



Book Army of Entrepreneurs

Create an Engaged and Empowered Workforce for Exceptional Business Growth

Jennifer Prosek
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Recommendation

You must constantly think of ways to improve your business and maximize your employees’ resourcefulness. Public relations and communications consultant Jennifer Prosek explains that competition now is too intense and market changes too rapid for organizations to become complacent. Wise employers cultivate an entrepreneurial mentality within their workforce while empowering employees to be daring and creative. While Prosek’s notion of an “Army of Entrepreneurs” isn’t groundbreaking, her belief that many organizations’ leaders lack vision reads true. Your success in making the transition from old beliefs to an entrepreneurial mind-set depends on whether your company proves too conventional to change or is willing to embrace new, exciting methods. *BooksInShort* recommends Prosek’s guide to those considering shaking up their business’s old belief system to ensure long-term growth.

Take-Aways

- Your workforce should be an “Army of Entrepreneurs.”
- A strong, entrepreneurial corporate culture ensures long-term organizational success.
- To promote an entrepreneurial mind-set at your firm, motivate your workforce with financial incentives.
- Practice full disclosure. The more information your employees know about your company, the better.
- Complacency stifles the innovation firms need to move forward.
- Even if you aren’t currently hiring, be on the lookout for new talent.
- Formal training programs create engaged, motivated employees.
- CEOs must tap into the power of social media tools as communication tools.
- Embrace technology in your innovation efforts without becoming a slave to it.
- Constantly measure your entrepreneurial approach.

Summary

Maintaining Momentum

When entrepreneurs launch a new business, they get motivated. CEOs are excited about the possibilities and anxious to prove their organizations can succeed. But even a profitable company that gains clients and expands its workforce will eventually lose momentum. The CEO – and perhaps a handful of high-ranking executives – will tire of being responsible for making the business grow. The resulting burnout can compromise individual performance and threaten the company’s future.

“Employee engagement is the emotional tie that breeds loyalty, creativity and a desire to go above and beyond the call of duty.”

One solution to this dilemma is to create an entrepreneurial mind-set throughout your organization. With proper training and corresponding motivational tools, every employee is capable of thinking like a CEO. Your “Army of Entrepreneurs” will respond more favorably if you provide incentives, such as a “Commission for Life” structure that grants workers financial benefits for taking entrepreneurial initiatives. For example, an employee who arranges a meeting resulting in new business might receive 5% of the income from the account as long as the account and the employee remain with the company. All employees are eligible to set up an initial meeting, even if they are not involved in managing the account. A commission for life program benefits the organization and the individual for the following reasons:

- Earnings beyond a base salary make your company more attractive to employees, and that will boost both recruitment and retention.
- Employees’ successes energize their colleagues and motivate them to show initiative by seeking similar opportunities.
- Your company can identify employees with innate entrepreneurial skills as future candidates for more important positions.
- Employees feel more vested in the company and will work more diligently to ensure customer satisfaction.

Creating an Entrepreneurial Corporate Culture

Corporate culture helps determine organizational success or failure. Your company’s long-term viability depends on whether your employees are motivated, happy, optimistic and proud. Hiring the right people is essential, but corporate culture matters more. You can build a strong company culture based on these fundamental elements:

- **Transparency** – A CEO’s intent on creating an “Army of Entrepreneurs” must be honest, straightforward and sincere. The chief executive officer should demonstrate a deep belief in the organization. Every employee needs to recognize and buy into the leader’s commitment. By exerting tireless efforts, the CEO sets an example for the whole workforce. Employees need access to an organization’s financial statistics and information – except salaries. Transparency, honesty and communication instill confidence in employees.
- **Support and recognition** – All employees appreciate a pat on the back for a job well done. Managers should acknowledge employees’ accomplishments both publicly and privately. Devote a couple of minutes of your staff meetings to recognizing employees’ achievements. Give your workforce the tools to excel by providing training and education. Encourage individuality, and give plenty of support to those who make efforts beyond their job descriptions.
- **Organizational growth** – Provide financial rewards for individual accomplishments. Establish clear and firm guidelines for ethical behavior and practices, and deal harshly with violators. Seek ways to improve your corporate culture – even when things are running smoothly.

Stay Nimble

In an age of rapid developments and changes, large, successful firms cannot afford complacency. For instance, experts attribute some part of the decline of General Motors to its failure to recognize a change in consumer trends. While competitors such as Toyota offered greater efficiency and affordability, GM continued to manufacture large, traditional, fuel-guzzling automobiles. GM’s precipitous plunge and loss of market share shows how even a mighty corporation can falter if it lacks an entrepreneurial mind-set.

“An Army of Entrepreneurs does more than just generate good ideas. It becomes the eyes and ears of the company out in the marketplace.”

Teach your army of entrepreneurs always to look for an innovative edge. Monitor consumer behavior to anticipate changes in the market. Move quickly and decisively. Expand your horizons and think globally. Since you can communicate with virtually anyone anywhere in the world, stay alert to and explore any option that might benefit your company.

