



Imagine

Working with a group of leaders recently, I observed they seemed to be stuck on how to move their business forward. Their conversation made it easy to imagine numerous possibilities that could help this organization create innovative solutions to yield new programs and revenue. I resisted an impulse to scream them out loud because my work is to create environments that allow leaders to “think together” to produce solutions on their own.

Afterward, I discussed this experience with my colleague, business development consultant Cynthia Aikman. I was having a hard time understanding how this team missed what seemed so obvious to me. Cynthia said this, “Gwen, they just **could not** imagine what you **could** imagine for their organization.” That statement was so powerful, reminding me of the important role imagination plays in the life of a leader. All successful leaders know that imagination is a powerful leadership resource.

It is often said when people are left to their own imagination challenging things happen. In some cases, this is true. However, I strongly believe effective leadership is the result of relationships and imagination. In fact, most businesses, organizations, and communities would not exist were it not for some leader having the ability to imagine they could exist in the first place. When spurred on by creative and thoughtful leaders, imagination becomes vision and Voila! a new thing is born.

So often leaders resist using imagination to spark innovation or problem solve because it seems such a “soft” way to approach “hard” business issues. However, imagination oriented exercises can create the very breakthrough needed to move an organization forward. I have watched leaders inspire teams to use imagination in a great activity called **A Place Where...** In this activity, teams are asked to let go of any existing thoughts or assumptions about the business to imagine how they can move forward to new places of growth and development by answering this question - In order to move our business forward in terms of products, programs, and services, what things must happen to become the kind of place we want to be?

It is amazing to see the results when teams are given permission to simply imagine a new future for their business. A tangible excitement occurs when teams have the opportunity to speak aloud the many good ideas they have without fear or attachment to the past. It doesn’t take long for a realization to hit that much of what is imagined can become reality with the right leadership and resources. **A Place Where....** and activities like it, help teams and leaders learn that what we imagine can become reality.

But imagining reality is just the first step. It is far too easy to sustain a mindset of doing things a certain way which inevitably leads to thinking that there can be no new way. When businesses lack imagination they also lack growth, market share, high potential employees, and innovation. It’s a vicious cycle that

I highly recommend that you incorporate imagination into your next business discussion. Try the **A Place Where....** activity. You might be pleasantly surprised to discover the answer you are looking for resides as a beautiful possibility in the minds of your employees.

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