

## One Final Adventure

# The Entrepreneurial Employee

*An entrepreneur launches  
his own adventure – it doesn't matter  
who signs the paycheck.*

*–bj*

As discussed in Chapter 9, The Call of Career, the workplace offers expansive opportunities for you – the Self CEO to carve out a path of mastery and creative fulfillment. Yet for a host of reasons, the salaried employee tends to miss more of these opportunities and voluntarily cede more choices to others. Thus, for all those who are swapping their expert services for a paycheck, we offer this pocket guide of examples to make sure you don't forget to carry the Enterprise of You into your jobsite.

She was the new kid in the shop, with no experience, and to make it worse, she was the owner's niece. No one held very high hopes for this upstart. But Shari Spiro seethed with a friendly fire. You could tell by the way her words just came tumbling out as she came up to you and began asking questions, and more questions.

Placed by her uncle at a tiny desk with small administrative duties, Shari took every opportunity to walk the floor, learn each staff member's expertise, and absorb every aspect of the small job printing business. She learned color blending, distribution, sales techniques, pricing, and production methods from letterpress to laser. She wanted to master it all. Shari also devoted countless hours talking with repeat clients, discerning their needs and giving a face to the service the shop provided.

"In the beginning, it came from a need to prove myself," Shari recalls. "I was determined not to be known as just the boss's niece, given a charity job. But very soon I really got into it...I just found the whole world of

printing fascinating, and the business part really excited me.” By the end of her first year, staff members began to turn to Shari with their questions. She had become the go-to girl for coworkers seeking an overview or forgotten details.

So what exactly made the young Ms. Spiro stand out? She saw business as a realm of opportunity – not an obligation. Shari had entered into her new situation with an entrepreneurial attitude. By entrepreneur we mean an individual engaged in creating value – someone willing to undertake some exceptional challenges to bring forth worthwhile benefits, including, but not limited to financial gain. Personally, this author always envisions an entrepreneur as any enterprising venturer who is more scared of missing out on the fun of an opportunity, than she is scared of failing at it.

Tucked into Shari’s entrepreneurial portfolio were the following assumptions:

- ▶ I am a talented individual with many things to offer. (I’ve already toured my mental warehouse and discovered a marvelous, capable self.)
- ▶ Yes, I also am now part of a team. Each of these folks holds some information that can help me perform better – and perhaps I might discover some ways I may add to their experience.
- ▶ I want to be – I can be a contributor.
- ▶ Here is an opportunity for fun and challenge. There’s a whole lot of activity buzzing around this hive – interesting people, inventive processes. The more I know about who and what’s making it all happen, the happier my workdays will be.

Wisely, a few of the attitudes Shari excluded from her portfolio included.



- ▶ I’d better be very careful, keep my head down, and make sure I don’t screw up.
- ▶ Focus on my job and don’t get distracted by things around me.
- ▶ I really need this job. The money is very important to everything I have planned in my life.
- ▶ Every person in this company is my competitor. I need to constantly compare my progress against theirs.

These guaranteed recipes for workplace misery she left safely tucked in a closet at home.




**Tips & Tasks** Shari Spiro's entrepreneurial mindset fed these actions:

- ▶ Studying the latest printing techniques and discussing them with coworkers. Then, taking their mutually derived ideas/suggestions to the owner.
- ▶ Examining her assigned projects and determining each's exact role in the entire business process.
- ▶ Constantly adjusting and expanding her labors to make them more effective with that process.
- ▶ Developing a mental catalog of individuals' various expertise and resources. ("Jill is the one to help me with this.")
- ▶ Forging personal relationships throughout the entire workplace regardless of rank. Doing favors – finding after-hours interests.
- ▶ Giving credit for that exceptional endeavor aimed at improving the firm's product or procedures.
- ▶ Casually making folks aware of her individual effort and willingness to help.

Do you suppose some of these habits might bring a little zest, benefit, and personal mastery into your workday?

