It really registered for me at a recent executive breakfast when another woman introduced herself as a corporate entrepreneur. I had lived that role myself, as had quite a few women and men I know. But here she was, stating it proudly and publicly as her identity. Not “vice president of this” or “director of that” but “corporate entrepreneur.” What she was really saying was: “I confidently help accelerate my company’s growth.”

Her bold statement made me think about all the other managers I know who could describe themselves the same way – managers who successfully and consistently build businesses within businesses. It reminded me how much companies need entrepreneurial zeal today when their investors are so insistent on growth. And it made me realize that many companies may be letting significant growth opportunities slip by because they are not effectively harnessing the most able business builders they’ve got: their corporate entrepreneurs (or “intrapreneurs,” as they are now known.)

How can this be? It’s not as if the topic has never been discussed. In his article “The Age of Entrepreneurial Tolerance,” author Joseph L. Rotman puts it this way: “The most sought-after professional for the 21st century economy will be a new breed of corporate entrepreneur, or intrapreneur, whose education and experience are both broad and deep and who have the skills for identifying and exploiting opportunities; fostering team-based innovation, creativity and managing change.”

Perhaps the lack of a clear definition of corporate entrepreneurs is a contributing factor. Corporate entrepreneurs are the in-house counterparts of the classic entrepreneurs you read about in Inc. magazine. They build new revenue-generating products and services and sometimes whole new business entities within an established organization.

What is abundantly clear is that many corporate executives still don’t fully understand the difference between intrapreneurs and entrepreneurs. The research available in the area of corporate entrepreneurship suggests that each group uses very different processes, each representing a unique set of challenges and opportunities. Combine this with the shortage of role models who fully understand the dynamics behind corporate entrepreneurship and you can see why organizations have not tapped into this valuable resource.

Many organizations lost their entrepreneurial talent during the late nineties to startups. Others, under pressure to control expenses, have redirected entrepreneurial resources to “business as usual” efforts. So finding a corporate entrepreneur isn’t easy. Potential employees who think they can do the job often underestimate its complexity. It is important to recognize that a corporate entrepreneur must also possess skills and values that are not required for an entrepreneur.

So how exactly do corporate entrepreneurs walk and talk? They are not always the inventors of new products, services or processes, but they are very often the team builders who turn those ideas into profitable businesses. They are seen as “business architects” who design the work environment, create informal controls, provide the discipline, motivate change by promoting entrepreneurial behavior in others, open channels of communication, and establish clear roles and responsibilities, goals and measures.

They are classic change agents; they take calculated risks, have a high tolerance for ambiguity, prefer autonomy, have plenty of perseverance, and are passionate about making a difference. Their leadership style lends itself to networking, building relationships, and empowering employees to achieve results. They have learned to deal with systems and structures that are not always supportive. Their motivations (continued on reverse)
Corporate entrepreneurs are the primary source of business growth today. They are the thought leaders. The team builders. The champions of new products and processes. And if you aren't effectively leveraging their skills, energy and creativity, your company may be missing out on its most valuable competitive advantage.

We can help you activate this critical corporate resource—and the engine of business growth it represents.

We are Corporate Entrepreneurs.

Corporate Entrepreneurs, LLC
Call us today at 781-662-9513 or visit us at corporate-entrepreneurs.com