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Aspen Institute Looks to Intrapreneurs for New Economy Answers

Our hope is to build a cohort of leaders in business who are changing the game:
Nancy McGaw

On July 29 some of America's most brilliant innovators within existing businesses will gather in Aspen, Colorado to begin a year-long learning journey together, and the vision is that their doing so will help business live up to its full potential as a vehicle for positive social change.

It's the fourth such group to convene, and, as with each past class, every person this year has been hand-picked as an exceptional business professional who has shown an ability and passion for imagining new products, services and business models that achieve both profitable business growth and lasting, positive social impacts.

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The 2011 First Mover fellowship members.

Hosted by Aspen Institute's Business and Society Program, the First Mover fellowship, as it's called, has been crafted to integrate leadership, innovation and reflection practices, as well as a sense of community.

It is geared solely to people working in for-profit business, in keeping with Aspen's long-held focus on the business sector and its belief in the potential of business to contribute to society's collective well-being.

The notion for the fellowship grew out of a multi-year dialogue with leadership development experts, including Appreciative Inquiry thought leader and Case Western Reserve University professor Ron Fry, around meeting the leadership needs

of the future.

“We decided that for us it was much more important to focus on the innovations that were happening in business and to learn from the people who were orchestrating these innovations than it was to think about what responsible practice really meant,” Business and Society Program deputy director Nancy McGaw tells *Axiom News*.

“We thought if we could get the innovators together and really look at the work they were doing we would see, in a sense, what companies are doing when they’re really working at their best.

“We found that to be a much more empowering strategy than organizing around a challenge and trying to figure our way out of it.”

Judith Samuelson, the Business and Society Program’s executive director, has watched the First Mover program evolve, with Nancy tending it “like a garden, in a really amazing way.”

“The people that compete to get into this program are really committed to the opportunity to build a community that is possible when you have that intense of an experience,” she says, suggesting this may be what’s most powerful about it.

“They don’t feel alone in their own firms, and it’s not that people don’t hit a wall. In the course of the year they do, many of them do, and so they gather a lot of strength from the group.”

Judith says she sees the fellowship providing an opportunity for people to strengthen their courage to act and build their vision and then be able to communicate that in a more powerful way, but also in a way that’s embedded in everything known about how innovations take root.

She adds she’s seeing it deliver.

“These individuals are so committed to using their businesses to do something really valuable within the business and powerful in terms of impact outside the business... and it’s not social entrepreneurship, it’s not a non-profit model. This is not something that requires continued subsidy. This is something that really leverages the business itself.”

The 2012 First Mover class will meet three times for several days at a time over the next year, this time at the pristine Aspen, Colorado location, and otherwise at two other sites in Maryland and just outside New York.

A summit of the four classes of fellows to date is slated for this year as well.

“Our hope is that over time we really build a cohort of leaders in business who are changing the game,” says Nancy, noting her ultimate vision is to expand the program with many more intrapreneurs involved. She is also writing up the curriculum so that it can be available for wider use.

To learn more, visit this [link](#).

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