

How do you engage staff and clients to find new business ideas?



CAPITAL IDEAS

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Graham Sherman, co-founder of Tool Shed Brewing Company. *CHRIS MURPHY, BLACKWATER CREATIVE / SUPPLIED*

Capital Ideas members were asked how they engage staff and clients to find new ideas. Here's what members of our


community of Calgary business owners helping business owners had to say:

“We understand that our staff are only with us for a small portion of their journey. Asking them where they want to go in their career and how we can help them get there empowers them and helps them realize they’re way more valuable as members in our combined journey than just clock-punching employees. That authentic commitment to furthering our employees’ (careers) engages them to share amazing thoughts and ideas within our business to help us all progress.”

— *Graham Sherman, co-founder of [Tool Shed Brewing Company](http://toolshed.beer) (<http://toolshed.beer>)*

“We believe the best solutions come from a large group of people with a variety of perspectives. We are constantly sharing our vision and mission statements with those (who are) new and established in Calgary’s entrepreneurial scene. We’re all stakeholders in trying to diversify and enhance our economy, and we want to stand on the shoulders of the giants by learning from their experience, mistakes and wisdom as we try to blaze new trails and strengthen our city.”

— *Travis Parker Martin, co-founder of [Launch Calgary](http://launchcalgary.ca) (<http://launchcalgary.ca>)*

 ***“Ask your clients three key questions: what did my predecessor do that I should keep doing? What do my competitors do that I should start doing? What does nobody do that everybody should be doing?”***

— *Derek Bullen, President, [S.i. Systems](http://sisystems.com) (<http://sisystems.com>)*

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“We regularly hold ‘jam sessions’ where we all come together as a collective think-tank. Jamming is the art of improvisational strategic thinking. A cross between brainstorming and strategic planning, jamming encourages a free flow of ideas by challenging one another’s imagination, building upon each other’s ideas to produce an entirely new set of strategies to help deliver on vision, much the same way jazz musicians might build on each other’s riffs.”

— *Kris Hans, strategist at [Market Grade](http://marketgrade.com) (<http://marketgrade.com>)*

“First, be open to new ideas. If clients don’t think you want them, they won’t offer their ideas. Second, if a client is bigger than you are, their ideas can have broad applications to others and can also raise your best practices to a new level. Third, give your clients credit for their suggestions, so everybody realizes they are part of the process. Fourth, I’ve found that new hires have the best ideas before they are immersed in the corporate culture. I never hire anyone who is a ‘yes man.’ They add no value to the improvement process.”

— *Mark Ruthenberg, general manager and editor-in-chief [Found Locally](http://foundlocally.com) (<http://foundlocally.com>)*



Roger Jewett, founder and CEO of Jump On Flyaways. *SUPPLIED*

“Beer, lots of beer. Our motto is we’re a six pack away from a great idea! We do our best to break away from the daily grind and find a few hours every month to blue sky

and dream big. A couple of beers really gets the creative ideas flowing. The key is to weed out the bad ones! That's how our team developed Jump On's original business model and that's how we came up with our next big innovation we're calling Jump Seat, which will give our customers access to even more low cost flights."

— Roger Jewett, founder and CEO of Jump On Flyaways (<http://gojumpon.com>)

“Communication! Staff need to feel safe to speak up. Strong leaders notice the quiet ones and help everyone feel safe and comfortable to express their ideas. Staff who feel they are making a difference have increased engagement, which increases productivity, which increases profits! Ask staff to present five ideas. This should get a good cross-section. Take timely action to implement the top ideas. Recognize the employee(s) for their great idea, then measure and report the new, improved changes. For clients, I like to ask questions about ‘stop, start, keep.’ For stop, it could be too much paperwork. Start: it could be representative meetings every 30 days. Keep: a great benchmark to collect what is ‘not broken.’ ”

— Patty Miller, founder and senior HR consultant, MillerNet HR Solutions (<http://millernet.ca>)

“Innovation is a great word that has been bogged down by the weight of failed initiatives to innovate something. The secret is as old as time. People need to be connected to something bigger than themselves and to be empowered to make changes within parameters agreed to with leadership. Leaders need to be ever vigilant that employees and customers are continually reminded of how they and their work contributes to achieving your mission.”

— Steve Armstrong, coach and consultant, stevenarmstrong.ca (<http://stevenarmstrong.ca>)



Marjorie Munroe, co-director at Workplace Fairness West.

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“It starts with listening. People who feel heard and are acknowledged for their own concerns are prepared and willing to understand the bigger problem. When people understand the problem and trust their needs will be met, they face challenges with the (sort of) open-mindedness and creativity that leads to innovation.”

— Marjorie Munroe, co-director at Workplace Fairness West (<http://workplacefairnesswest.ca>)

“Lucky for us we have a built in mechanism for improvement and new ideas: training evaluations. Every training session is evaluated and we ask what people thought was the best and worst part of their training — they almost always have something to say with that leading question. We also ask for improvement

suggestions. This gives us up to 20 sources of innovation from each program we teach. Our staff is also always looking for ways to stand out and do better, because they are also being personally evaluated for each program. This is one of the best ways we have to incite feedback, and because we communicate this feedback with our clients, we are very serious about taking their advice & improving.”

— Merri Lemmex, managing partner at Lemmex Williams Training (<http://lemmexwilliams.com>)

“Work with the staff — be friendly, boost them up by appreciating their work, refresh them with a monetary bonus or award. Conduct team or staff meetings regularly to discuss and come up with innovative ideas. Encourage staff and be the backbone to execute the ideas successfully.”

— Saliha Sheriff Salem Mahaboob Sheriff, founder of InnoApps (<http://innoapps.ca>)

“Group brainstorming, solo storming and conducting client market research studies (have all) brought new business. Our team’s sense of creativity and clients’ willingness to share ideas using our study approach contributed. With layoffs, we wanted to find out if clients had an employee handbook of policies and procedures in place to protect them against employees filing complaints to Alberta Labour. Our team created questions to ask the clients. I met with them and they shared whether or not they had a handbook and tips they could pass onto small businesses. I prepared a report and shared it with the participants. Clients who didn’t have a handbook turned to us to help write one.”

— Laura Pierce, president at LP Human Resources (<http://lphumanresources.com>)

*These answers are in response to a question posed by **Wellington Holbrook**, executive vice-president of ATB Business. Here’s his take:*

“The easy answer is to just ask and there are various ways you can do that. In my experience, ideas aren’t the hardest part of the equation. It’s the method or approach to actually turning the idea into a reality that is most challenging, and where staff and clients can really make magic happen. When asking for ideas, make sure you ask how the team member or client would make it happen.”



Wellington Holbrook, executive vice-president of ATB Business. *SUPPLIED*