Nurturing an Entrepreneurial Culture

Entrepreneurial spirit is at the heart of what makes your organization a true contender in your industry. As a startup, you used innovation, persistence, and ingenuity to break down barriers. Now, as your company grows, you need to be proactive to keep that entrepreneurial culture alive.

A culture of entrepreneurship doesn’t just happen. It needs to be closely managed to keep your company nimble and your employees on top of their game. Sangeeta Bharadwaj Badal, the primary researcher for Gallup’s Entrepreneurship and Job Creation initiative, cites four ways to keep entrepreneurship alive as your company grows.
As your company grows, so will the need for teams dedicated to key functions such as R&D and IT. Resisting silos between such teams is important to foster collaborative thinking. Engaging the entire company in problem-solving and decision-making supports a "we’re in it together" culture and promotes an entrepreneurial environment across all teams.

Breaking down silos is also a way to bridge the gap between innovation and entrepreneurship. Teams in large companies are generally full of great ideas. What they often lack is the freedom to take risks and bring ideas to life. Connecting idea generators with those full of entrepreneurial passion will help make your company successful.

Before hiring new talent, take inventory of the traits that make your top performers who they are. Are they reliable, flexible, and resourceful? Identifying these traits will provide you criteria when looking at candidates. Ensure a right cultural fit from the very start to help avoid disruption to your business in the future.

“If you bring on people that aren’t a fit, they’ll infect other parts of the organization. Even after culture misfit hires move on, their corrosive effects on the company live on.”

3. Create a supportive environment

Having the right people in the right place is just the beginning. A supportive environment is also important to promote entrepreneurship. Characteristics of a supportive environment include:

- An environment that is open to risk-taking and acknowledgment that failure is part of the innovation process.
- A high level of trust between employees and managers. Trusting relationships empower employees and foster new ideas.
- Leadership that is committed to innovation and change at all levels of the organization. This gives managers and employees the authority and autonomy to generate new ideas.
- Time and resources for employees to embark on new and innovative projects. For example, Google lets employees spend 15% to 20% of their time working on side projects.
- Realistic performance measures. Since entrepreneurial initiatives have unknown outcomes, evaluation reward systems should accommodate failure, tolerate ambiguity, and focus on long-term outcomes.

4. Take regular temperature checks

Once practices that promote entrepreneurship are in place, you’ll need to regularly monitor and measure progress. Perceptions between leaders and employees may differ, so getting feedback from everyone is critical. Questions to ask may include, “Do you believe company leadership supports entrepreneurship?” and “Does your daily environment allow and encourage entrepreneurship?”

Make the most of your findings by sharing them with your teams. Encourage employees and managers to work together to help create the entrepreneurial culture you want to achieve. This type of continuous assessment will help you measure progress and maintain momentum.

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