



Editor's Note: Thomas M. Menino is the Mayor of Boston and a contributor for BostInno.

Cities around the world are racing to attract entrepreneurs and innovative companies. Some rely solely on tax incentives only to see lower than expected returns. Some bank on "winning" sectors only to lose the bet when an industry falters. Others roll out marketing campaigns that generate buzz but little for the bottom line.

Ultimately, the cities that outcompete their peers don't do so with short-sighted gambles or PR gimmicks. Instead, winning cities concentrate on winning talent.

We launched Boston's Innovation District in January 2010 to help companies win the war for talent. Two years, 100+ new companies, and 3,200 jobs later, we have accumulated some valuable lessons.

Here are ten things we've done (or plan to do in 2012) to keep the talent pipeline flowing.

1. Ask CEO's what they need to recruit talent. Then deliver results. Matt Lauzon, CEO of online jeweler [Gemvara](#), told us his employees wanted to be in the Innovation District, even though their new address wasn't exactly. To welcome the company to Boston, I brought soil from the Innovation District, planted a tree at their new office, and officially declared their part of the 8th floor of One Financial Center part of the ID. The small gesture sent a big signal that we care about the little things.
2. Don't play sector favorites. If the recession and sluggish recovery taught us anything, it's that government isn't great at picking winners. In Boston, we resisted the temptation to attract a specific sector, and it's paying off. Designers, software programmers, marketers, lawyers, bio engineers, and more have all found a supportive place to grow in the Innovation District.
3. Don't treat after work needs as an afterthought. Last year we launched Boston IDEA (Innovation District Entrepreneurs After work) to help companies connect with their neighbors outside of business hours. After a summer block party and a Rock Band competition, we now have a bona fide social group that companies can plug into once they arrive.
4. Provide food for thought, literally. The restaurants at Liberty Wharf, Atlantic Wharf and in the Seaport/Fort Point area have been essential to the Innovation District's success. They're some of the hottest destinations in Boston, giving employees on the waterfront places to relax and visitors added incentive to explore the area.
5. Welcome companies and recognize talent. This sounds obvious, but it's easy to overlook. Businesses want to know that the city cares about their success, so highlighting their achievements and contributions is a must. I visit companies regularly, invite CEOs to join me at events, and talk about their successes in public. When Brightcove took its employees on a first tour of their new waterfront headquarters, I took the tour right along with them.
6. Create a (warranted) buzz. People want to work in cool places, but building buzz means more than talking a good game. Babson's new classrooms, along with events like the Boston Local Food Festival, Extreme Sailing, and cliff diving off the ICA have helped give the Innovation District its identity.
7. Finally, attracting entrepreneurs means acting like one. Be responsive. Always look out for opportunities to recruit new companies. And don't let bureaucracy get in the way of progress.

So, what's in store for 2012?

8. Build a public innovation center. One of the country's first, this will be a place for entrepreneurs to come together, showcase their latest ideas, and create new ones.
9. Foster collaboration at home. With smaller floor plans to increase affordability and shared living spaces to promote collaboration, developers will pilot several innovation housing units to better serve the live/work needs of entrepreneurs.
10. More, more, more. What's perhaps most exciting for us are the new companies and restaurants that are sure to open and the new VC's and university centers we hope to attract.

We like to say that from Boston's waterfront you see Boston's future. It's a bright one because more talent is on the way.

Related Posts



[Manny Ramirez Signs with the...](#)

[0 Comments](#)