



## How to Think Like an Entrepreneur Within the Corporate Walls

**Y**es, entrepreneurial thinking does have its place in corporations. It refers to the kind of innovative, "find-a-way-to-get-it-done-well" attitude that leads to praise, promotions, and job satisfaction.

Just ask Marie Benesh, who created several new positions for herself within the walls of a large corporation in upstate New York. She says, "In the beginning, I never knew I had the power to suggest changes, and cross boundaries."

Working with coach and mentor Carol Bergmann ([www.alignedforaction.com](http://www.alignedforaction.com)), Marie found the courage to write a white paper proposing a new area that would gather and compile data from around the company for executives to use in their decision-making. "I didn't know how to get them to buy-in to my idea. I never saw myself as leading this new area. At first, I couldn't even articulate my idea. Carol helped me see that the set of boundaries I thought existed weren't really there."

Her coach helped Marie's star to rise. Her boss put her in charge of the new Decision Support Systems area. With the in-house staff she recruited, they pioneered an integrated system that's evolved into a necessary part of data management for her corporation worldwide. "It was a breakthrough experience because executives throughout the corporation could see how the approach I implemented could help them make key decisions based on numbers not previously available to them."

Rich Porter, who works for a multi-national company employing 90,000 people, took on the challenge of merging three products from three previously separate divisions within the corporation. "I worked with a coach using exercises and tools that helped me get this done. During the first four months, I had to massage a lot of folks to get buy-in. It then took another four months to implement the change. By bringing these products under one umbrella, we realized a cost savings of \$5 million a year."



**Katharine Halpin, CPA, MCC**

**Katharine Halpin and Company, LLC  
303 East Colter Street  
Phoenix, Arizona 85012-1469**

**Telephone: 602-266-1961  
Fax: 602-266-1966  
[www.HalpinCompany.com](http://www.HalpinCompany.com)**

Katharine is the CEO of Katharine Halpin & Company, LLC, a coaching firm founded in 1995. She has coached over 250 executives, including 25 CEO's in 14 states and Europe and impacted thousands of professionals through her public speaking and team coaching programs.

KH&Co., LLC, serves small to mid-size organizations up to the Fortune 100. Our services include leadership and team development programs; facilitation of processes which involve diverse stakeholders addressing complex issues; and corporate culture and board development programs. The benefit our clients realize from their work with us is the development of a workplace where everyone steps up and speaks up.

## What Is Intrapreneurial Thinking, Anyway?

**I**ntrinsic in these real-life corporate examples are characteristics normally attributed to intrapreneurs – a term defined by the American Heritage Dictionary as, “A person within a large corporation who takes direct responsibility for turning an idea into a profitable finished product through assertive risk-taking and innovation.” Intrapreneurs combine the best of entrepreneurial thinking within the corporate world.

Professionals with an entrepreneurial bent – intrapreneurs – feel a degree of ownership, take risks, make decisions, and take responsibility willingly. Intrapreneurs are independent and visionary. They have good communications skills, and a high sense of curiosity and self-worth.

“An entrepreneur just can’t sit still in the saddle,” says Laura Berman Fortgang ([www.LauraBermanFortgang.com](http://www.LauraBermanFortgang.com)), a coach, author, and speaker who’s had her own coaching company since 1997. To coach and author Robert Hargrove ([www.masterfulcoaching.com](http://www.masterfulcoaching.com)), “Entrepreneurial means shifting the mindset from running a business to creating a business.”

Gifford and Elizabeth Pinchot ([www.pinchot.com](http://www.pinchot.com)) are credited with coining the name “intrapreneur.” Time hasn’t diminished the impact, or the accuracy, of what they originally penned back in 1978. “Courage, original thought, and ability to observe the obvious do not necessarily lead to success. If we are to get really good problem-solving in our decentralized corporations, we must introduce a system that gives the decision to those who get successful results, not to the inoffensive. Such people will be willing to take moderate risks, and will be more concerned with achieving results than gaining influence. These are among the characteristics of the successful entrepreneur. What is needed in the large corporation is not more semi-independent departments run by hard-driving yes men, but something akin to free-market entrepreneurship within the corporate organizations.”

