

PIXEL LEADERSHIP GROUP



MANAGER'S CHEAT SHEET

Use Coaching to
Increase Your Team's Innovation

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LEADERSHIP GROUP



Pixel Leadership Group, LLC is a leadership and organization development consulting firm composed of psychologists, business leaders, and social scientists who enjoy applying their collective expertise to help maximize leaders' potential, create inspired and innovative teams, and build people-centric organizational cultures. We use our deep understanding of behavioral and assessment science to develop customized solutions to help our clients achieve their unique goals.

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UNLOCK BIG IDEAS WITHOUT BURNING EVERYONE OUT

Let's be real: most workplaces don't kill creativity with malice - they kill it with meetings, policies, and *"That's how we've always done it"* energy.

Creativity isn't some mystical superpower reserved for artists and ad execs. It's the engine behind innovation, problem-solving, and progress in every single organization. And spoiler alert: your team already has creative potential. What they need is permission, space, and support to let it rip.

That's where coaching comes in.

This Manager Cheat Sheet isn't about turning you into a full-time coach or making your team sit in a circle singing kumbaya. It's about using practical, brain-friendly coaching moves to unlock new thinking, challenge assumptions, and help people create better solutions - not just faster ones.

INSIDE, YOU'LL FIND:

- The Innovation Culture Audit (Mini Assessment)
- 5 power-packed coaching questions designed to spark innovation
- Quick how-to tips so you can actually use them in real conversations
- A short list of "What NOT to say if you want creative thinking to survive past lunch"

Whether you're a manager, HR professional, or just the person on the team who's sick of playing it safe, this cheat sheet will give you tools to stir up the kind of energy that makes people say, "Oh wait... what if we actually could do it differently?"

Let's stop trying to micromanage our way to innovation. Let's coach our way to better thinking.

Time to stir up some genius.

THE INNOVATION CULTURE AUDIT (MINI ASSESSMENT)

Is your team set up for creativity - or are you unintentionally crushing it? This 10-question audit helps you assess whether your current culture supports or stifles innovation. Rate each statement honestly, then total your score to get customized coaching prompts that help you strengthen your team's creative edge.

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|---|-------------------|----------|----------------------------|-------|----------------|
| | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neither Agree Nor Disagree | Agree | Strongly Agree |
| Item | | | | | Rating |
| My team feels psychologically safe to speak up with bold or unconventional ideas. | | | | | |
| We make time for brainstorming and idea generation-not just execution. | | | | | |
| Mistakes and failed experiments are treated as learning opportunities, not career-ending moves. | | | | | |
| We have leaders who ask great questions instead of jumping in with answers. | | | | | |
| Diverse perspectives are actively invited and considered in problem-solving. | | | | | |
| We celebrate effort, learning, and experimentation-not just wins. | | | | | |
| Our team has permission to challenge the status quo. | | | | | |
| We have quick ways to test new ideas or prototypes (e.g., pilots, experiments). | | | | | |
| Team members feel ownership and autonomy in their work. | | | | | |
| Cross-functional collaboration is common and encouraged. | | | | | |
| TOTAL SCORE: | | | | | |
| Add all the items to get your total score. | | | | | |

SCORING & COACHING PROMPTS

Total your score, then see where you land:

● 40–50: You've built a solid innovation culture. Keep it going!

Now it's about fine-tuning and scaling what works. Coaching prompt: How can you champion innovation across other teams or the org as a whole?

● 25–39: There's creative potential - but it's not fully unlocked.

Some conditions are right, but inconsistency or unspoken barriers may be holding people back. Coaching prompt: Where in the workflow is creativity getting shut down? What could you do differently?

● 10–24: Creativity is on life support.

You might be stuck in execution mode, fear-based culture, or too much top-down direction. Coaching prompt: What small change would help your team feel safe to challenge or experiment?

5 POWERFUL COACHING QUESTIONS TO SPARK INNOVATION

When to Use Them, How to Use Them, and Why They Work

Let's face it: creativity doesn't show up on command. It's not like your team's going to magically birth the next breakthrough idea just because you dropped "We need to be more innovative" in the Monday meeting.

