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Being Entrepreneurial in a Big Company

Shah Selbe, *National Geographic Society*

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National Geographic Explorer Shah Selbe discusses the advantage of being entrepreneurial within a large corporation. Selbe, who started as an intern at aerospace giant Boeing and rose to become a lead spacecraft-propulsion engineer, says those with initiative can easily stand out in a sea of employees who only care about a paycheck or their specialty.



Transcript

I want to stress right now that there is ways at being entrepreneurial while you're still at a big company. You don't have to a do start-up thing and be an entrepreneur. You can be - have an entrepreneurial mindset when you're working for a large corporation like Boeing. And the way that I want to explain that is just kind of through this chart and if we just imagine for a second that when you look at a big company, especially one that was like born of maybe like an older industry, so someone like aerospace, a big engineering company a lot of times you get two main types of people there. And let's call those people techies and jobbers. So jobbers are the people that come to the - come to job - come to their work everyday only 9 to 5 and they just - they're coming to it for a paycheck. They don't want to get anything outside of that. There is not anything necessarily wrong with that. I mean, there is more to life than just work, but that was never me. I was never of that jobber type.

The other people are the techies and those are the people like the brilliant engineers, the specialists, the program managers, the types of people that want to become very, very good at one thing and they care very much about that, but they really don't care about anything else in the company. Now the interesting thing that I've learned about being in a company full of jobbers and techies is that if you are entrepreneurial minded and you want to do things, basically both those groups of people move aside and let you do it. They won't stand in your way. And if you do it in the right way and if you think about it in the - the correct method in terms of trying to change things in a company, you can get the resources of a giant corporation behind you, which can be pretty beneficial. So the opportunities I have had at Boeing in the last 10 years have been amazing. I have been kind of in charge of the engineering and design for multiple space craft, the propulsion system specifically. So I'm a rocket scientist or a propulsion systems engineer. I've gotten to be part of a team that launched over 11 spacecraft and worked the mission control. Many of those times I was lead propulsion engineer for that. And when you get to do that, you get to do things like sit - cool things like sit in mission control and say propulsions go for launch, doing the countdown.

When I did that I could check that off a bucket list that I didn't even know existed, because who has that on a bucket list.