## What Is Required To Be An “Intrapreneur?”

**I**ntrapreneurs are professionals working within corporations, who use entrepreneurial skills to meet challenges in innovate ways. Their personal strengths and values have to dovetail with those in the organization. As Bergmann points out, “Being entrepreneurial can imply that anything goes. So watch out. Innovative

ideas have to fit the environment. Coaches of entrepreneurial thinkers have to understand, and be sensitive to that environment.”

Hargrove agrees, saying that some intrapreneurs can appear to be like bulls in a china shop. “They thrive on change, but they also have to know how the changes they want align with their company’s objectives.”

“Intrapreneurs seek an all-encompassing view of a company’s processes from start to finish. They feel ownership in everything, not just one piece,” explains coach Angela C. Alpe ([www.createperformance.com](http://www.createperformance.com)). “Intrapreneurs don’t buy into the ‘it’s not my job’ way of thinking.”

Successful corporate intrapreneurs understand it’s not enough to have a good idea. Bergmann explains, “It’s always a two-part process: one is coming up with innovative ideas and the other is knowing how to get your ideas sold in the organization. That’s usually where coaching comes in.”

## How Do Corporations Benefit From Developing Intrapreneurial Thinking?

### 12 Ways to Sabotage Your Intrapreneurial Spirit

1. Get wrapped up in day-to-day functions and lose sight of the overall vision
2. Fail to acknowledge wins and contributions by yourself and others
3. Operate in isolation
4. Give up on an idea too soon
5. Wait for things to come through rather than take action
6. Discount ideas from yourself or others
7. Fear losing your job
8. Believe in working harder and longer rather than working smarter
9. Listen to your inner critic
10. Be impatient to reach an outcome or become too attached to a particular outcome
11. Make defeatist statements
12. Wait for permission to bring an idea forward

**S**andra Nahan, Psy.D., had a 20 year career in finance and broadcast programming before becoming a coach. Nahan tells this story, “In a national hotel chain, each employee has access to \$2,000 to make discretionary decisions that would make a difference to a customer. One guest who stayed frequently at this hotel had left his laptop behind in his room. One of the housekeepers, after exhausting other options, made the decision to fly to his next stop and deliver the laptop to him personally – an action that didn’t have to be pre-approved. The employee took the risk to do the right thing. Undoubtedly that guest will return to that hotel forever.”

In another example, the CEO of a privately held dot-com company realized that 95% of his corporate assets left the building every night in the form of his employees. Protecting his assets became a priority. He created an environment that appealed to the needs of his employees – on-site physician visits, social work, day care center, cafeteria and a gym. He brings in a pianist and massage therapist regularly. The result? Turnover was a mere 3% instead of the whopping 20% corporations traditionally experience. People had fewer sick days. These two things alone saved his company millions of dollars. He saw company profits increase even during the dot-com crises. But it wasn’t just the “good-

ies" that allowed his staff to buy-in to his vision. It was experiencing how he valued them, and respected their input on a day-to-day basis.

"One woman I coached wondered why she'd been overlooked for promotion," says Fortgang. "She wasn't getting a chance to share her innovative ideas. Through the coaching process, she was encouraged to drop the behind-the-scenes volunteer projects she was doing. She stopped using 'apology' language. She was challenged to shift how she looked at things. Within four months, she had stopped 'hiding out' in the background and took more control. With a new sense of presence and confidence, she was able to sell her idea for a new product to management."

Coaches who foster an intrapreneurial mindset cite even more benefits for the individuals they coach, and their organizations. Says Alpe, "Individuals benefit from coaching because they see how they can make a contribution. Their personal satisfaction in the job goes up, plus they're bringing value and 'playing in the game' rather than sitting on the sidelines. For the organization, when individual barriers to performance are removed, retention, productivity, and profits go up. Commitment and company loyalty surface; so does innovation and creative problem solving."

