Four Skills to Emphasize When Teaching Innovation

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Innovation is more important than ever, not just for startups and entrepreneurs, but also within established organizations, where employees must consistently learn how to use new tools and make new connections in order to advance products and processes. Set against this context, entrepreneurship education and the ability to think like an innovator are crucial. When teaching innovation to students, four key competencies are critical to setting tomorrow's workforce up for success:

Tip 1: Omniscience

Tomorrow's talent cannot know it all, but they must aspire to know as much about their industry as possible. Students who learn how to understand each step of the value chain and are equipped with a deep understanding of what drives customers—along with managing complex, data-based systems—will improve product performance, reduce costs, and attract and retain business in their post-college careers.

Tip 2: An Entrepreneurial Mindset

Pushing boundaries on products and processes requires students to think and act like digital intrapreneurs once they join the workforce. Teaching innovation with a focus on an entrepreneurial mindset can lay this important groundwork now, preparing students to disrupt organizational cultures in order to move beyond the status quo, or develop new solutions in house if they are not available for purchase. An entrepreneurial mindset requires risk tolerance and the ability to quickly pivot when things don't go as planned.

Tip 3: Bottom-Line Focus

Fostering students' capability to think about business models while simultaneously designing and implementing new solutions and systems is key. For example, while a company's data experts must be on the front lines of managing and processing data, they also must think about how this data can be meaningful to the business overall and how it can be monetized. Students who want to be at the forefront of innovation need to think about the business implications across systems.

Tip 4: Ethical Intelligence

Humans oversee machines that are increasingly capable of making complex design decisions, which requires empathy and anticipation of unintended consequences. When teaching innovation, faculty must encourage students to grapple with the ethical questions introduced by new opportunities and ventures as part of the creation process.

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