

10 Tips for the First-Time Business Owner



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Written by Scott D. Gerber, Entrepreneur.com's Young Entrepreneur

1. Focus. Focus. Focus.

Many first-time entrepreneurs feel the need to jump at every “opportunity” they come across. Opportunities are often wolves in sheep’s clothing. Avoid getting side-tracked. Juggling multiple ventures will spread you thin and limit both your effectiveness and productivity. Do one thing perfectly, not 10 things poorly. If you feel the need to jump onto another project, that might mean something about your original concept.

2. Know what you do. Do what you know.

Don’t start a business simply because it seems sexy or boasts large hypothetical profit margins and returns. Do what you love. Businesses built around your strengths and talents will have a greater chance of success. It’s not only important to create a profitable business, it’s also important that you’re happy managing and growing it day in and day out. If your heart isn’t in it, you will not be successful.

3. Say it in 30 seconds or don’t say it at all.

From a chance encounter with an investor to a curious customer, always be ready to pitch your business. State your mission, service and goals in a clear and concise manner. Fit the pitch to the person. Less is always more.

4. Know what you know, what you don’t know and who knows what you don’t.

No one knows everything, so don’t come off as a know-it-all. Surround yourself with advisors and mentors who will nurture you to become a better leader and businessman. Find successful, knowledgeable individuals with whom you share common interests and mutual business goals that see value in working with you for the long-term.

5. Act like a startup.

Forget about fancy offices, fast cars and fat expense accounts. Your wallet is your company’s life-blood. Practice and perfect the art of being frugal. Watch every dollar and triple-check every expense. Maintain a low overhead and manage your cash flow effectively.

6. Learn under fire.

No business book or business plan can predict the future or fully prepare you to become a successful entrepreneur. There is no such thing as the perfect plan. There is no perfect road or one less traveled. Never jump right into a new business without any thought or planning, but don’t spend months or years waiting to

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execute. You will become a well-rounded entrepreneur when tested under fire. The most important thing you can do is learn from your mistakes—and never make the same mistake twice.

7. No one will give you money

There, I said it. No one will invest in you. If you need large sums of capital to launch your venture, go back to the drawing board. Find a starting point instead of an end point. Scale down pricey plans and grandiose expenditures. Simplify the idea until it's manageable as an early stage venture. Find ways to prove your business model on a shoestring budget. Demonstrate your worth before seeking investment. If your concept is successful, your chances of raising capital from investors will dramatically improve.

8. Be healthy.

No, I'm not your mother. However, I promise that you will be much more productive when you take better care of yourself. Entrepreneurship is a lifestyle, not a 9-to-5 profession. Working to the point of exhaustion will burn you out and make you less productive. Don't make excuses. Eat right, exercise and find time for yourself.

9. Don't fall victim to your own B.S.

Don't talk the talk unless you can walk the walk. Impress with action not conversation. Endorse your business enthusiastically, yet tastefully. Avoid exaggerating truths and touting far reaching goals as certainties. In short, put up or shut up.

10. Know when to call it quits.

Contrary to popular belief, a smart captain does not go down with the ship. Don't go on a fool's errand for the sake of ego. Know when it's time to walk away. If your idea doesn't pan out, reflect on what went wrong and the mistakes that were made. Assess what you would have done differently. Determine how you will utilize these hard-learned lessons to better yourself and your future entrepreneurial endeavors. Failure is inevitable, but a true entrepreneur will prevail over adversity.

Scott D. Gerber is Entrepreneur.com's Young Entrepreneur columnist and CEO of Gerber Entertainment, a brand development and venture management company that specializes in the entertainment, Internet, media and marketing industries. For information on speaking engagements, media appearances or Gerber Entertainment's portfolio of businesses visit www.GerberEntertainment.com. Follow Scott Gerber on Twitter @yngentrepreneur.

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