



EVA NIEWIADOMSKI

The number one tenant of our philosophy here is that environment matters and that creative environment helps individuals tap into the deep reserves of their imaginations.

EVA NIEWIADOMSKI IS A SUCCESSFUL ENTREPRENEUR WHO CREATED A NEW CATEGORY IN THE HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY, CREATIVE CONFERENCE SPACE, WHEN SHE OPENED CATALYST RANCH. IT IS HOUSED IN A HISTORICAL LOFT IN DOWNTOWN CHICAGO AND WHIMSICALLY FURNISHED WITH VINTAGE FURNITURE, ETHNIC ARTWORK, COLORFULLY PAINTED WALLS, TOYS, BOOKS, AND MUCH MORE. IN 2008 CATALYST RANCH WAS NAMED TO *INC. MAGAZINE'S* TOP 100 FASTEST-GROWING PRIVATE COMPANIES IN ILLINOIS. PRIOR TO STARTING HER OWN BUSINESS, EVA SPENT ALMOST TWENTY YEARS IN CORPORATE, WORKING FOR THE QUAKER OATS COMPANY IN A VARIETY OF FINANCE AND MARKETING POSITIONS, AND AT ARTHUR ANDERSEN & CO.

WHY DID YOU START CATALYST RANCH?

When I started Catalyst Ranch in 2002, it was with the thought that there was a different way to enable creative thinking. At Quaker Oats I had created different spaces, a couple of innovation hallways and a creativity room as a sideline to my day job. I decorated my desk, I had a lot of artwork around, and people loved coming and having meetings at my desk. There was a different energy in how we approached things because there was a different physical environment.

Many people take for granted the importance of a creative, fun space. They don't understand how important it is to engage the brain in a different way to get better results. Too often in a plain conference room people zone out, and it doesn't matter whether you are training someone, or having a strategic planning or product ideation meeting.

If you come here for a meeting, you will experience it for yourself. You can see and feel the difference in your energy level and the output of your meeting here versus when you've done similar meetings elsewhere. We show people how a creative environment impacts them, and hopefully helps them come up with greater products, achieve better strategic direction, and come up with ideas they wouldn't have come up with otherwise. In addition, they learn that a creative space is an important component of your day-to-day life, and certain changes need to happen within your corporate environment.

WHY DO WE NEED TO GIVE PEOPLE PERMISSION TO HAVE FUN?

There's a corporate mantra, "If we are doing serious business, we have to be serious." On the other side is the idea that if you are having fun, you can't possibly be working as hard as you should be. I think this is counterproductive. When people are playing, having fun, thinking in a very different way, and being more creative, they have realized better approaches to whatever their assignment is.

We want to make sure Catalyst Ranch employees are having fun and enjoy working with each other. We have a lot of things to do that are mundane in terms of writing



THE *Creative* ACTIVIST

contracts, setting up meetings, talking with people, making sure their rooms are set up correctly, and dusting the room. I hire creative people who are actors, artists, photographers, musicians, filmmakers, and writers. I think it's important that employees have other interests and passions, and they bring that to their day-to-day life. That's what makes them interesting. It's what builds the dynamics between the staff, and it's where we get some of our best ideas.

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