

A Quick Tour of the 50 Best Workplaces for Innovators

I feel your pain. Your boss is a moron, your coworker mansplained how copiers work, and Irma from Accounting just asked you how to copy and paste. What's worse, your ideas, despite being solid gold, keep getting panned in meetings. They're too risky, or too costly, or the ever-present classic, "We're just used to doing it the old way."

It's time for a change. You've got big ideas, bold strategies, and at least a basic grasp of the stuff you claimed "expertise" in on your resume. You've got what it takes. It's up to you to drag these people into the 21st century by sheer force of will and desperate gesturing at their plummeting bottom line. And when that doesn't work, jump ship.

You know what you're looking for, right? You're not going to like it. We all took a blood oath not to use corporate buzzwords, but we've got to call on the ancient force: Innovation. Cue the sound of steam engines, rocket blasters, and hologram Steve Jobs giving a speech to a cheering cyborg crowd.

Don't fall for the propaganda. Innovation and discoveries don't really happen with one skinny white dude sitting in his basement until the Powers That Be cut his lonely life a break. Innovation comes from collaborative company culture. Are employees encouraged by the Organization (like the Powers That Be but less approachable) to pursue ideas? Are you given time to think, learn, and grow? Are you even, *gasp*, supported when you fail? Innovative thinkers fail big, fail often, and fail fast, and if your company isn't giving you room to spread your wings, fly too close to the sun, and fall thousands of feet to a squishy demise, you aren't with the right company.

Where can you find the right one? Let's start the [Fast Company's 50 Best Workplaces For Innovators](#), an annual list that celebrates companies focusing on experimentation,

inclusivity, and positive failure. Sounds like college, but better, because they pay you and you don't wake up drunk with a pregnancy scare. At least, you really shouldn't. Not until you're CEO.

I've narrowed them to the top three in three categories, to make it easier for you to scroll through during your mid-morning cry in the bathroom stall... I mean. Your coffee break.

The categories are: **Outreach**, **Experimentation**, and **Empowerment**.

Outreach: Companies encouraging collaboration outside the company.

- Blue Prism, a robot-automation company, gives its proprietary software and training materials to universities so students can prepare themselves for the day our robot overlords finally enslave us all.

- Duolingo, a language-learning platform, has a Duolingo Lab built for its website team to reach out to its 300 million global users for enhancement ideas.

Surprisingly, not all the ideas were trash, and the company released the number one most-downloaded education Podcast last year.

- Sephora, the makeup company conquering your local mall, has Sephora Accelerate for women who have founded beauty companies. It's a weeklong boot camp, filled with mentoring, grants, and demos from Sephora's venture partners and leadership.

Experimentation: Companies focusing resources on projects that might flop in a big way and waste everyone's money.

- Cloudflare, a website company, assigns their employees to experiment "spikes." They focus two weeks on a new idea to see if it should get more time and money. This is also my dating strategy.
- Compass, a real estate technology firm, has a digital forum where employees up or down vote each others' ideas, and ideas with the most upvotes get millions of

dollars to make their dream come true. Thank goodness this isn't how Reddit works.

- Workday, who creates cloud applications for finance and HR, has a "Spelunking Conference." Employees present lessons from failed projects, and if they don't wear harnesses while they do it, I'm not going.

Empowerment: Companies giving the tools and time to accelerate their employee's development.

- Sonatype, an open-source code management company, has innovation days every other week, so employees can take the day and make discoveries.
- Influxdata, a database company, posts all documentation, trainings, and presentations on its public Youtube channel, blog posts, and webinars. Employees are one google search away from all the info they need.
- Pivotal, a cloud-based software company, requires all its programmers to pair up. They say it's for support and motivation, but I suspect they like the drama of taking a rogue programmer who doesn't play by the rules and making him work with a strictly by-the-book programmer.

I hope you enjoyed this comprehensive (it's only missing 41 of the companies on the list) and heavily curated (I picked the ones that I could make the funniest jokes about) list. If you do end up working at any of these places, let us know. I love playing matchmaker.