

A GENERAL'S GUIDE
TO DEPLOYING AN ARMY
OF ENTREPRENEURS

JENNIFER PROSEK

WHEN YOU BUILD A TEAM, are you focused on joining links in a chain or weaving together a strong rope of intertwined employees?

While I may have started out building a chain—mindful that a chain is only as strong as its weakest link—I came to see that interweaving the threads of a rope came much closer to meeting my goal of a cohesive, interactive team.

That way, I eliminate the inevitable spaces between chain links, replacing them with a “rope” team, where every thread is bound together.

My Philosophy: Why it Worked for Me and How to Make it Work for You

The rope analogy illustrates my philosophy of team-building; every member is important and adds value and is encouraged to develop an “owner’s mindset” and take on new responsibilities. This is the foundation for “Army of Entrepreneurs™,” a management and training model I developed over time at my firm, CJP Communications. This is the model I used as I found, trained and deployed my staff—my Army—and I could not be more satisfied and proud of the results we’ve had and the achievements I see on a daily basis.

To give you the full picture of how this strategy worked for my company, we need to go back to the fall of 2007. I was pregnant and had planned on a full month of maternity leave. In the past, even when I went on vacation, I was looped into everything that was happening with clients and staff. But now I was in a position where I wanted and needed to reorder my priorities.

During these stressful weeks leading up to my maternity leave I was plagued by a recurring nightmare that the company I joined when I was 22 and co-owned by the time I was 30 would flounder if I was not there to run it six or seven days a week. Then the unexpected happened. My daughter was born three weeks early and I had to put my trust in my team.

Saved by an Army of Entrepreneurs!

The good news is that, even before my expectant mother panic, I had been working on a new way to configure my business, one that tapped the tremendous talent of every member of my company and inspired them to rise up and face the challenges of the day whether or not I was in the office to see it. I had amassed, trained and deployed An Army of Entrepreneurs . . . and they sure came to my rescue!

I was transitioning into motherhood and preparing for my new role as a working mother and my company was not only doing fine, it was thriving. This was not, I knew, a matter of luck or even hard work, but the result of a strategy I had been percolating for years. All the building blocks I'd put in place—the boot camp training, the talent pipeline, the compensation/reward system—were working together to keep my company chugging along at a very nice clip even at the height of the recession.

As a business owner, I know it feels as though we've been through a war in the last couple of years. I can tell you unequivocally that using this breakthrough strategy has allowed my business to survive and even grow, no small achievement by today's standards.

There's a very concrete reason the "Army" model helped my company succeed despite the hard times. I did not have to re-train my team for doomsday scenarios and try to come up with a makeshift strategy to stay afloat. I just asked them to take what they were already doing and kick it up a notch. They took on the challenge with gusto because when your General tells you there is a battle to be fought, the Army needs to be ready and they need to fight to win!

Any Business Can Be an Army of Entrepreneurs

This experience also taught me another important lesson: the Army model was not just a way to run my own business but perhaps a way to run any business, even in a challenging economy, and come out the other side an engaged, motivated and growing company.

I want to share the core components of the strategy outlined in my book *Army of Entrepreneurs: Create an Engaged and Empowered Workforce for Exceptional Business Growth*, so others can replicate the success I have had and use it in their own organizations to ensure their own growth.

The roadmap is clear and the steps are fairly simple to understand. But leaders who think the Army strategy could work for them have to make a full commitment—and that can be hard.

For the strategy to work, you need to do some things differently and we all know change is uncomfortable, especially in the beginning. I also want to warn you that there will be naysayers inside and outside of your organization and some days you may be tempted to give up. But I promise that if you follow the steps I've laid out, you'll see results and, in the end, you and your staff will be happier and more productive.

Believe me when I say you can't do this half way. If your soldiers sense you are less than fully committed, they will not embrace the new marching orders and actions needed to be successful.

10 Questions to Ask Yourself Before Mobilizing Your Army of Entrepreneurs

1. Have you read up on recent trends in management theory? This will give you a foundation for your efforts and confidence that you are doing the right thing.
2. Do you have support for this change? Surround yourself with a team that believes and wants to help you make it succeed.
3. Are you being true to yourself? Are you comfortable with change and committed to seeing it through, even if it's difficult?
4. Can you keep it simple? You need to make your program simple and easy to understand and your message repetitive and straightforward.
5. Can you bring action, not just words? Culture is king and it is created by consistent, repetitive measures.
6. Can you set up some quick wins? Momentum fuels innovation. Create some early successes then shout it from the rooftops!
7. Are you ready to give up control? More decisions will be made without you. Great ideas will come from other sources and business will come from more directions. Can you handle becoming less relevant, less important, and less central?
8. Can you tune out the negative noise? As Jason Fried said in his book *Rework* (Crown Business, 2010) ignore the real world. You need to tune out the pessimists, the naysayers and those who want to drag you down.

