3 ways to turn your employees into intrapreneurs

What's an intrapreneur? Just like an entrepreneur dedicated to building an innovative start-up business, intrapreneurs apply the same mindset to their corporate job. They start to see their role through the lens of what is possible, and what could be improved upon for the greater good of the company.

So where are the intrapreneurs? Right in front of you. Your employees have a line of view into your organization's strengths, weaknesses, inefficiencies and opportunities that management may not. When your team feels supported and encouraged to turn their invaluable, firsthand knowledge into the catalyst for ongoing improvement, you evolve your employees.

They transform from people on your payroll who do the job they're told and into highly engaged intrapreneurs.

Every employee has the potential to be an intrapreneur; it's not a role relegated only to top performers, or those who have previously worked in a start-up environment role or a consulting firm.

Yet, cultivating this mindset in your team members requires that you shape a team culture where every employee you manage knows her ideas are valuable and worth sharing.

Here's how to do it.

1. Invite consistent feedback before there is a critical problem. When it comes to workplace communication, silence isn't an indication that everything is perfect—in fact, it may signal the exact opposite.

In the book *Crucial Conversations*, the authors say the most influential people—both in life and in business—are those who learn to master so-called crucial conversations.

They know how to tackle issues in a way that is proactive and productive in order to move forward. That process starts with cultivating a collective willingness and shared agreement in your team that all issues and ideas are "safe" to be brought out into the open and discussed in a productive and nonjudgmental manner.

People are generally hard-wired to protect themselves from vulnerability, particularly when it comes to interacting with people who hold perceived power or authority.

If your employees fear job loss or similarly negative repercussions for voicing concerns or sharing ideas for improvement, they won't provide feedback in good times or bad.

To bring out every employee's intrapreneurial potential, you have to be willing to truly hear, without judgment or your own personal bias.

You establish this trust by paraphrasing. When employees share ideas and reasons for suggesting them, repeat back what you have heard them say. Ask them to confirm that you've understood correctly.

If you haven't, allow them to explain further until you've grasped exactly why they've made the suggestion. This tactic can speak volumes to employees when it comes to building a culture where employees believe their thoughts matter.

2. Be open to every suggestion. Employees will not share ideas if they perceive that you or someone else in authority has already made a decision, will dispute their idea or suggestion, or will balk at ideas that contradict the current way of doing things.

You don't have to act on every idea an employee proposes to create an intrapreneurial culture, but you do have to be willing to accept the message even if you don't like it.

Without this freedom of expression, you'll miss key opportunities to build a highly productive team whose input makes the entire organization better.

3. Set clear next steps once employees do share ideas. Communicate what happens to employee ideas once they are shared, and continually update them on the progress. Are you collecting ideas to take to a working group or committee for further discussion? What is the end goal, and what is the deadline for making the decisions related to it? Will you give employees credit for their suggestions when they are shared?

Regardless of whether an employee idea is ultimately implemented, it's important that employees know their ideas don't fall into a proverbial black hole.

If you can't take the time to let them know the outcome of their shared feedback, why should they be motivated to provide their ideas for improvement?