



The 4 Essential Traits Of 'Intrapreneurs'

Our company, Fishbowl is filled with intrapreneurs. They think and behave like owners. Most of them actually are as our organization is employee owned. They are invaluable to the company's health. But how do organizations recognize and develop intrapreneurs, and, even more importantly, how can you be sure they won't leave?

As authors Vijay Govindarajan and Jatin Desai have noted in a *Harvard Business Review* blog post, there are certain characteristics that successful intrapreneurs share. I would like to focus on four of them:

1. Money is not their measurement. Intrapreneurs certainly respect the value and importance of money. They understand the economic drivers that allow the organization to succeed and are able to support this fundamental truth and not fight it. A non-intrapreneur is perpetually looking for non-economic ways to justify their own advancement and payment. An intrapreneur “gets it” and does their work in a way that shows the organization they are someone it can't afford to lose. The money and advancement finds them.

2. They are “greenhousers.” When you speak about an intriguing idea to an intrapreneur, the idea never leaves them. It germinates within their mind, and they carry with them the desire to figure out how to make it work. When you see them next, they are likely to have grown the seed of an idea into a full-blown plan or they will have created an even better set of alternative plans in its stead.

3. They know how to pivot. Intrapreneurs aren't afraid to change course, nor do they fear failure. It isn't outward bravado that drives them but an inner confidence and courage that every step takes them closer to their ultimate goal. In my own training and vernacular I call this phenomenon “failing up.” I celebrate opportunities for growth, even painful ones.

4. They behave authentically and with integrity. Most importantly, intrapreneurs exhibit the traits of confidence and humility—not the maverick behavior of corporate hotshots, Govindarajan and Desai say. I agree fully with this conclusion. Integrity (along with Respect, Belief, and Courage) are key among the traits I call the 7 Non-Negotiables, which have driven my own company to miraculous accomplishments and are at the core of the methodology I describe in my book. A budding businessperson could carry every other characteristic in spades, but without a foundation of integrity, they will fail (and the work landscape is littered with many examples of such failures).

So if these are the traits that describe what an intrapreneur looks like, where will you find these individuals and how can you ensure they will stay?

For starters, a company founded with an entrepreneurial/intrapreneurial emphasis becomes a magnet for more of the same. Employees recommend the company to others who share their values. Like breeds like, which is also to say that a company can't conduct itself without integrity and still expect to find those traits upheld in its ranks. With time and experience, you will learn to ask the searching questions that will help you determine the true traits of the individuals you consider. The search will be worth the effort, as tomorrow's world of work ecosystems will be driven by the increasing ranks of intrapreneurs.

There's been much discussion of late about the entrepreneurs within an organization—those highly valuable executives and team members who will perhaps never become a company founder, but who have learned to apply the essential principles of entrepreneurship to the roles they fill within a company.

We refer to these employees as “intrapreneurs” because they're not entering into their own, work venture, but they are working within your company, thus the “intra” part.

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