

**THE NEW
TALENT
PLAYBOOK**
Podcast

Action Kit

**Stop Sabotaging
Innovation in Your
Own Business**

Featuring JL Heather

Episode 3 - Season 5

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You just listened to JL Heather reveal the truth about innovation: It's not a department, a job title, or a quarterly initiative; it's a culture that lives in every person on your team. For 20 years, JL has helped small and mid-size businesses solve problems faster and smarter by building systems where innovation thrives organically. This Action Kit will help you transform innovation from a buzzword into a daily practice that drives growth, solves real problems, and keeps you 10 steps ahead of the competition.

1. Innovation Lives in Culture, Not a Department

JL's most important insight: **innovation can't be outsourced** to a "tiger team" or innovation lab. It's embedded in your culture. What your people do, how they feel on Sunday night about Monday morning, that's your culture. And if you haven't created the right environment with safety, empowerment, and accountability, people won't innovate because they won't feel safe taking risks.

Your Innovation Culture Assessment:

Rate your organization on these innovation culture indicators (1 = Rarely true, 5 = Consistently true):

Culture Indicator	Score (1-5)
People feel safe challenging the status quo without fear of retribution.	
Team members are empowered to enact changes, not just suggest them.	
Innovation happens across all departments, not just product development.	
Failure is treated as learning, not something to be punished.	
People actively solve problems instead of just completing tasks.	

Total Score (out of 25): _____

If your score is below 15, **your first priority is building psychological safety and empowerment.**

2. Lead with Questions, Not Answers

JL identifies the most common way leaders sabotage innovation: being the source of all the answers. If someone comes to you with a problem and you immediately tell them what to do, you've just shut down their critical thinking and ownership. You hired smart people, now you need to empower them and get out of the way. Use JL's "I like, I wish, I wonder" framework for feedback instead of dictating solutions..

The Answer Addict Self-Audit:

Think about the last three times someone brought you a problem. What was your instinct?

Problem Brought to You	Your Response	Answer or Question?

If you give more answers than questions, you're creating dependency, not innovation.

3. Practice "I Like, I Wish, I Wonder" Feedback:

The next time someone presents an idea or prototype, structure your feedback this way:

- I like... (What's working? What excites you about this?)
- I wish... (What concerns do you have, framed constructively?)
- I wonder... (What questions could lead them to a better solution?)

This keeps you from being "the decider" and transforms you into a coach.

Practice on a recent idea someone brought you:

I like:

I wish:

I wonder:

4. Design Your Innovation Operating System

JL explains that most teams are structured to be assigned work: "Go do this task." That creates people who show up to complete assignments and avoid trouble. Instead, give teams problems, not tasks. When you hand someone a problem, they engage their brain, come up with solutions, and own the outcome.

From Tasks to Problems:

Review the work you've assigned this week. Reframe at least one task as a problem statement using the "How Might We" format.

Current Task Assignment	Reframed as a Problem (How Might We...?)
<i>Example: Update the onboarding document.</i>	<i>How might we help new hires feel confident and productive in their first week?</i>

Use Time Constraints to Unlock Creativity:

JL's favorite tool is "Crazy Eights", a rapid ideation exercise that forces your brain outside its comfort zone.

Try this with your team:

1. Take a sheet of paper and fold it to create 8 boxes.
2. Set a timer for 8 minutes.
3. Sketch one different solution in each box, one solution per minute.

5. Implement Transformational Change (Like AI-First)

The Transformation Roadmap:

Use this framework for any major initiative (AI adoption, new systems, return-to-office, etc.):

- **Step 1: Define What This Means to YOUR Organization:** "AI-First" or "Agile" can mean a thousand things. What does it mean for you?

Our definition: _____

- **Step 2: Engage Your Team in the Solution:** Don't mandate. Co-create. Ask your team:
 - How could [AI/this tool/this change] most effectively move us forward?
 - What concerns do you have?
 - What support would help you adopt this successfully?

Which team members will you engage first, and when?

- **Step 3: Principle → System → Tool (Not the Other Way Around):** JL's mantra: Don't let tools drive your principles. Define your principles first, design the system that supports them, then choose tools that fit.
 - What are your core principles? (e.g., customer-centricity, speed, collaboration)
 - What system supports those principles? (e.g., how we make decisions, how we communicate)
 - What tools fit that system? (e.g., Jira, ChatGPT, Slack)

Are you letting a tool (Jira, Slack, ChatGPT) drive your organization's behavior? If yes, reverse it.

"You have to hire really smart people. You have to empower them and you have to get out of the way."

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