Teach and Train

To stay competitive, offer training programs that teach skills and educate employees about their particular concerns and roles. Studies show that formal training fosters “employee engagement,” an essential component of organizational success. You must offer regularly scheduled, ongoing training. Sporadic or inconsistent classes are ineffective. Divide your training classes into the following categories:

- **Business essentials** – Explain what your company offers and how it makes money. Analyze the competition. Trace the company’s history, and introduce key personnel. Discuss factors affecting your business operations, such as labor costs and insurance.
- **Generating business** – Describe how the sales process works. Teaching employees how mastering its fundamentals and techniques will enable them to bring in new accounts. Address the myth that only a select few can be successful salespeople. Define formal and informal networking. Show entrepreneurial employees how to use their networking skills.
- **Building from within** – Employees can be so enthusiastic about generating new business that they ignore opportunities right in front of them. Encourage staffers to be proactive and to offer ideas to existing clients, who are usually open to new proposals.

A Matter of Talent

To foster an entrepreneurial culture, you must have good employees. Workers happy to simply follow orders and meet their minimum job requirements will not take your company to the next level. Ensure that you hire the right people by asking interview questions which reveal how prospective hires will behave in certain situations. Not everyone feels comfortable being independent. Identify whether your candidates will thrive or flounder in your forward-thinking, enterprising organization. Seek employees who excel on their own and when working with others. Build an infrastructure that will support training to meet your workforce’s professional objectives.

“No training program can be successful if it exists as a one-time or even as a once-in-a-while effort.”

Hiring and retaining employees who have an entrepreneurial mentality won’t happen automatically. While a few gifted staffers may walk in your door, recruiting requires planning and awareness. Interview a handful of candidates every month, even if you have no openings. Scrambling around to fill a sudden vacancy rarely guarantees a

satisfactory replacement. Maintain a roster of potential talent so you can act when necessary. Encourage your staff to look out for talented individuals. Offer a cash incentive to employees who bring in an important hire.

“One way to help a new hire adjust is to communicate to the existing staff how that person is going to fit into the company’s mission.”

Don’t be afraid to hire a budding star even during challenging financial times. Your investment will pay handsome dividends in the long run. Tell candidates the benefits of working for your company, list their specific tasks and outline what they can expect during a typical workday. Hire only those candidates who are a good fit for your organization and vice versa. Before you hire someone, be convinced that he or she will thrive in your culture. Allow new hires enough time to adjust, and make sure your other employees are cordial and welcoming.

Using Technology

Communications technology dominates business today, so utilize it to your advantage. Such tools as Twitter, LinkedIn and Facebook can be valuable entrepreneurial tools for your workforce.

“Blogging is a critical technology option for an entrepreneurial company. It’s both conversational and permanent.”

One recent study concluded that blogging “allows businesspeople to bust barriers,” whether the obstacle is an overseas market or an inability to connect with staff members. Your organization must stay abreast of technological developments and recognize the power of online communication as a business engine and as a marketing and outreach tool.

“Unobtrusively set up the stimuli or conditions people need to act in their own best interests and for their own benefit.”

However, technology cannot replace human interaction. Clients may feel inclined to give their business to an organization where human beings answer the telephone, not machines. In fact, badly deployed technology can be quite harmful. For example, employees could send ill-advised tweets they believe are private only to see their messages become public relations disasters. Carefully choose how you want to use social media so that it supports internal entrepreneurship.

“When staffers feel a company is going somewhere, they are willing to hang in and work hard to make it happen.”

Don’t let your communication devices hold you captive. For instance, don’t feel compelled to answer your cell phone or check your messages when dining out or enjoying an evening with your family. Disconnecting at the appropriate time is a good idea. Keep things in perspective, and don’t let technology consume you.

Measure for Measure

You can’t determine the success of your entrepreneurial army without measuring it. The old dot-com days were infamous for inaccurately gauging corporate performance based on stock price. Businesspeople nowadays understand that success actually consists of a number of variables. The big question is what factors to measure. You may want to include the following:

- **Growth** – You should notice a significant increase in new accounts or those on the verge of being activated and serviced. Maintaining a strong talent pipeline is critical in helping you weather the normal ups and downs of business.
- **Innovation** – With proper training and inspiration, your staff should come up with plenty of new products and ideas. Don’t focus on whether each project succeeds; just fostering innovation is more important.
- **Expansion** – New business is great, of course, but building on existing accounts is easier than acquiring new ones. Expect significant growth in your clients’ business from year to year.
- **Satisfaction** – Employees may feel unsettled when your company rolls out a new initiative. But after an adjustment period, your workers will be calmer, more energized and happily participating in “army activities.”

Silencing the Skeptics

Innovation is often met with skepticism. Executives, employees and clients may believe that the army approach cannot succeed. Common objections include the following:

- **Love of money is destructive** – Employees will focus on pursuing commissions and pay less attention to their normal duties. In reality, many workers will be slow to adopt the new system and will be most comfortable performing routine tasks.
- **Not everyone can sell** – Some individuals have natural ability, but with education, motivation and incentives, everyone can learn to sell. If your workforce lacks that entrepreneurial spark, find out what’s missing in your training.
- **Is this really necessary?** – Your company generates plenty of business and leads, so why bother with new tactics? Being satisfied with the status quo is dangerous. Anything can happen, from a change in economic conditions to a new competitor in your market.
- **Minor leaguers need not apply** – Veteran staffers may resent seeing their less-experienced counterparts hunting for new business opportunities. Junior employees may make mistakes, but enthusiastic younger people often have more extensive social networks.

“The hard truth is, not everyone can handle the independence.”

About the Author

Jennifer Prosek is the founder and CEO of CJP Communications, an international PR and financial communications company with offices in New York, London and Connecticut.
