

We are currently experiencing what Klaus Schwab, executive chairman of the World Economic Forum coined the “Fourth Industrial Revolution” enabled by extraordinary technological advances and widely believed to be commensurate with those of the first, second, and third industrial revolutions. The impacts of this revolution are expected to fundamentally change the way we live, work and relate to one another. And this accelerated speed of change is amplified by the economic impacts of the pandemic coupled with increasing job transforming automation also known, as the “double-disruption.”

The mantra for organizations to “innovate or perish” perhaps has never been more relevant than in these current times.

And yet, in a recent Deloitte survey, while 78% of future business leaders deemed innovation essential to business growth, a mere 26% of leaders believe that their current organization encourages practices that foster innovation. *Why does this enormous disconnect exist?*

My hypothesis is that this disconnect is a result of a lack of meaningful investment in leadership development to prepare leaders to cultivate a high-trust environment, where people can authentically be themselves and are comfortable taking risks. There are so many definitions and interpretations of the concept of innovation, but the common thread among most is that *“it is seeing opportunities others haven’t and creating solutions that others wish that they had thought of first.”* This is a phrase that I learned from my former boss, the founder, and Chair of the Board of Union Square Hospitality Group, and the author of the NYT bestseller *Setting the Table*, Danny Meyer. This definition was our effort to articulate to our people that innovation can occur on multiple levels and with many different benefits.

Innovation starts with our people challenging conventional notions of how things have been done before and questioning how things could become even better. And by “better,” that could mean being more productive, efficient, or value-oriented but it could also mean how lives or jobs could become even easier, happier, or more fulfilling.

Innovation is only enabled when someone is prepared to take a risk and inherent in taking a risk is that mistakes can and will be made. Therefore, the jump from “seeing the opportunity” to “creating a solution” (otherwise known as “intent to execution”) relies on an individual feeling safe to take a risk, possibly making a mistake—and that requires organizational trust.

About the Institute

The Dr. Nancy Grasmick Leadership Institute is an interdisciplinary research and action-based institute at Towson University. The Institute provides a continuum of leadership development opportunities for individuals and organizations that drives personal, professional, and organizational success. Programs focus on transformational outcomes, improving workplace culture and engagement, talent attraction and retention, and addresses today's most challenging issues.

So, if innovation is critical to our future success, how do we get our people comfortable with taking calculated risks? Here are some ideas:

CLARIFY YOUR "WHY" (AS PER SIMON SINEK'S GOLDEN CIRCLE)

The why is your organization's purpose for existing. The why should also clarify how the world benefits as a result of your organizations' s continued existence. Your why can inspire your people to develop more trusting relationships and innovate in alignment with your purpose.

TRAIN YOUR LEADERS TO LISTEN MORE THAN SPEAK

The paradigm of transactional management, a "tell and get" equation, when an employer "tells" an employee what to do and in return that employee "gets" money is over. People have so much more to offer than what they are usually asked to do, and when they are able to contribute more of themselves, people feel more valued and are more comfortable offering ideas and taking risks.

DEFINE THE WATERLINE FOR RISK-TAKING

The water line in a boat represents where cuts can be made to the boat, without sinking it. Leaders need to communicate the boundaries for how their teams can take calculated risks, in alignment with the organization's purpose and in ways that don't fundamentally put the organization at risk.

CELEBRATE CALCULATED MISTAKES

Leaders often celebrate successes, but they tend to spend less time celebrating mistakes- and the irony is that we typically learn more from our mistakes than our successes. By celebrating those that take calculated risks above the waterline and in service of our 'why,' we can help our people feel safer to take risks and innovate.

Leaders aren't born with the skills to cultivate an environment of trust and innovation, these skills need to be developed, nurtured, and supported. The Dr. Nancy Grasmick Leadership Institute exists for the purpose of uplifting our region by developing competent and ethically-driven leaders at all levels of an organization. We benefit from generous donors such as Whiting-Turner and St. John Properties who have underwritten several of our programs to ensure the accessibility of our offerings. We also provide customized leadership development solutions for individual organizations. We work across all sectors and are proud to support organizations such as Erickson Senior Living, Under Armour, Truist, The National Aquarium, BGE and Shephard Pratt, to name a few. If you are interested in developing your leaders to inspire more innovation, please reach out.



Meet the executive director

ERIN MORAN is the Institute's inaugural executive director, leading the overall operations and fiscal management of the Institute. Moran has spent most of her 24-year career dedicated to developing leaders who create inspiring work environments that enable people to be fulfilled while also achieving extraordinary business results. Moran believes 'we create a better society when people work in healthy environments.'