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Paul McDonald • Dec. 18, 2014

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As the new year begins, many managers find themselves evaluating their departments and assessing ways to do things better, faster and cheaper. If fostering an innovative culture is a priority for your company, you're not alone. Many public accounting firms recognize that in order to grow and remain competitive, they must welcome innovation from within their own ranks.

However, creating an innovative culture is not always easy. A [Robert Half survey](#) of more than 1,400 chief financial officers (CFOs) found plenty of barriers to innovation in the workplace. The top reason was lack of new ideas (cited by 35 percent of CFOs), followed by too much bureaucracy (24 percent) and too much time required to put out fires (20 percent).

To overcome these hurdles and foster an innovative culture, follow these tips:

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overarching goals and inform all employees — starting from when they are recruited and onboarded — of its importance to the firm.

- 3. Help employees gain knowledge.** Public accounting firms that want their workers to contribute fresh ideas must be willing to invest in their training and professional development. For their part, employees should also make it a point to keep up to date with business trends, current events, technological advances and industry changes. Encourage staff to attend in-house training sessions, seminars, conferences, events, webinars and other opportunities that promote learning at every stage of their careers. A bonus: If you commit to continuing education, you'll find it much easier to attract and retain top talent.
- 4. Increase collaboration.** Interdepartmental cross-training is a must in today's public accounting firms. Encouraging employees of different backgrounds and skills to work together allows each to bring his or her unique viewpoint and priorities to the table. Together they can approach and solve problems that face the company. Team-building activities can also be an important step to creating an innovative culture. Employees who feel comfortable with coworkers and secure in their role on the team are more open to sharing ideas and receiving input from others.
- 5. Loosen up a little.** Allow some individual freedoms in the workplace. Studies have shown that [listening to music](#), for example, while working can improve efficiency and encourage innovation. As long as employees don't disturb each other, allowing them to groove to their own beat, or to have a standing desk or exercise ball chair, can ultimately benefit the entire company.
- 6. Respect down times.** Encourage your employees to get away from work, both occasionally during business hours and by using vacation days or flex time. People who are all work and no play are less likely to be productive and come up with great ideas. If you sense staff are overworked, emphasize the importance of using personal days. Also look into bringing in interim or full-time accounting

professionals as needed to take on some of the load. You can do your part by

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More and more public accounting firms are recognizing the value of creativity. Make innovation a part of your company culture, and you just may see lasting results in your staff's morale and on the bottom line.

Paul McDonald is senior executive director with [Robert Half](#), the world's first and largest specialized staffing firm. Over the course of his 30-year career with the company, he has spoken extensively on employment and management issues based on his work with thousands of companies and job seekers.

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