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Kelley Keehn

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Building bridges in business

By KELLEY KEEHN



Before taking the risk of entrepreneurship, you might want to consider "intrapreneurship."

It's simple, and speaking as someone that's been both an employee and a business owner, I think the concept is quite brilliant. Intrapreneurship is defined by dictionary.com as "a person within a large corporation who takes direct responsibility for turning an idea into a profitable finished product through assertive risk-taking and innovation."

To learn more about this unique business concept, I contacted nearly a dozen large corporations for their opinion and insights. Eight failed to return my inquiry at all, and two declined courteously.

But one company, Stantec Inc., opened its doors, willingly available to comment, and with passion, I might add, about their commitment to nurturing the intrapreneur.

Edmonton-based Stantec's goal is to become one of the top-10 companies of its kind. It has grown through acquisition to include more than 5,500 employees at locations throughout North America.

Stantec president and CEO Tony Franceschini described the corporate culture of Stantec with passion and eloquence.

He's only the third CEO in the company's 52-year history. Franceschini embraces the role of the intrapreneur, and describes it as, "an entrepreneurship with boundaries."

A visionary has great freedom and opportunity for growth within Stantec, but still needs to understand and work with the company's vision and values, he said.

Lofty goals elusive

In 1978, just before joining Stantec as a design engineer, Franceschini contemplated

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going it alone as an entrepreneur. However, he knew that the lofty goals he had set for himself were never to be realized as a one-person operation.

"I knew I needed a team to get done what I wanted to accomplish, and putting ego aside, I also didn't need all of the credit that comes with owning your own business," said Franceschini.

Stantec's team spirit is evident in its Confederation Bridge project. The 13-kilometre bridge links Prince Edward Island and New Brunswick. In celebration of its completion, Stantec produced 1,500 buttons for employees that stated, "I built the bridge."

Only a small portion of employees designed, worked on, or had a direct impact on the bridge.

But at Stantec, with their intrapreneurial focus, everyone from the invoice clerk, to the receptionist, CEO or communications officer gets to say, "I built the bridge."

"You don't get to do that as an entrepreneur," Franceschini added.

As an owner, you get all of whatever glory your company achieves, but in a larger company, everyone gets to share success.

Stantec follows a number of brilliant corporate models and philosophies. Franceschini admires the Lexus slogan: "the relentless pursuit of excellence."

He notes that the word "pursuit" is of the utmost importance in that it presupposes that excellence can never be achieved, so one must continually strive; and strive together as a corporation.

The successful strategy of Lexus and Toyota has never been a secret, Franceschini noted. They've always built quality cars, and altered their designs and offerings as the marketplace determined. Any automotive company desiring to mirror the success of Lexus needs only to witness their values and vision; no great secret there, yet it's so rarely done.

Franceschini and his team also walk their talk. During my tour of the Stantec building, I was greeted with smiles by other employees, and company pride beamed as much from communications team leader Jay Averill as it did from Franceschini. Averill also takes delight in the Confederation Bridge. On a visit to the bridge, he saw tourists taking pictures of the mammoth structure.

Helped build bridge

"I got to tell them that I helped build that bridge," said Averill.

Entrepreneur, intrapreneur or just an employee, there are options today within large corporations that are worth exploring. If the business-ownership bug hits you shortly, consider that freedom, corporate flexibility and rewards might be available right at the company you currently work with, or is at least worth exploring in others.

Kelley Keehn, lecturer, personal coach and author of *The Prosperity Factor*, uncovers the "inner games" people play surrounding wealth. Visit Kelley at www.TheProsperityFactor.com or call her at 780-732-0144. Letters to the editor should be sent to mailbag@edmsun.com.

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