As an after note, when I met Shari Spiro, she was busily plunged into managing the rewards of her entrepreneurial business approach. As will happen in family firms, circumstances shifted. Several years after Shari's joining the company, her uncle, for reasons both personal and financial opted to sell the shop. By mutual consent, Shari took over the business, changing the company's name and direction. Titled Admagic, CEO Shari Spiro and her lean team now stand as one of the largest independent manufacturers and publishers of new playing card and board games. Catering to the more rebellious/fun streak in millennials, the company has brought forth the wildly popular Cards Against Humanity, Exploding Kittens, and other successes too humorous to mention. Her coveted games sell so well worldwide that Shari has developed a 3-D device to prevent international piracy. And Shari still radiates her broad smile and engaged energy that indicate how much joy she is finding in her chosen career.

## The Wage Slave

Of course, instead of launching into your job as an entrepreneur, you can always lapse into default mode, and opt for the Barcalounger approach. Shuffle into your new supervisor's office and greet her with, "What do you want me to do, boss? I'll do anything you ask." While this all-too-popular first-day announcement to your employer may seem ingratiatingly obliging, it is the last thing she wants to hear. In essence, you are reminding her that she has just hired a too  mindless worker, awaiting instructions, showing up to serve his time. "Just the thing we need, how nice."

Further, with those thirteen words, you have wrapped up all your chief executive self-mastery and tossed it into the lap of another. All your decisions, your time, your thinking process, and, let's face it, any hopes for pride and joy you have given away. And no, this is not part of your trade, as we discussed earlier. Your trade is the valuable services you perform in exchange for the chosen compensations you require. Your mind and spirit are non-negotiable pearls beyond price.



**Blunders to Avoid** And by the way, poverty is no excuse for the wage slave attitude. You may have desperately grabbed your current job to keep a rented roof over your head and put three bowls of rice daily on your children's table. This merely means you are poor, it does not mean you must make poverty your master. All the entrepreneurial opportunities discussed above are equally available to the assistant produce stacker in the local grocery store, as to the CFO of a global tech giant. Your chance to proudly create value always stands. Got a good idea to share with the boss, or a question for a coworker?


As a young, dirt-poor, African American man, Ken Parker stood in front of Atlantic Electric's headquarters, walked around to the rear, donned his jumpsuit, and began mowing the grass. 18 years later, Ken again stood in front of these corporate offices. This time he walked in the front door, greeted all his coworkers, chatted with his administrative assistant, pushed open the door marked "President" and dropped himself down in the huge leather chair behind his desk. Another day of keeping more than half a million families in the greater Philadelphia area electrically empowered.

Ken's mind-boggling rise rings with the aura of a romantic, Horatio-Alger fantasy. He was the first in his family ever to graduate, or even attend, college, and certainly the first to obtain such a leadership position. But once you meet the man, it becomes obvious that there's a lot more at play here than some allegory of sweat and naked ambition. Ken Parker took a markedly different entrepreneurial approach to his career. He exhibited an almost terrifying laser concentration on each task set before him. "You could always tell when Ken has cut the grass," was the common remark around Atlantic City Electric. It was a sense of powerful pride that fed his ownership of each undertaking throughout his vocation. Lawn maintenance was not an assignment. This was Ken's personal responsibility which, by heaven, would reflect the kind of person he was.

Secondly, employee Parker held a vision. He took to heart the mission of his company and, like Shari Spiro, actively built a solid understanding of all the workplace processes around him. "Each time they gave me a new assignment," Ken recalls, "I would make a list of all the departments and individuals this job would effect. Then I'd go around and ask each one how I might differently perform my job to make things work a little better for them on their end."



**Tips & Tasks**

If you wisely want to undertake the Parker-performance-networking system in your own workplace, why not actively take notes as you listen to the needs of your coworkers  Let each one see you recording her ideas. And, oh yes, don't forget fulfillment, and followup.

## Your Three Promotable Products

Business is a juggling act. Whether you are on an existing firm's payroll, or you are desperately trying to generate revenue from a venture you are launching, you are still an entrepreneur – out there creatively creating value. And this means you have three separate, yet connected value sources that you always hold in your mind to promote and push forward.

**1. Your Marvelous Self** You are performing your own work, employing your own tactics. You are that individual who is always thinking, concerned about his coworkers, coming up with good ideas, and bringing beneficial things to the firm. The responsibility falls on your shoulders to connect your many deeds with their author. People need to see the value you are generating, so that they will give you the respect you are richly earning every day. (Hint: Self-promotion is a subtle art. Your deeds alone may not speak for you. Some brief reminders and quick mentions on the fly always seem to work better than leaning in with diatribes on the greatness of your grand efforts.)

