



Self-Assessment Centre

16.1.2010 Archives / Assess Your Work

Awake the Entrepreneur Within

by Michele Marrinan



It's no secret some of the most innovative ideas come from entrepreneurs who dare to buck the system. But you don't need to start your own company to tap your entrepreneurial impulses. Most jobs offer plenty of opportunities to make gutsy moves worthy of Sam Walton or Bill Gates.

Just ask Joe Cohen. He can pinpoint the day when his career as a public relations professional took a decidedly entrepreneurial turn. He had been with The MWW Group, a public relations firm, for about seven months when he and a friend were asked to work late on a particular rush job for a major retail client.

"This got sprung on me at the end of the day and I was really tired," he recalls. "All I wanted to do was go home and rest, but you have to seize the moment." Cohen and his friend -- both fresh out of college -- took the initiative and practically lived at the office for several days in order to complete the project. Since then, he has been given more responsibility on such high-level accounts as Bally Total Fitness, Continental Airlines, and Hard Rock Cafe.

Taking an entrepreneurial approach to your work can mean the difference between a mediocre job and an exciting, fulfilling career. Here's how to get in touch with your inner entrepreneur:

Work for a Small Company

Or seek out an innovative division or manager at a larger firm. "If you're an entrepreneurial person by nature, you're better off in a place where you don't have to wait your turn," says Michael Kempner, president and CEO of The MWW Group and Joe Cohen's boss. "If I did good and worked hard, I wanted to get noticed. I wanted to rise on my merits, not stay in place based on politics, size or because I'm waiting my turn."

Be Ready to Jump

Put yourself in your boss's position. He needs to know he can rely on you to get the job done. That often means going beyond the minimum amount of work required and the time allotted. When Cohen agreed to stay late that night, he was letting his boss know he was committed to providing the highest quality product to the client. He also got a chance to strut his stuff, so to speak -- something he sorely needed to do after spending several months paying his dues with grunt work.

Get Noticed

Never be content to toil away in the back room. Pick projects that will attract attention. Perhaps you could volunteer to help with the CEO's pet project or take the initiative to solve a difficult problem. Rob Carskadden took the latter approach when he saw that his company, Fisher Scientific, needed to liquidate a huge amount of excess surplus. He decided to produce an online auctions site that utilized Fisher's existing logistics system to market, sell and distribute that surplus throughout the country. Einstein's Garage, LLC, as the site became known, is now a separate division of Fisher, and Carskadden serves as general manager.

Banish Fear

Nothing kills the entrepreneurial spirit quicker than fear. Innovative employees should never be afraid to propose new ideas. "There are risks [to being entrepreneurial]; your ideas could get shot down," admits Dave Wolkowitz, a senior account executive at PR21, a public relations firm. "But regardless of whether or not your ideas are used, people will appreciate the effort put towards stimulating creativity and innovation."

Inc. Yourself

If you want to be truly entrepreneurial, you need to treat your career like a business. Curt Tueffert recommends writing a career plan modeled after traditional business plans. The national sales director for Digital Consulting and Software Services, he teaches an advanced university professional selling course. He tells his students to incorporate themselves. "The final assignment is to turn in a blueprint for your sales career, everything that you've learned in class and all of your abilities and outside experiences," Tueffert says. "It's a blueprint, or a map, for success."