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OPINION

In The Flow

Many think of creativity as a light bulb moment. In fact, creativity — and driving change — is a disciplined process.

Matthew Spriegel, CEO and Founder of Atiom

Imagine watching a Grand Slam tennis match between Roger Federer and Rafael Nadal, two of the world's greatest tennis players. After a shot from far off the court, Nadal fumbles, almost missing his step and losing his balance. Seconds later, he miraculously recovers and returns a powerful forehand, with the perfect drop shot that barely trickles over the net.

After a seemingly unlucky point, Federer recomposes himself and hits a flawless serve. He wins the game.

What we are watching is not only a physical battle, but a battle of the minds. In fact, tennis is known to require more mental toughness than physical ability at amateur and professional levels. What you have also just imagined are two tennis players in their top flow states — a term coined in 1975 by psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi as an "optimal state of consciousness where we feel and perform our best." This is often referred to as being "in the zone," where we feel most productive and creative.

Many think of creativity as a light bulb moment, like a bolt of lightning that strikes out of the blue. In fact, creative development is a product of routine, rhythm, and repetition. Often neglected is the journey to get to the state that nurtures innovation and change. The process is not linear, and it cannot be forced.

Having lived in China for over a decade, my experiences have taught me that creativity comes from the process of learning, ups and downs, reflection and



Below are some practices our team has put into action to navigate the rapidly changing work environment:

1. Build up a communication cadence.

Set up routine, informal check-ins with teammates to encourage genuine, open communication. Check-ins are essential time blocks to reflect on team progress and make plans for improvement. Intentionally schedule in daily huddles, weekly meets, and monthly catch-ups to ensure everyone is on the same footing. Remember to mark it down: if it's not in your calendar, it doesn't count.

2. Frequency over volume. Hold shorter, frequent check-ins over long, dwindled-out meetings. Whether meeting online or offline, keeping meetings succinct and under 30 minutes allows a better focus on what's at hand. Separate decision-making and brainstorming meetings: blocking time dedicated for a creativity huddle ensures that innovative ideas don't get lost in task-oriented discussions.

3. Leverage tools for accountability and goal setting.

In times of uncertainty and instability, it's easy to be demotivated and lose sight of team goals. Having external tools to measure progress helps clear mental space to make time for what matters. As our personal and work life become more digitized, seek out technology that can automate routine tasks to allow for more capacity. When progress is recorded on a shared workspace, employees can collaborate more efficiently.

4. Implement rewards and recognition.

The lack of recognition is a leading reason for the Great Resignation — a movement that sees over 19 million workers in the US (and counting) voluntarily leaving their jobs since April 2021. Both a form of extrinsic and intrinsic motivation, rewards, and recognition not only contribute to a positive work environment, but also encourages innovative thinking. Receiving praise triggers the release of dopamine in our brain. This feel-good association fuels the desire to voice out and repeat behaviors for the next recognition.

5. Build a culture of belonging. Without trust, there is no team. People who feel that they belong to an organization that aligns with their values do not only perform better, they are also more willing to engage. Psychological safety — a sense of security that allows one to take risks and express vulnerability — is consistently reported as a common denominator to high-performing teams, and in the age of disruptions, it has become imperative to make concerted efforts to connect with our colleagues. Encourage an open door policy, physically or virtually, whenever possible. The safer someone feels, the more likely they are to admit mistakes, accept other ideas, and speak their minds.

Nadal once said, "However great your dedication, you never win anything on your own." Sticking to a set of guiding principles can support the workplace for breakthroughs. Making it work for your company, however, relies on a collective effort to build a culture that nurtures creative processes and change. ■

Matt Spriegel is the founder and CEO of Atiom, a mobile-first workplace solution that empowers businesses to learn and grow every day. Atiom works with multinational companies like Compass Group, Hays, and Mandarin Oriental to deliver frontline employee communication and engagement through bite-size, gamified training. Prior to Atiom, Matt was the VP of Operations (APAC) for STEM Marketing, a healthcare consulting company. He also worked in business intelligence at Boehringer Ingelheim where he discovered the need to address gaps in modern workplace training. This led him to develop Atiom. Matt has been living and working in Asia for over 10 years and is fluent in Mandarin, both written and spoken. He is a competitive tennis player and a triathlete, and also loves to travel.

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the company.