

Theory E²: Working with Entrepreneurs in Closely-Held Enterprises

VI. The Inspiring Entrepreneur

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While the assertive entrepreneur provides the fire to move a closely-held enterprise forward, the inspiring entrepreneur helps the closely-held enterprise decide where it wants to, or should, go. The assertive executive burns up the resources of the closely-held enterprise; the inspiring executive helps to import resources from outside the organization. Inspiring entrepreneurs serve as the *strange attractors* of which chaos theorist and, more recently, organizational theorists, speak.ⁱ Often with minimal effort, the inspiring entrepreneur attracts media attention and the interest of people who are only vaguely acquainted with her organization. Like many gurus (ranging from Buddha to Jesus) the inspiring entrepreneur often seems to gather people and resources around her without even trying.

The inspiring entrepreneur also helps other members of his enterprise to decide which resources to use and articulates the reasons for doing so. The inspiring entrepreneur encourages an organization to look at its potential. The inspiring executive draws attention to that which is important in the closely-held enterprise and away from that which is unimportant or distracting. The inspiring entrepreneur often asks simple questions as a way of drawing attention to important matters. How do we get help to people who really need it? What really is our business? Why are we doing this? What would our founder think about what we are doing right now?

The inspiring entrepreneur also helps to build community and, in her engagement with other members of the organization in defining vision, values and purpose, helps to build commitment to the closely-held enterprise and its mission. The inspiring executive is a person who cares about the welfare of others. She believes strongly that the ends do not always justify the means. Focusing on the intentions of the closely-held enterprise, the inspiring entrepreneur constantly turns to the enduring values of the closely-held enterprise. While the assertive entrepreneur is needed by an organization to bring about necessary change, the inspiring entrepreneur is indispensable in helping to heal the wounds that are brought about by the processes of change and insuring that these changes relate to the organization's mission.

Focus

The inspiring entrepreneur focuses on values, on relationships – and on the ideal state of the closely-held enterprise. Like the assertive executive, the inspiring executive often grows impatient when members of a group dwell too long on facts and figures. The inspiring entrepreneur always wants to know what the human implications are that lie behind these facts and figures and wants to know how these numbers relate to the core values and vision of the closely-held enterprise. The inspiring entrepreneur tends to react negatively to facts and figures because they are often used to ground the organization in so-called reality.

Organizations soon lose sight of their vision when they are constantly looking down at their ledgers and policy manuals.

The inspiring entrepreneur, however, grows uncomfortable with the assertive entrepreneur's desire to charge ahead with a new idea and immediately take action. The inspiring executive often believes that assertive executives take action without considering the human cost and without ensuring that the action leads in the desired direction. The unilateral actions that are taken by assertive executives may destroy relationships, shatter a sense of community and destroy the commitment. The inspiring entrepreneur plays a critical role in a closely-held enterprise when she encourages the closely-held enterprise to build a strong base of trust and support before moving out into a stressful and turbulent world.

Appropriate Use of Strengths

The inspiring entrepreneur provides an organization with direction and a sense of purpose. The inspiring executive wants to know what is missing in the organization. What is the tough question that this organization never asks about itself? What has this organization lost and must find again? What is needed to make this an excellent closely-held enterprise? The answers to these questions do not come from numerical analyses or policy manuals. Through these questions and through her own actions in the organization, the inspiring executive repeatedly draws the attention of members back to the central, convening vision, purpose and values of the closely-held enterprise.

The inspiring entrepreneur constantly pulls energy into an organization and focuses it on that which is truly important. In doing so, the inspiring executive helps to define the basic and recurring patterns of the organization. The inspiring executive can attract attention to the core vision, purposes and values of an organization primarily because she knows how to relate the personal aspirations of members to the vision and purposes of the closely-held enterprise. She is also in a position to convince members that the vision can and should be attained.

Frequently, the inspiring entrepreneur formulates the vision herself and plays a central role in building community and commitment around this vision. The inspiring entrepreneur may also become the steward or servant of the vision that is established and enacted by other members of the community. The inspiring executive no longer holds the vision herself. The vision is built by and shared with the entire community. The inspiring executive works hard to make sure it is realized or at least that the organization consistently works toward the vision. She often plays the painful but necessary role of referee or guardian, making sure that everyone is playing by the rules and working toward the mission. The actions of all members of the closely-held enterprise should be aligned with its core values.

Inappropriate Use of Strengths

The inspiring entrepreneur is most often criticized for being impractical or soft. The first of these criticisms is justified when the inspiring entrepreneur distracts an organization from the needed consideration of its current reality. It is always tempting to look up at the sky and dream when the world that surrounds us isn't very pleasant or when it is devoid of any prospects of success. Assertive executives often suggest that inspiring executives are too soft. They believe that the inspiring executive's overriding concern with building community and commitment often keeps an organization from getting the job done. If we wait for everyone to make a firm commitment to a new project, it will never get off the ground. Furthermore, people often begin to feel like they're part of a community only when the community begins to take action and achieve real results.

The assertive entrepreneur is correct in suggesting that desired outcomes are often not fully understood or appreciated until an organization begins to enact a new project or program. There are often unanticipated early benefits associated with a new project that add further value. Commitment builds when people see that something tangible really will occur. The inspiring entrepreneur sometimes fails to fully appreciate the compelling force of action and the potentially disruptive role that can be played by someone who is always pointing toward an uncertain future rather than celebrating what has already been accomplished.

ⁱ Wheatley (1992)