

FAST COMPANY

» meeting in ever miss beg, borrow, STIMULATE

M.I.N.M.
Association for Managers of Innovation

WHO
Stanley Gryskiewicz, VP and senior fellow, Center for Creative Leadership

EMAIL
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PLAYERS
25–30 innovation practitioners

FREQUENCY
Twice a year

WHY I NEVER MISS IT
“I find something to use at these meetings that I could not have predicted.”

WHERE DO INNOVATION THOUGHT LEADERS GO WHEN they need a little inspiration? Some of the lucky ones attend the biannual meeting of the Association for Managers of Innovation (AMI). Founded in 1981 as a creativity seminar for scientists who wanted to talk about new inventions they were working on, the invitation-only meeting has morphed over the years into a forum for large-scale change. “It’s a way to stretch your thinking with people who may already have wrestled with the challenges you’re facing,” says Stanley Gryskiewicz, 54, VP of global initiatives and senior fellow of creativity and innovation at the Center for Creative Leadership in Greensboro, North Carolina and one of the meeting’s founders.

Twice each year, AMI members—innovation practitioners from companies such as Hallmark, IBM, and Kraft Foods—gather for two days in a host company’s conference room to talk about what they’re working on and to exchange ideas on hard-to-handle issues and big questions. *Really* big questions, like, How do you help the 100 line-operating companies in your corporation enhance their innovation? How do you deputize 300 change agents within your organization? Or questions such as, What would

you do if you were asked to change what you do overnight? Which assumptions about your business model, if violated, would put you out of business, and how can you turn those ideas around to put your *competition* out of business?

Sometimes discussions are organized around provocative presentations from outside speakers. Other times, the group takes field trips. For the meeting last fall, 30 attendees went to the Pentagon to attend a high-level presentation by the deputy director of the Defense Reform Initiative about the measures that are being taken to streamline operations within the Department of Defense.

GUIDING PRINCIPLE Give and take. “In order to have an open dialogue, everyone agrees to respect issues of confidentiality. But

this can’t be a one-way meeting where people don’t share their thinking. Each of us has to be an active member who gives as much as he gets. So if someone misses four meetings, the group asks him to leave.”

BEST PRACTICE Beg, brag, what ifs. “Each person gets 20 minutes to beg for help on a specific issue or to brag about some initiative that they’ve implemented successfully. It’s a great way for us to learn about innovative practices and ideas that are evolving inside of companies in different industries. Or, if there’s a beg, we can share real-time support, resources, and information on a specific challenge.”

AGENT PROVOCATEUR Positive turbulence. “We invite outside speakers—from architects to chief knowledge officers—to push us to those future-perfect possibilities. They ask the ‘what ifs’ that force us outside of our velvet ruts.”

ANNA MUOIO



Illustration by BELLE MELLOR