

INDUSTRY
VIEWS

Why embracing a disruptive leadership mindset is necessary for success



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Innovate. Ideate. Execute

With new developments and emerging technologies, convention leaders know they must constantly pay attention in order to keep up, says **Greg O'Dell**.

Audience demands are constantly changing. As the president and CEO of Events DC, the official convention and sports authority for the District of Columbia, I realise that these changes present an opportunity for us to improve and embrace new outside-the-box tactics.

Events DC aims to break from the traditional, quasi-government structure by making investments and taking risks in the development of new venues and services. For instance, a Strategic Initiatives Division was implemented that positions Events DC for future growth while also enhancing the ability to create premier event experiences that help achieve our mission to drive economic and community benefits for residents and businesses of the District of Columbia.

Only through a 'disruptive leadership' mindset and by embracing the need to shake things up – to innovate, ideate, and execute – can we achieve the results we need.

INNOVATE

Each event comes with the challenge to outdo its predecessor, finding better ways to engage audiences – often by incorporating new technologies including mobile apps, crowd-sourcing or social media tools – and turn them from passive attendees to active participants. Events are becoming more dynamic and interactive, and venues will have to keep evolving their strategies to meet these needs.

It is important for leaders to keep pushing innovation forward, even when they are already currently seeing success. For example, our Walter E. Washington Convention Center has over 200 digital signage displays and is the largest signage network of its kind in the US. We significantly expanded this programme by adding new LED video walls to key locations that allow meeting planners to better implement new interactive technologies and engage their audiences.

Our push to continue innovating has resulted in a tremendous amount of excitement among

our customers and has led to numerous accolades regarding their experiences.

IDEATE

As we convention leaders consider our future in an ever-changing and competitive marketplace, we must continue to ideate with forward thinking at the leading edge. Strategic planning requires that we place emphasis on repurposing our existing assets, while simultaneously examining new opportunities. How can we extend our business and our brand beyond our venue? This is a question I often ask myself, while also considering how we can best 'pay it forward' – an adage I believe all leaders should live and work by.

We recently broke away from the norm and set our sights on new market segments like e-sports. We even sponsored a team – the first city to do so – to let the world know that e-sports events, gamers and the community are welcome in our nation's capital.

Additionally, since opening the doors to our convention centre, the neighborhood has benefitted with additional consumer traffic and an explosion of new restaurants and retail outlets.

EXECUTE

When executing any plan, it is important to recall the core qualities of the hospitality industry and provide a service to our clients that is helpful, trustworthy, courteous and kind. We must always acknowledge our audience's presence, making each person feel recognised. Good leaders know that to accomplish this, we need to dare ourselves to break from the norms, forge unprecedented collaborations and invest in innovation, new ideas and initiatives.

We must become disruptive leaders who place an intentional focus on thinking beyond our traditional operations by embracing innovation, developing bold ideas, and executing these new strategies. We also challenge others to develop their own ideas and engage in knowledge sharing because, ultimately, this is what leads to greater success. **M**