



Do You Like My Idea?

I love hearing good ideas, don't you? Whether they be in a work context ("I've got this great idea for a new product..") or in a non-work context ("What if the party is a dress-up with a theme of..."), I am constantly impressed with the innovative thinking of other people. However, it has recently occurred to me that ideas, when initially communicated, are like fragile plants.....

We really want these seedlings to grow into strong, healthy, productive ideas but it is very easy to kill them before they have a chance to develop. Consider some possible first responses to the person with the idea: "It won't work because..."; "It's been tried before but..."; "They won't let you.."; or "You know what you really should do..". We may not be deliberately trying to kill them - we are just using our critical thinking skills to assess the merits of the idea. However, how will our well-intentioned feedback be interpreted? Unless the person is particularly persistent, resilient (or stubborn) our critical response may result in the idea withering on the vine.

So how do we convey our legitimate concerns? Rather than state, for example: "That won't fit in with the tax law..", let's nurture the idea first by recognising the good intent behind the idea. For example, a response like: "It sounds like you want to achieve greater sales..." will show that you have understood their objective. This provides more fertile soil so that the idea can survive when you table your concerns. For example: "I am worried about the tax treatment of the product...". It is even more effective if the other person can come up with the improvement themselves. For example: "Have you considered how to ensure that the product complies with the tax rules?".

To give the ideas the best chance of healthy growth they need a good environment. Think about the climate you foster, perhaps using words like "and" rather than "but" and "might" rather than "should". Consider the language that you employ and think about opportunities to use questions rather than statements. You might also review the tone of your communication and look for feedback on whether you usually sound critical or whether you usually sound supportive when people share their ideas with you.

Remember, cultivating good ideas into great ideas benefits everyone....