

BUSINESSWOMAN

BUSINESS SUCCESS TIPS

From an Accidental to an Intentional, Successful Entrepreneur

— By Susan Urquhart-Brown, MA

AN ACCIDENTAL ENTREPRENEUR IS NOT A BORN OR natural entrepreneur, or even someone who is comfortable, at first, selling products or services. Accidental entrepreneurs don't set out to be entrepreneurs; rather, they find themselves working on their own by chance or to fulfill a passion, and find that they enjoy it.

At that point, they realize that they need to learn what they don't already know — everything they can, in fact — in order to make their business a success.

Here are two examples:

1) A communication specialist who takes a retirement package, and a few months later agrees to do a project for her former boss. The boss, enthused about the specialist's work, recommends her to someone in another company. Soon she is working on projects for three companies. One day it dawns on her that she has a consulting business. This is fine with her. But so far this work came strictly through referrals. How can she market herself to other companies?

2) A therapist, counselor, or coach who finds herself enjoying working one-on-one with clients and wants to build a private practice. She keeps her "day job" while slowly developing a referral base. At some point, she knows she wants to do this work full time, but she doesn't have enough clients to support herself to this degree. What steps does she need to

take in order to accomplish this goal?

Entrepreneurship is like running a marathon. You might run to lose weight, to get in shape, to prove you can do it, or for a cause. These are all good reasons. But do they have sticking power? Is your heart really in it? Before you took your first running step, it would help to ask yourself, "Why am I doing this?" If your answer was, "Because I'm enthusiastic and passionate about it," then you would have a good chance. When your heart is truly connected with your goal, you are willing to train, to run, to move past your obstacles, reach the finish line, and celebrate your success — and then do it all over again! (The next time, however, you can learn from your mistakes and get to the finish line faster!)

Here are two pitfalls you are likely to run into along the way and how to avoid them:

Pitfall #1: Selling your product to customers without first finding out what they really want. It is tempting to tell a prospective customer all of the

services you offer; however, they really want to know how you can help them solve their problem.

How to avoid this pitfall?

1. Ask "How can I help you?" Then, listen. Tailor your response only to the service you offer that solves their specific problem and how your service is uniquely suited to helping them. Always be genuine.

2. Make life easier for your customers. For example, answer their requests promptly and take time to chat — a little kindness goes a long way. Send them a note thanking them for their business. With all the daily hassles people deal with, be a bright spot in their day! Businesses are really built through relationships. It takes time but pays off in referrals.

3. Be sure to take only the referrals that fit you and your business. Refer them out if you can't help. Be a resource to your customers. It doesn't cost a penny and pays wonderful dividends in referrals and good will.

Pitfall #2: Being a Lone Wolf. Trying to do it all yourself wastes time, money, and energy. The one secret successful entrepreneurs agree on is to ask for help when you need it. How can you avoid this pitfall?

Delegate and Ask for Help

You aren't good at every-

thing. New things take twice as long. Look at what you can outsource — for example, your website. Allow time to do what you do best. Don't undermine yourself by doing \$15/hour tasks when you could be earning \$100 per hour. This saves money in the long run.

An SBA survey of people still in business after 10 years found only two criteria in common: Their ability to build on their expertise and their willingness to get help when they needed it.

Remember: If you're wearing too many hats in your business, pass a few hats off and free yourself to do what you do best! You may have started your entrepreneurial career by accident, but it's important to make it intentional as soon as possible. For, once you set your intention and goals to match, it will be possible for your business to give back to you the kind of profit and enjoyment you hoped for in the first place. ❀

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