



Dr. Mildred L. Culp

ENTREPRENEURIAL EMPLOYEES: THE TRUE MULTITASKERS

The drive to increase employee stake and pride in a company has muddled our thinking about the nature of entrepreneurial employees. These employees:

- are self-directed,
- receive compensation from selling products and/or services, and
- manage the business they obtain.

Setting your own schedule by itself doesn't make you entrepreneurial, any more than does reporting only weekly to senior management about production. The method of compensation disqualifies anyone who doesn't generate the revenue from which his salary is drawn.

An employee who does nothing but sell might seem to be entrepreneurial, but isn't. Jay Shields, executive vice president of sales and marketing for the 161-year-old Schaeffer Manufacturing Co. in St. Louis, manages 300 people selling specialized lubricants for industries ranging from agriculture to utilities. Each one establishes his own client base, completely on commission and undistracted by running a business. This single-minded, sharp focus makes each person a salesperson, not an entrepreneurial employee, who manages the business he secures.

SELF-SUFFICIENCY

Self-sufficiency, the end result of the three characteristics combined, enables entrepreneurial employees to be the true multitaskers of the workplace. But not everyone who wants to be entrepreneurial can be without some coaching. Arnel Trovada, president of the 3-year-old Trovada Public Relations & Marketing in Irving, Texas, is inculcating entrepreneurship among his three account managers.

"I hire people who enjoy the entrepreneurial environment but not the monetary uncertainty that self-employment brings," he states. "For at least six months, I provide them resources, through which they build a dynamic practice. I encourage them to think of not working for a salary but for an advance on earning potential. They close on an account, staff it and produce the deliverables. The more clients and projects they manage, the more income they earn. It's up to them to figure out how much money they want to make each year." He has stock options planned when the firm is older.

Anthony Askew joined the company a year ago intending to learn every facet of his position. "I don't feel like a salesperson, because I'm not just selling," he remarks. "I'm managing and implementing the execution of the services sold. So selling, though very important, is not the primary focus of my responsibilities. I'm a content expert who sells. Our roles are very similar to partners at other consultancies."

'GET WHAT YOU EARN'

Schaeffer Manufacturing salesman Bruce Sullivan, whose territory is in Tennessee and Kentucky, joined the company "because of its prospect of being in business for myself but not by myself. They provide the support, everything but the selling, while I bring blood, sweat, tears and time.

"You get what you earn, and that's the best way to work," he says. "The more I put in this, the better it gets." He has increased his sales 20 percent each year for five consecutive years. If he wanted to bring his wife or one of their children into the business, he could. "I can actually bequeath my business to my family," he comments, "but, of course, if no one wanted it, Schaeffer would give the territory to someone else."

Sullivan found his first two years on commission difficult but now enjoys the freedom of not having to account for his every move. The company has extended favors based on his potential, including half the cost of sales tools he wants -- "If they paid the full amount, a tool might sit on my desk unused" -- and bailing him out when his car died in a snowstorm.

Sullivan concedes that the company offers him the market's best value in the industry, customers he likes and motivation from the company's values and people. "I'm not sure I'd be good at selling anything else," he muses. "Sometimes I question whether my success here comes from my selling ability or the energy I get with this company."

(With Universal Press Syndicate, Dr. Mildred Culp sponsors the annual WorkWise Award. Look for more of her helpful information at www.work-wise.com.)

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