**2. Your Company** You are part of a team. You have committed yourself to these other men and women, and their corporate goals. Just as you individually stand for your personal principles, the company you have joined has its mission, and its unique culture. What elements of these make you proud to be working here? Yes, of course, there are some bozos and bullies, but which leader and coworkers are performing so admirably that you can boast about the connection?

**3. Your Product/Service** You have made yourself aware of all the benefits of what the company brings forth – as well as your part in the creation of these benefits. You have talked to the clients and discovered how they profit from what your company offers. 'Tis only natural that you want to share those benefits, for the sake of your own pride and the good of the community. If you truly search and find nothing good about what you're selling, you have two choices. Either labor to make that product worthwhile, or get the heck out of this company before you spiral into a self-loathing cynicism.

None of these three items stands in conflict with one another. Pride, like love, is not a fixed-amount emotion. That pride you hold in the company you've chosen to offer your services, will feed your personal value and

raise the esteem in which you hold yourself. Likewise, the enrichment your product brings to the clients and the community at large is also a personal value enhancer. After all, you personally are contributing to it. It's success is yours. Just remember, sales are not the sole measure of value. Even if the buyers haven't caught on yet, your brand's safety, quality, durability, or whatever your niche, all reflects favorably on you.



**Tips & Tasks** Like it or not, you (and every other employee) will become the spokesperson for the company at which you work.

Those people surrounding you will grow to know your company through your eyes, and your reports. Now, I don't know a darn thing about tractors, but after five minutes listening to John Deere worker Wanda Sano, I wanted to buy a John Deere. I even wanted to work for her company. No, Wanda wasn't in sales; at the time she was guiding executives through the labyrinth of her firm's computer technologies. She simply believed in her vocation and the product towards which she contributed. I still don't know anything about tractors, but I'll bet 10 cents of my own money that Ms. Sano, with her vision of the value she's adding, heads her off to her job with an energy, fun, and pride that most of us would envy. Have you found any source of pride in your workplace and its team?

## In the Corporate Swim

As we have noted, being an entrepreneur is a mindset, not an activity. Your mindset of innate curiosity and inventiveness can lever you out of workplace loathing, up into workplace enthusiasm. That said, it all becomes a lot more complex when you step into a massive corporate entity.

Financier Warren Buffet noted that it is difficult to judge your accomplishment within a large corporation: you always wonder if the company is like a train bustling along at sixty miles an hour while you are sitting still. You try to keep awareness of your individual contribution to the firm's progress and products, but it may appear remote and hard to trace. You try to be inventive, but however brilliant, your innovations can get lost in protocol. In business, all too often, big means sluggish.

The good news is that the entrepreneurial mindset scales easily from little shops like Shari's to multi-thousand-employee corporations, like Ken Parker's Atlantic City Electric, Inc. Regardless of company size, you take full engagement in the three value entities of your work: self, company, and products. The opportunities are still there – more often greater. But the engagement process requires some extra steps and research.

First, catch the company rhythm. Just like joining any new business, you begin building a solid understanding of the processes – who does what in your area, how do things move, through whom. Buzzworders today call it the culture. But the firm's rhythm is more dynamic – less tangible. Does this company operate with a steady, legato, thoughtful flow – or do things surge in staccato jumps? And if these moves come suddenly, what and/or who is conducting this rhythm? Do board meetings make the company ship come alive on a new course – or is it the economy, or seasonal sales shifts? In short, you are not just scrutinizing how things get done, but determining why. Discerning this rhythm will indicate the leadership's goals, along with the optimum time and method of making your ideas heard. If possible, ask to audit a board meeting. Even if your supervisor refuses the request, he'll take note of your interest.


Secondly, cast your study beyond your company, and catch the industry tempo. Most high tech businesses (though not all) stride hell bent on



disruptive innovation. New decisions are best – rapid decisions are even better. Insurance providers, backed by centuries of process and success, generally move with greater reluctance. The easiest way to seize a strong sense of industry tempo is to attend a few professional organization gatherings. Count on it. As you stand there listening, the tune of your industry will be sung loud and strong.

