10 Tips for Intrapreneurs[[1]](#footnote-1)

Note:

This document is based on information provided in SustainAbility’s second Skoll Program report (entitled “Social Intrapreneur’s Field Guide”) which investigates the role of social intrapreneurs, a new breed of intrapreneurs working within businesses. Social Intrapreneurs are defined as someone who works inside a major corporation or organization to develop and promote practical solutions to social or environmental challenges where progress is currently stalled by market failures.

By interviewing some of the world’s leading corporate change makers, the Skoll Program report is able to provide aspiring intrapreneurs with a collection of tried and true best practices that are applicable to any kind of innovation effort in an organizational setting. The comprehensive report is included in the support resources section for i2i Mentoring participants on our website.

**1.** **Focus on solving a problem, not selling a solution -** It may sound simple, but prioritizing problem-solving is an essential element to successful intrapreneurship. Keen observers of their environments, leading intrapreneurs conduct rigorous research and constantly strive for deeper insight. It is this quest for understanding that yields more effective and innovative solutions.

**2.** **Use storytelling, but build the business case** - Getting colleagues to make a perceptual shift from today’s reality to tomorrow’s possibility is a critical challenge. Mary Harmon of Trium Group, an organizational transformation consultancy, puts it this way: “It’s important for people to have a line of sight. You need to show them not only where you want to go, but how you are going to get there.” Most intrapreneurs find that storytelling, images and prototypes help people to grasp the opportunity. But stories alone aren’t sufficient. Changemakers need to build the business case for action. In particular, intrapreneurs must be clear about the potential business benefits - and about the timescales likely to be involved. “People will want to know ‘why us?’”

**3. Align with the best of the company culture -** Once the problem has been identified and carefully researched, successful intrapreneurs know they must focus on how their efforts can leverage the core competencies of their organization, including finance, innovation, marketing, distribution and access to global networks. Similarly, social intrapreneurs have found that their chances of success are greatest when they can link their projects to the company’s ambitions, values, culture and history. Citi, for example, moved to 24-hour banking in the 1980s in an attempt to extend its services to previously underserved middle class consumers.

**4. Go to the top -** Don’t get hung up on getting the support of top management, but remember that companies tend to respond energetically to signals from the CEO and other leaders. Then, once top people have got the message, they need to keep banging the drum. “If you support the idea,” as Procter & Gamble’s Win Sakdinan insisted, “don’t stop saying it!” In siloed organizations, Sakdinan stressed, change takes longer - often much longer. “So be a broken record,” he advised. “And be patient.” Interestingly, many intrapreneurs stress the importance of remaining under the radar in the early stages. Shell’s Sachin Kapila was particularly strong on this point: “If you get too high a profile too early on, your work can easily get blocked,” he warned. “Get success first, demonstrate the possibilities, document your learning, build alliances and go from there. Otherwise, you’re just setting yourself up for a big fall.”

**5. Wherever possible, use existing processes -** Most intrapreneurs attribute much of their success to their ability to integrate their new thinking and requirements into existing processes. This not only enables them to access company resources and know-how, but also helps to create support for their efforts by getting more of the mainstream company involved.

**6. Make sure you’re funded -** Pretty obvious, isn’t it? But enthusiasts often leave the financial details until later - sometimes too late. The importance of ensuring you have a sensible budget, the intrapreneurs insisted, cannot be overstressed. Without it, they said, people you need to help you won’t take you seriously. “Once you have funding,” says Kerryn Schrank of BP, “people start to listen.”

**7. Create a coalition, engage external stakeholders -** Time and again, intrapreneurs cite small coalitions of people who “get it” as key to their success. This is ‘Step 2’ in John Kotter’s framework for change management, with Step 1 to create a sense of urgency. Leading intrapreneurs have shown themselves adept at finding others in the organization who share their vision, as well as bringing in the right people to support the project early on. Build a coalition in support of your initiative; they suggest, but make sure that the right people are involved - and that the agenda is clear. And make sure that you engage external stakeholders in appropriate ways throughout the process.

**8. Pilot and execute -** Intrapreneurs are overzealous in their views on execution because they understand the power of proof points. Once your idea moves from theory to action, you’re much more likely to get people’s attention, for good or ill. Most intrapreneurs start with pilot tests in specific markets before going big. This enables experimentation and learning, potentially minimizing risks.

**9. Maintain your integrity. Be patient -** Along the journey, inevitably, an intrapreneur

- like an entrepreneur - will be challenged and pulled in many different directions. But be patient and clear about what you are trying to achieve. Attempting to integrate an initiative into the business too early, or in the wrong way, runs the risk of diluting impact. Be opportunistic, but be careful not to be deflected from your core goals of fundamental change. Paths of incrementalism are very likely to emerge, in some cases purpose-designed to distract you. So remember the urgency of change. While successful intrapreneurs generally show openness to improving their thinking and solutions, they won’t budge when it comes to achieving real impact.

**10. Share ownership – and have fun -** It was apparent in our interviews that despite

the many challenges and often long hours, the intrapreneurs are not taking the whole responsibility for change on their own shoulders - indeed they seek to share ownership of their initiatives with a range of key people inside and outside the organization. And, while they all work furiously hard, one more thing shone through from these conversations: these people enjoy their work and are having fun, most of the time.

1. "The Social Intrapreneur: A Field Guide for Corporate Changemakers." *SustainAbility,*. SustainAbility, The Skoll Foundation, Allianz, and IDEO,, 17 Apr. 2008. Web. 22 July 2013 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)