

Being an entrepreneur - a tough but rewarding place to be

By  Alan Russell

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Being self-employed is one of the riskiest and scariest, yet most rewarding things in life. I have been an employee at three very diverse companies for a large part of my career but I guess in all three cases I turned out not liking my boss and I am sure he didn't like me. I sometimes now still don't like my boss and he doesn't like me but he is constantly in my head and I have to put my trousers on him every morning. Although a tough task master with very high standards, he has had the courage to put me where I am today and I wouldn't have it any other way.



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To me there is far more to entrepreneurship than just running a business. Entrepreneurs, in my view, are always looking for new and exciting opportunities, whether to start a business, expand their operations or spot a gap in the market.

I believe some people are genetically cut out to take the risk of an opportunity and run with it, while others just aren't. This is OK because without the non-risk takers, entrepreneurs would not be able to carry their ideas and businesses to the world. We need only think of the top entrepreneurs who surround themselves with great and skilful people who are all super doers, providing them with a secure, exciting environment to flourish without the fear of taking risks.

More support for aspiring entrepreneurs

It is a very tough decision to go out into the entrepreneurial world but it is encouraging to see more and more young people choosing from the outset to do their own thing.

It is now even common for colleges, universities and school curriculums to feature entrepreneurship as a subject and you can also get a diploma or a degree in entrepreneurship. These courses are really good and equip the learner with a set of tools which provides them with more insight into business, but the question is, "Does a formal qualification, qualify you to fly by the seat of your pants?" It sounds a little counter intuitive to me, but if it helps I am all for it!

A good entrepreneur uses every tool available to them, every piece of advice given to them and every opportunity afforded them, so take that degree and put everything learnt into practice. A good entrepreneur would not waste that chance; get the degree to learn something, not just to get the degree.

To stimulate entrepreneurship even more, we really need government to actively back and financially support these young people. As has been said many times before and remains true - small business will create jobs, not governments. An easy example to demonstrate that is if 5,000 new businesses employ five people, it would result in 25,000 new jobs!

Choose your advisors wisely

I believe that great advice always comes from those who have done it, not those who think they are qualified to give you advice. I read a book years ago written by a very successful entrepreneur and he said something that I have carried through my life: "Never take financial advice from your bank manager as I have not met a rich one yet." I personally have met many unsuccessful highly qualified financial advisors.

I also believe that finding a mentor is essential. It is sometimes a lonely calling being an entrepreneur, and a mentor can not only offer objective advice but can help you deal with the stress and anxiety in the tough times. They needn't necessarily be in the same industry but should be someone who inspires you, has the scars and has been successful. Heed their advice, run things past them and take action.

In conclusion I would say to all aspiring entrepreneurs, suck in every breath with enthusiasm, use every great word spoken, read every inspirational story then close your eyes and jump in. It's a heck of a ride.

ABOUT ALAN RUSSELL

Alan Russell is the Managing Director of ThornTree Group, a mid-sized supplier of high quality recruitment and placement services across a number of industries and specialisations in sub-Saharan Africa.

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