint John is well poised to take advantage of. If we don't innovate, this fast pace environment will leave us behind and have continued significant impact on our economies.

Innovation encourages entrepreneurship, brings with it jobs, prosperity, and economic growth in a very competitive world. This is key to growing our economy, as small businesses truly are the backbone of our province's economy. It is also key to keeping today's youth in our province and attract talent from outside the province. Younger generations are looking less and less for traditional jobs, and more for positions that will allow them to be creative and share their ideas in hopes of making an impact.

We've seen some very innovative successful startups in recent years, and their spirit of innovation is contagious. I also think it's important to highlight that you don't need to be from Silicon Valley to be innovative. Innovation can and does happen in smaller towns and cities like Saint John, and companies like Radian6, T4G, and Mariner are living proof of this. Living breathing success stories like these can inspire others and continue to spread the contagious spirit of innovation among the province, and across Atlantic Canada.

4. What are some simple things you've done to drive change?

There have been many small things I've done to drive change with impact. I have limited physical barriers in our workspace that would prevent teamwork and collaboration. If you walk into our office today, you will see an open space where the entire team can work together, communicate easily and share a creative energy – it's contagious.

We use collaboration tools to constantly share our ideas, showcase progress, and encourage input from all employees.

I've also made a habit of celebrating big and small successes together as a team. These celebrations double as team building events, and spread positive energy among the organization. This strengthens key relationships among team members, which shows when we have our brainstorming sessions. I also involve the whole team when we are making high level strategic decisions to ensure many different opinions and perspectives are heard.

5. What success have you had with innovation in your organization?

ProcedureFlow in itself is a very innovative software product, having been developed to solve real business problem and incubated amongst global businesses right here in our backyard.

We have seen significant success stories since we started this business, and believe that there is no other software like ours on the market today.

We have been able to reduce training time for our clients by 50-90%, and reduce their operations costs by 5%. Our continuous feature development, and integration of customer feedback has allowed us to continuously improve and better serve our valued customers.

One innovation we are particularly proud of is our social collaboration patent pending feature. It enables all employees to contribute into the betterment of their business by creating or/providing input into business processes. We help innovation within our customers own business.

Our software has completely revolutionized how the call and contact center industry trains and onboards their employees, and we are continuing to build on that success. Our team is doubling in size this year, and we are now a global company, with clients across North America, Europe, and Australia.

As our team grows I can ensure that team members are focused on continuing with our growth strategy, and leverage each of their unique skills and abilities. Although we are experiencing a rapid expansion this year, I know that the journey of growth is only just beginning.