But here's the good news: great coaching questions can help *unlock* the messy, uncertain, brilliant parts of people's brains where innovation actually lives. When you coach instead of command, you create space for new thinking to emerge—without forcing it or fake-smiling through another forced "ideation session."

These five questions are designed to be deceptively simple. They're rooted in neuroscience and behavioral psychology, but they don't sound like a TED Talk. You can drop them into everyday conversations—1:1s, team meetings, project planning, post-mortems, even Slack threads.

WHEN TO USE THESE QUESTIONS

Use these questions when you want to:

- Spark fresh ideas when your team is stuck in Same-Old Thinking™
- Reframe problems instead of rehashing them
- Make experimentation less terrifying
- Encourage bold thinking without sounding like a motivational poster
- Reflect after something flopped (without triggering existential dread)

HOW TO USE THESE QUESTIONS

Don't ask all five in one sitting like a checklist robot. Pick the one that feels most relevant to the moment. Let it breathe. These questions are catalysts, not quizzes.

- **Pick 1 question** to drop into your next team or individual conversation. Don't overexplain—just ask and shut up. Let the awkward silence do its magic.
- **Follow up** with curiosity. ("Say more about that." "What would that look like?" "Why do you think that is?")
- **Use your tone** to invite—not interrogate. Coaching isn't an interrogation, it's an invitation to think differently.
- **Keep a straight face.** When someone says something out-there, don't smirk. Bold ideas die under judgment.
- **Rinse and repeat.** The more your team gets used to these questions, the more naturally they'll start to think this way.

1. WHAT'S A TOTALLY DIFFERENT WAY WE *COULD* LOOK AT THIS?

Use this to reframe problems. Ask your team to imagine the opposite of the current approach-or solve it like a company in a completely different industry (e.g., how would Netflix tackle this?).

2. WHAT'S THE RISK IF WE DON'T TRY SOMETHING NEW HERE?

Flip the fear. Use this when teams get stuck in 'safe mode.' It helps people realize that staying the same can be riskier than trying.

3. IF FAILURE WASN'T AN OPTION, WHAT WOULD WE TRY?

Create a 'safe fail' zone. Pose this during early ideation to stretch possibilities. Bonus: Ask, 'What's the smallest experiment we could run?'

4. WHAT'S BLOCKING US - AND WHAT CAN WE LET GO OF?

This helps identify real vs. perceived limits. Great for coaching around mindsets, habits, and resource assumptions.

5. WHO ELSE MIGHT HAVE A COMPLETELY DIFFERENT TAKE ON THIS?

Encourages perspective-taking and cross-functional thinking. Try inviting outsiders into the brainstorming process or roleplay as them.

🚫 THINGS NOT TO SAY IF YOU WANT INNOVATION

These common phrases kill creativity faster than a pointless status meeting. Try swapping them with curiosity; instead, ask: "What's interesting about this idea?" or "What would it take to make this possible?"

- "We've already tried that."
- "That's not how we do things here."
- "Let's be realistic."
- "We don't have time for that."
- "What will leadership think?"

THE “WHAT IF WE...” EXERCISE

Break your team out of linear, risk-averse thinking by encouraging playful, low-stakes ideation.

HOW IT WORKS

1. Grab a real challenge your team is facing.
2. Ask your team to generate 10 outrageous, unrealistic, or “What if we...” ideas as fast as possible.
Examples:
 - “What if we solved this with zero budget?”
 - “What if we had to launch it tomorrow?”
 - “What if Beyoncé was our project manager?”
 - “What if we banned email for a week?”
3. After the laughter, **mine the madness**. Ask:
 - “*What could we actually use from this?*”
 - “*Which idea has a small but interesting kernel we could test?*”

WHY IT WORKS

This exercise creates **psychological safety** and **pattern disruption** - two essential ingredients for innovation. It turns off the inner critic and invites curiosity, which helps unlock more flexible, generative thinking. (It also gets people to stop saying “we’ve already tried that.”)

WHEN TO USE IT

- Kicking off a new project
- Debriefing after something failed
- When your team is stuck in analysis paralysis
- As a warm-up in a team meeting (5-10 min)

Want to be a better manager? Want a high-performing team? Want thriving employees?
We can help!

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