9. Are you being realistic? The AOE system works. I can promise you this based on my own personal experience. But I can also tell you that running a business is full of disappointments and unexpected twists and turns.
10. Have you armed your employees? If you were an employee of the company could you tell me the purpose of the company or the problem it is trying to solve? Could you tell me if you were adding value and how? And can you tell me why it is worthwhile to work at your company? Give your workforce concrete answers to these questions so they can march forward with you, with confidence and direction.

Yes? All right then. What are you waiting for?

When you build a team, are you focused on joining links in a chain or weaving together a strong rope of intertwined employees?

Four Key Steps to Building an Army

Imagine what *your* business could accomplish if every employee was an internal entrepreneur. There would be a steady flow of new ideas and every person would treat the business like it was their own.

I have outlined briefly the four key strategies you will need to help you to amass, train and deploy your own Army of Entrepreneurs. Remember it all starts with you, General, so lead by example and your troops will fall in step and march forward with you towards success!

Establish and nurture an entrepreneurial culture

Culture isn't optional. To truly build an Army of Entrepreneurs, you must maintain the right practices and outlook. The four elements of a core culture include authenticity, commitment to people, commitment to the business and continuous effort.

An Army also needs an open, transparent culture. "Management by empowerment" is essential. People must be encouraged to think independently and take risks. The old command-and-control management model is dead, replaced by a fast and flexible culture that rewards innovative thinking.

Create a "Nudge"

A "nudge," according to behavioral economist Richard Thaler of the University of Chicago, is a harmless bit of engineering that manages to attract people's attention and alter their behavior in a positive way, without actually requiring anyone to do much at all.

At CJP Communications, our nudge is a program called “Commission for Life™” in which any person who sets up a meeting that leads to new business—that’s it, just sets up the meeting—receives a 5 percent commission for the life of that account. While CJP’s system, is a cash reward, any ongoing incentive works.

I also make sure I focus on offering “psychic” compensation. This type of compensation doesn’t come in monetary (or really any tangible) form. Instead I offer my employees autonomy. I offer them complex and challenging work to keep them engaged and learning. I am generous with my praise and my appreciation.

Teach employees the business

While many businesses are focused on teaching employees the skills they need to do their jobs, an Army approach is focused on “teaching the business”—how it makes money, where clients come from, why they stay or go and other big-picture issues.

Having internal entrepreneurs brings increased innovation and business growth because everyone thinks and acts more like an owner. Owners understand how the organization makes a profit and moves forward, and empowered employees can make decisions, bring ideas and act in the best interest of the company. In addition, internal entrepreneurs are generally happier and stay longer in their jobs. Why? Because they feel like they are a true part of what is happening and see their contributions making a difference.

Maintain momentum

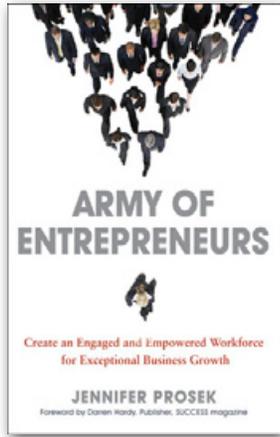
Inertia is the enemy! Building and maintaining an Army of Entrepreneurs and the culture that sustains it takes ongoing effort, initiative and originality. It's critical to maintain momentum. There are three key components to keeping the energy alive—compensation, morale and communication. This trifecta is critically important because employees want and need these elements to be successful at work, and companies who recognize and deliver on them will have a talent advantage.

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Standing Together as a Squadron

With these tools in your arsenal you are ready to lead your Army and fight the good fight to keep your business growing and your employees challenged, empowered and engaged.

But remember to take a little time to celebrate your victories and commiserate over the landmines that you will inevitably face. **Just make sure you do it as squadron and never let your rope start to fray.** 🇺🇸



BUY THE BOOK

Get more details or buy a copy of Jennifer Prosek's [*Army of Entrepreneurs*](#).

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jennifer Prosek is founder and CEO of CJP Communications, a leading international public relations and financial communications consultancy, and the author of *Army of Entrepreneurs: Create an Engaged and Empowered Workforce for Exceptional Business Growth* (AMACOM, February 2011). CJP and Prosek have won numerous honors. CJP was named an Inc. 5000 Fastest-Growing company, has been recognized as one of the "Top Places to Work in PR" by *PR News*, and was named "Small Agency of the Year" by The Holmes Report and one of the tri-state area's 2011 "Great Entrepreneurial Places to Work" by *New York Enterprise Report*. Prosek lectures frequently at business schools including Columbia, and at entrepreneurial/business groups, such as the Yale Chief Executive Leadership Institute. You can follow Jen on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#).

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