

Recruiting an Entrepreneur?

By Ben Slick

North Americans and the businesses they work for worship the entrepreneurial spirit in public and curse it in private. Entrepreneurship can be the catalyst that a large company needs to maintain its competitive edge. But for many companies, the idea of letting someone "do their own thing" also can be very threatening to the status quo.

Cutting through the myths and understanding the benefits can help you as a manager and in your career. Entrepreneurs tend to be driven, independent people who have little tolerance for those who fail to share their energy or ideals. This passion can create new industries or real injuries.

Most entrepreneurs fit into three basic categories:

1. Those who never worked for a big company. These entrepreneurs have a high-risk profile, especially from the point of view of bigger companies. They're great for doing new things, but you'd better be prepared for the consequences.
2. Those who worked for a big company and found the limitations debilitating. You've got a medium-risk profile here. Entrepreneurs from big companies are experienced. That makes them an incredible resource for small companies - and great for big ones, too, if they return to the fold.
3. Those who are comfortable working for big companies but like to effect change within an environment with ample resources. Low risk for a big company; high risk for a small one. We warn small companies about hiring from this category to make sure their hires understand the significance of the change they're making. They'll be sending their own faxes and making their own copies.

Despite these complexities, organizations should not avoid entrepreneurs. That can be as dangerous as using them carelessly. Entrepreneurial energy is one of the only forces capable of seizing the opportunities of today's economy and turning them into profits. What you need to do is hire good athletes, not specialists.

A better understanding of the realities of the entrepreneurial world is best. Turn people on to *Red Herring*, *Business 2.0* and *Upside* magazines. Have them read *Startup*, by Jerry Kaplan, the CEO of Onsale.com. See if you can figure out how to inject entrepreneurship into your own organization.

Once you have found your athletes, give them a good playing field. Entrepreneurship demands a real degree of freedom and intensive support. Neither you nor your company will win if you send your adventurer out on a limb and then saw it off.

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