

Breaking Rules to Unlock Innovation

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Unpacking Rule-Breaking

1 | **Symptom**

2 | **Problem**

3 | **Solution**

4 | **Takeaway**



#1

Where are you finding innovators who
you need to change the status quo?



Symptom #1: Same-old, same-old “new” talent

Do you have the following problem?

- ❓ People who apply are not who you want
- ❓ People who you want do not apply
- ❓ People that you do want and who do apply, leave

When applications for your open innovation roles finally arrive



Problem #1: Stale talent pipelines

What might be causing this?

- 1 Complicated legacy application process
- 2 A forced list of “approved” talent vendors
- 3 Hiring manager is not connected in the industry
- 4 Cutting edge talent never heard of your company

“Our innovation talent pipeline is on track”

The track:



Solution #1: Uncommon talent in uncommon places

Course Communities
On Slack



Passionate, lifelong learners are found in learning communities

Discord Indie Game
Dev Communities



Bleeding edge innovators are gamers and techies and aren't on LinkedIn

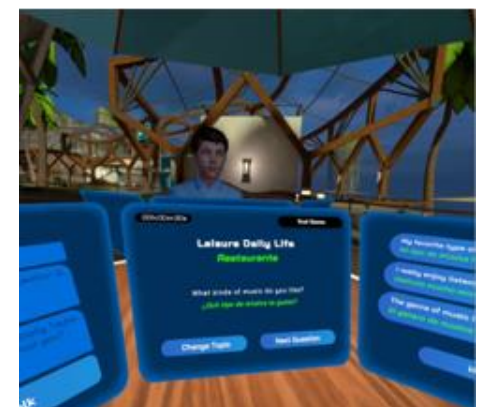
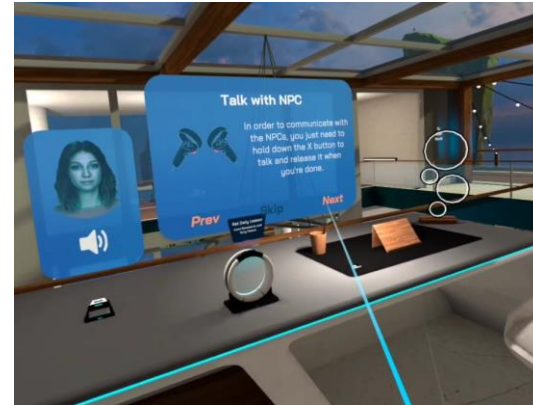
Partnering w.
Bootcamps early



Sponsoring hackathons allows you to spot and meet high potentials

Result #1: MVPs Pearson never thought possible

- ✔ Record of <2 weeks per new team member
- ✔ Full-stack teams of game developers, prototypers, and creative technologists
- ✔ Multiple MVPs built less than 6 months after team was created:
 - VR “Metaverse” for language learning
 - AI Conversation Partner
 - AI learning tools
 - New Alexa skill
 - Proof of concept for ELL’s new vision



Takeaway #1:

The talent you need the most

Can only be found in places

You're least likely to look.

#2

Are you sure the right people
Are upskilling the right people?

Symptom #2: Courses, courses, courses

Have you ever experienced the following?

- ! Compliance courses
- ! Leadership courses
- ! Soft skills courses
- ! Metaverse, Innovation & AI courses
- ! Completion is ok. Satisfaction is ok. Quiz scores are ok.

Aaaaand....the org somehow stays exactly the same as it was



Problem #2: Fake Teachers. Fake Learners.

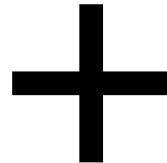
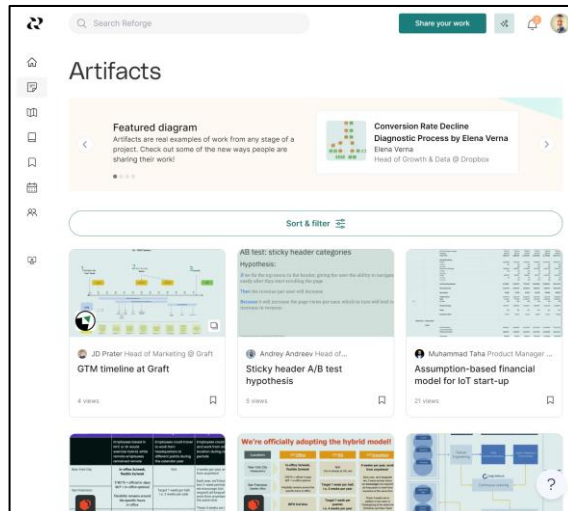
- 1 Domain experts outsource upskilling to L&D who aren't
- 2 Training programs delivered by generic "talking heads"
- 3 Selected employees are the "usual suspects" - favorites
- 4 Employees go through motions while learning



Solution #2: Let the upskilled drive the upskilling

1. Bottom-up learning request driven by most passionate experts. Not top-down compliance.
2. Training led by practicing VPs and CPOs from best orgs. No talking heads or “professors”.
3. Bi-weekly meetups became the platform for our PMs to become “experts in residence”.

Reforge Membership



Internal Meetups with PMs teaching each other



Result #2: L&D employees actually love

- ✔ The most loved and well attended training initiative in the division
- ✔ Longest lasting L&D community in the division
- ✔ Organically grew from 50 to 130+ PMs by invites from member invites only
- ✔ Regular weekly requests asking to join our community
- ✔ One PM recently gave webinar on Reforge as a Growth Expert
- ✔ Other PM groups from the org asked to join ours

Takeaway #2:

Don't outsource upskilling for top-down L&D.