### What Does A Corporation Lose By Not Nurturing Entrepreneurial Thinking?

**I**n Porter's experience, "out-of-the-box" thinking is necessary in today's marketplace. He says, "The traditional corporate view has to be shaken up to respond to changes in the world, so those changes can be reflected in the business."

As another corporate insider, Benesh quickly realized her desire to make changes could have been perceived by others in her organization as either "a pain in the neck or a visionary." "I've learned that it all depended on my approach to getting buy-in for my ideas. My coach was critical in helping me determine what my approach needed to be."

Alpe believes, "If you don't think like an entrepreneur, you stay in one place." Harking back to the creativity aspect of entrepreneurial thinking, Hargrove says, "When you don't 'create' a business, you're missing unrealized opportunities for growth and increased earnings."

Add to that a sense of everyday boredom for the individual and negative consequences prevail. Hargrove makes this comparison: "It's like the donut ad on TV. That ad shows a short bald guy wearing a paper hat saying over and over, 'Gotta make the donuts, gotta make the donuts.' He's resigned to sameness. But people who are creating something new everyday see endless possibilities."

### Fostering An Environment Of Collaboration

**M**ost corporate cultures do not foster an environment of trust or safety for presenting new ideas. Add to that the stress of deadlines, cutbacks, and communication difficulties, and it's easy to send the wrong message. The coaching process provides a safe haven to

explore and position new ideas. Given the opportunity to evaluate a new idea, understanding its impact to the organization and role-playing how to best present it for buy-in are crucial for creating solutions that benefit the corporation and its employees.

Says Fortgang, "A coach brings out the truth and helps the client learn how to navigate within the walls of the corporation. Most importantly, coaches don't let their clients' self-imposed limits get in the way of achieving their personal and organization goals."

"Coaches don't have the same sense of history as someone within the company so they don't have preconceived notions of how others around them may behave," says Alpe. Gaining access to that type of objectivity is often the catalyst for creating possibilities and solutions, where before only barriers were perceived.

### The Intrapreneur's 10 Commandments

1. Build your team – intrapreneuring is not a solo activity.
2. Share credit widely.
3. Ask for advice before you ask for resources.
4. Underpromise and overdeliver – publicity triggers the corporate immune system.
5. Do any job needed to make your dream work, regardless of your job description.
6. Remember it is easier to ask for forgiveness than for permission.
7. Keep the best interests of the company and its customers in mind, especially when you have to bend the rules or circumvent the bureaucracy.
8. Come to work each day willing to be fired.
9. Be true to your goals, but be realistic about how to achieve them.
10. Search for and reward your sponsors.

**"T**his kind of thinking can accelerate careers," says Bergmann. "I've seen individuals gain visibility among their peers and superiors. They attract more challenging projects that can be intrinsically rewarding, which often leads to promotions."

Developing the entrepreneurial spirit within your company's environment takes time, practice, and commitment on behalf of both the individual and the corporation. The rewards for everyone are far reaching, measurable and add value to more than just the bottom line.

# A T A G L A N C E

## Try These On — Key Questions To Spark Intrapreneurial Thinking

Why not stimulate your intrapreneurial thinking with the same key questions successful coaches use?

- ▶ What change do you want to create in your organization?
  - ▶ What actions are hindering collaboration in your work environment?
  - ▶ What do you want to be known for in this organization?
  - ▶ What thoughts drive the behavior affecting you at work?
  - ▶ What boundaries do you perceive as limiting you?
  - ▶ What change in yourself are you willing to be accountable for?
- ▶ What risk are you willing to take to bring an idea forward?
  - ▶ What value does a certain belief (e.g., working harder leads to success) hold for you? Is it detrimental or beneficial?
  - ▶ What about your company inspires you?
  - ▶ What new skills do you need?

Even the best organizations today use only a tiny portion of the potential productivity, talent, and drive of their members. Imagine what your corporation could accomplish by tapping into the creativity already within your company's walls!

***Katharine Halpin and Company, LLC***  
303 East Colter Street  
Phoenix, AZ 85012-1469

