

For the sake of change?

I'm starting to feel a bit uncomfortable that as we duly fixate our energies on getting back on the corporate growth track, we might be losing sight of the corporate history and knowledge slipping out the back door. I'm talking about the thousands of employees retiring or in the process of retiring – and the money that will be potentially wasted on re-inventing ideas and initiatives that have already been tried and tested for better or worse.

Don't get me wrong, I'm all about innovation. I'm also about getting value for our dollars and staff time. And as we slowly – hopefully - begin the economic upturn, I think we all want to use those dollars wisely.

Which reminds me of a story. Not long ago I met a farm representative giving out apple samples. Since I grew up working on my grandfather's apple orchard, I pride myself on being able to name pretty much any apple you can throw at me. So I confidently proclaimed that I could name the apple she was divvying up. She informed me that this was a newly created apple and that I wouldn't know it. I took a bite anyway. What luck! It was one of my childhood favourites called a cox-orange. She raised an eyebrow, then replied that no, this was a new creation. Hmm. She scrunched her forehead and said, "Well, I guess it is similar to a cox-orange but it's not - it's new." More silence. I shrugged my shoulders, grabbed another slice of my childhood favourite and wished her a pleasant day.

I can't help but think that this just might be a case of poor succession planning. If the proper knowledge was passed on or sought out, then perhaps this innovative farmer could have invested his time and money into a product that provided his customers with something of even greater value – a product they didn't already have.

There is sometimes a knee-jerk reaction to implement wide-spread change when the issue is more about connecting to your employees and customers to figure out what they really want, what they value and what motivates them. How many employees have sat in their office watching another change management initiative sweep by their door, only to shrug their shoulders, put

up their feet and cross their arms? They've seen it before.


If you haven't already started, it's time to engage your seasoned employees in meaningful dialogue about their corporate experiences and lessons learned. What were some of the biggest challenges they faced over their career? How did they handle it? What went wrong? What went right? Don't be surprised if the conversation is slow to start. This often happens in the professional development tele-classes I run with administrative assistants. It's not that the participants don't have an opinion – it's that they rarely get asked for it. Give the conversation time and practice your listening and reframing skills. The intention is to capture any hidden gems that will save you time and resources as you continue building on the success of your organization.

What if you're a sole proprietorship or a young company? Seek out mentors who have been in your line of business and have succeeded. Establish an advisory committee to help you with challenging issues. Figure out a way to engage those who have the knowledge and capacity that only experience brings. Add that to your own knowledge and expertise and you've got a recipe for success. - and that's an apple worth biting into.



Karen Kelloway

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- How can you cultivate mentor relationships inside and outside of your organization?
- What's the story you want to be able to tell when you approach retirement?
- What's the story you're telling now?
- What are your initial thoughts on creating a succession management plan? 

Questions for Reflection

- What does succession management mean to you?
- What challenges or opportunities are you facing that would benefit from some 'big picture' discussions?
- How can you integrate staff's historical perspective into your strategic planning efforts?

Based in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Karen Kelloway is a certified executive coach trained through Royal Roads University. Karen works with motivated, dedicated professionals to take their performance at work to breakthrough levels. Through her business columns, tele-classes, individual and group coaching, Karen provides the tools and know-how to get the results you desire. Visit kellowaycoaching.com, email Karen@kellowaycoaching.com or call 902-444-3985. The views expressed in this column are those of the author and not necessarily those of *Atlantic Business Magazine*.