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Career Entrepreneurs Control Their Own Destiny

Have you ever felt as if your professional destiny was in someone else's hands? Too many professionals abdicate responsibility for their career to their employer, waiting patiently or impatiently for the next steps to be defined and/or made available. These same professionals could also get whiplash watching colleagues who take an entrepreneurial approach to their career pass them by.

Being a Career Entrepreneur (CE) means having a mindset that takes you beyond simple career development in the form of identifying a career path and creating a personal development plan. This mindset fosters actions, behaviors and risk taking that aren't on the radar screen of the average professional.

What do Career Entrepreneurs do differently than their colleagues?

First and foremost, they approach their career as a business - one in which he or she has full P&L responsibility. One way this manifests itself in the workplace is thinking beyond not only one's job but also beyond one's discipline to become a well-rounded business person familiar with the interdependencies of all areas of the company. Additionally, a CE "knows the business": the bottom-line, the products, key customers, business strategy and the reasoning behind the strategy. CEs demonstrate a curiosity about the business, building an internal network of colleagues who are willing to share their knowledge.

Not waiting for a performance evaluation or other formal development process, a Career Entrepreneur initiates personal development and growth activities. They understand that simply doing their job well, putting in time in specific roles or gaining experience with current levels of responsibility are not enough; they seek out projects or special assignments that take them beyond their normal levels of responsibility.

You will also find CEs actively networking outside the organization, with colleagues in the same industry as well as from other industries. Looking beyond the social aspects of networking, they take the opportunity to understand what issues their counterparts within and outside of the industry are facing, what successes they are experiencing and in general the best practices they are applying within their functional discipline.

Not content with maintaining the status quo, or following the adage of "if it ain't broke, don't fix it," CEs are in continuous search of functional best practices, benchmarking against the best in the industry and in the discipline. They also seek out increased knowledge of their functional discipline, growing their personal capabilities and putting themselves on the leading edge of the expertise curve, basing their skill development not only on current business requirements but on an awareness of the skills that will be required to meet future business needs.

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How do I become a Career Entrepreneur?

Individuals who want to position themselves as a Career Entrepreneur can take a few basic steps to get them on the path including:

- Get out of your cubicle or office. Take the time to meet your colleagues from around the company and build relationships that expand the boundaries you previously placed upon yourself. Build an internal network that includes people from every department in the company.
- Join and participate in local and national chapters of professional associations to build an external network. Do not limit your network to the local community. You would be surprised at how many colleagues employed by national or international competitors would welcome the opportunity to network with a fellow colleague – pick up the phone and call them.
- Volunteer for special projects or assignments, particularly those that are cross-functional in nature, in order to gain exposure throughout the company as well as to broaden your overall knowledge.
- Seek out a mentor. Don't wait for someone in the company to match you up with a mentor. Identify and approach one or two key leaders whom you respect and from whom you believe you could learn.
- Selectively attend conferences/seminars at which you will be exposed to functional and industry best practices as well as to opportunities to learn and expand your skill set.
- Study your company's business strategy so that you understand the impact of the work you do on the company's ability to achieve its goals.

Over the next several years, as companies face pending retirements of baby boomers, there will be an abundance of opportunities for members of successive generations to set themselves apart and position themselves to assume key leadership roles. Career Entrepreneurs will be first in line and will likely rise to the highest positions. It is not too late for forward thinking Generation Xers and Yers to take the steps necessary to identify themselves as a Career Entrepreneur.