

Corporate Entrepreneurship – April 2011

Internal Entrepreneurs – Earn the Right

By Susan Foley

Another great question from one of the readers of the e-book *Acceleration – Changing the Speed of Growth* www.corporate-entrepreneurs.com/Acceleration.html is whether or not you have to *earn the right* to be an internal entrepreneur.

In our work we have found that the most successful internal entrepreneurs are individuals who have achieved a certain level of success within their organization. The success itself could be the launch of a new product or service, solving an organizational problem, creating a new process or opening a new market. The type of success doesn't really matter it is the visibility and recognition that one achieves from that success that gives these individuals the freedom to be an internal entrepreneur.

It is also the confidence that they acquire from their success which empowers them.

The fact is that most professionals do not think of themselves as internal entrepreneurs. The reason is that most organizations do not proactively identify or develop internal entrepreneurs (Intrapreneurs). As a result, individuals who are more entrepreneurial inclined will develop their own capabilities through their work. They are *unknowingly earning the right* every day to be an internal entrepreneur.

One executive vice president of a major financial organization said that she had never heard the term internal entrepreneur until someone brought it to her attention. The more she thought about it, the more it made sense. Of course by then she had successfully built a multi-million dollar business for her company. She had acquired the clout and political capital she needed to continue to develop her entrepreneurial skills inside the organization.

What about someone just starting out, must they earn the right as well? That's a great question. Every internal entrepreneur has to build a portfolio of skills and capabilities that enable them to be successful. It all depends on the work they sign up for and the challenges they take on. Playing it safe is not the way to build the skills that will be needed. What they need is an opportunity to develop and demonstrate their entrepreneurial capabilities.

According to Richard Branson, "*Virgin could never have grown into the group of more than 200 companies it is now, were it not for the steady stream of Intrapreneurs who looked for and developed opportunities, often leading efforts that went against the grain.*" He goes as far as saying that it is time for a major shakeup in organizations. They need to unleash the power of their Intrapreneurs. <http://www.entrepreneur.com/article/218011>

Like Richard Branson, we believe organizations must "enable Intrapreneurship." It is the right time for organizations to proactively enable these individuals. In turn, these individuals must *earn the right* to become an internal entrepreneur. They must demonstrate it through their work.

It is only then, that they can *claim the title of internal entrepreneur*.

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