**Tap into your passionate internal "influencers"
To drive the culture of upskilling bottom up.**

#3

Are your corporate comms energizing or tranquilizing your workforce?

A woman with long dark hair, wearing a blue and white striped long-sleeved shirt and black pants, is sitting on a blue armchair. She is holding an open book and looking down at it. To her left, a silver laptop is open on the sofa, and a stack of three books is next to it. The background is a plain, light-colored wall. The overall lighting is soft and focused on the woman.

Symptom #3: “Corporatese” as a Second Language

How bad are your comms?

- 1 So vanilla that they’re not actually saying anything at all
- 2 Or feel like a student essay that was generated by ChatGPT

Dear Team,

As we navigate the evolving landscape of our industry, it is imperative that we leverage our core competencies to foster a culture of excellence and drive unprecedented value creation. In alignment with our strategic vision, we must harness our collective capabilities to optimize synergies and streamline processes for enhanced operational efficiency.

Our commitment to innovation and stakeholder engagement remains steadfast, as we endeavor to exceed expectations and deliver holistic solutions. By embracing a proactive approach and maintaining an agile mindset, we are well-positioned to capitalize on emerging opportunities and mitigate potential challenges.

To further our goals, we must continue to enhance our cross-functional collaboration and promote a culture of knowledge sharing. By doing so, we can unlock new potential and drive transformative growth across all business units. It is essential that we remain focused on our mission and strive for excellence in every endeavor.

We are dedicated to creating an inclusive environment where every team member feels valued and empowered to contribute their unique perspectives. Together, we can build a resilient organization that not only adapts to change but also sets new benchmarks for success. Your active participation and commitment are key to our collective achievements.

Moving forward, it is crucial that we stay aligned with our organizational objectives and uphold our dedication to continuous improvement. Let us all continue to collaborate effectively, communicate transparently, and demonstrate unwavering commitment to our shared goals.

Thank you for your ongoing dedication and contributions.

Best regards,
[Your Name]
Chief Synergy Officer

Generated w. ChatGPT for comedic purposes.

Problem #3: No action. No reaction.

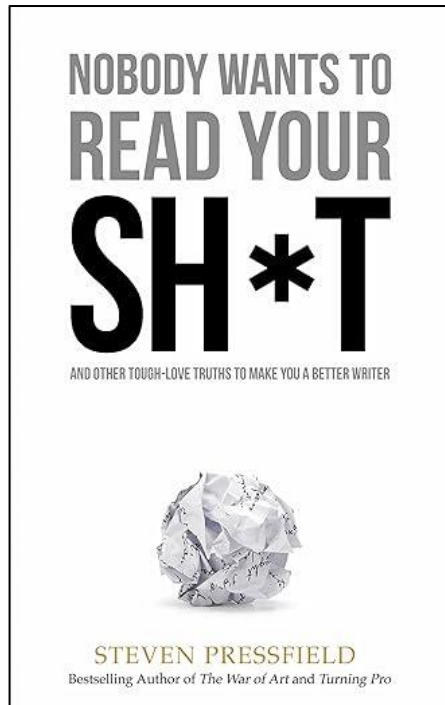
- 1 When you speak to everyone, you speak to no one
- 2 "Corporate" words make concrete ideas very abstract
- 3 "Corporate" nouns make actions sound weak
- 4 There is no inciting call to action. Mostly preaching.
- 5 Everyone becomes sedated

Innovation updates from senior leadership to inspire talent

Talent:



Solution #3: Weekly Innovation Newsletter



- Has a unique voice
- There is an arc to each edition
- There is always an “enemy”
- Audience is the hero
- Every edition in an invitation to accept the hero’s journey
- It’s funny as hell
- Very visual

Result #3: Most loved newsletter

"As an AI enthusiast, I can't wait for your newsletter! It really is my weekly dose of motivation. Thaaank you team for that!"

"The content is interesting, the tone is personal and humane and I loved reading it. It also shows the product culture and thinking which is good to see."

"Just wanted to say WOW. This newsletter is an AMAZING weekly experience and unlike anything I've seen in any other business unit I've worked in. I didn't think this kind of resource existed at Pearson, but now it does, in ELL."

"I also love the casual, integrated way of writing. The text does not sound like an excerpt from a textbook, but like a very intriguing chat with a very informed and intelligent person."

"Really insightful and engaging way of presenting key ideas and developments that - if i'm honest - i'm not seeing anywhere else across the business."

"Read it as soon as it hits my inbox. Brilliantly written, always makes me smile with the wry jokes and tone of voice. Perfectly pitched. Keep it coming!"

Takeaway #3:

Bland, vanilla language is killing the innovation spirit.

Employees want to feel a spark to do something.

Speak your workforce into innovators.

Let's Bring It Home

- 1 Corporate Innovation requires new ways of finding, upskilling and engaging talent.
- 2 The future of work belongs to those who dare to disobey, lead, and inspire.

	DON'T DO THIS	DO THIS INSTEAD
Finding Talent	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Use outdated channels, vendors and application forms	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Look in unconventional places to find remarkable people
Upskilling Talent	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Outsource upskilling to anyone who isn't a cutting-edge practitioner.• Add more top-down generic upskilling.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Give the platform to your most driven employees to drive upskilling.• Try bottom-up upskilling based on communities of practice
Engaging Talent	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Treat employees like robots that consume text for a living	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Add a spark of personality to motivate and inspire employees to do cool stuff



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