So what does this have to do with my entrepreneurial self-mastery? Well, as Chief Executive Officer, it is your job to fully assess your circumstance. You may hold powerful assets, and you may be aware of them. But where you deploy that personal capability depends on the currents of the stream you've stepped into. If the majority of your industry is banging the innovation-today drum, yet your company moves with traditional caution, what is your best strategy for promoting yourself, your firm, and its products?

## **Entrepreneurial Checklist**

When it comes to exploring and learning about the company you have selected to receive your many services, the process remains fairly similar, large or small. Invest your time and meet every individual you can. Learn who does what. What's their problem – what's their expertise? When are their birthdays? How many kids are they feeding? What do they know that you need to? What ould you do to make their job easier? What's their favorite lunch/after-school place that you're going to invite them to learn more? Oh, and don't forget that you are feeding more than your business self. Look for new friends, folks engaged in common interests, and yes, even romance. (The world is a tragedy for those who only think.)

However, in the larger corporate setting, you and your firm occupy a greater portion of the economic stage. The more you know about your industry as a whole and its place in the national/global commerce picture, the more valuable you become and the more people in decision-making positions will want to talk with you.

Knowledge held in a state of readiness, at any level, transforms you from an assigned-job worker to an asset. A few of the tongue-tip answers you will want to keep abreast of include:

- ▶ What is your company's stated mission?
- ▶ What is the firm's revenue? What is the current trend? What prime streams are most responsible for this income?
- ▶ What are the prime products that are bringing in the revenue? Who is buying them and what is their selling niche (e.g. is your product the cheapest, highest quality, best known, most convenient to local customers, etc.?)
- ▶ How do these brand values and sales figures compare with the competition? What's indicated by these figures?
- ▶ Looking at recent industry trends, who is succeeding and why?
- ▶ Fun Facts – Your firm has a triple retention rate of similar firms in the industry. More leadership roles are filled by humanities majors in your company than researchers or engineers. It never hurts to pose a few fascinating stats to liven up discussions and lighten the mood.

Finally, last mentioned, but vitally at the top of every businessperson's exploratory checklist comes **The Customer**. The most effective entrepreneurial strategy I have heard in all my years came from University of Arizona Professor Scott Livengood: If you have it in mind to start an enterprise, go sit down, face-to-face with 20 people who might use/buy/benefit from your product, and listen to their needs and ideas concerning what you have to offer. Not three, not five, not 20 interviews seven years ago. This is more than customercentric showmanship. You are going to be devoting your brain and sweat into this enterprise. You need to keep constantly calling and learning from those folks who did buy what you've helped make – and those who didn't buy. Yes, we mean making personal phone calls to strange, valued clients.

## Taking Pride

Your pride is a sin only to someone who sees it as a threat to their own individual gain. As CEO of your marvelous self, pride is one of the greatest sources of personal reward and encouragement you will discover on the job – or anywhere in life. As the entrepreneurial employee, this means clutching at pride in your personal accomplishments – those of your company – and those of its products. Your ideas and achievements remain truly yours. Company owners supplying you workspace and salary may compensate you, but they cannot own you, nor should you let them hamper the contagious pride they create in you.

Donovan Klotzbeacher, working for the Agricultural Department's inspection core, spent his days at the New York port checking the incoming cargo for invasive pests. An irrepressible tech wizard, Don invented a program which weened all the inspectors away from using paper manifests, onto a faster, sharable, computerized system. The Secretary of Agriculture personally thanked Don, and a small bonus was involved, but that was all the official recognition.

If you lay pipes along a roadway, end to end, you had better be sure those ends are precisely cut so that each length lines up perfectly flush, or you may be sending water off into the next county. Warehouse worker Marvin Arroyo spotted this hazard, as well as the flaws of the existing systems. So he invented a wooden mold that assured a perfect cut for each length of pipe in going out of his workplace. Marvin's boss thanked him profusely, set him on the top of the overtime opportunity list. And Marvin went back to work.

Unlike Shari Spiro or Ken Parker, the world did not open for these two entrepreneurial individuals. Neither ended up growing rich or taking board of directors' seats. Instead, each won the admiration of the most important person in his life – himself. And if you would like to see justified pride at work, glance over at Marvin or Don when they stroll through the office/warehouse and see their inventions in use. Theirs is the compensation of the entrepreneurial employee. 'Tis an opportunity potentially available to each person entering the realm of business. Yes, Self CEO, we mean you. 