Chapter 2: The Joys and Frustrations of Being an Entrepreneur

The Joys of Being an Entrepreneur

Ask a dozen entrepreneurs what they love the most about how they make a living, and you will get at least two dozen answers. What is rewarding now may not have been what motivated them at the beginning of their businesses, but entrepreneurs always find nonmonetary ways by which they regularly “pay” themselves. Here are some of the aspects of self-employment that most of us find particularly rewarding.

- Set your own hours.
  Having a customizable schedule means that you can incorporate the rest of your life into your day. You can arrange your hours around your child’s school schedule, a doctor’s appointment, the plumber, and lunch with a friend. In fact, a colleague of mine raised four kids, including twin boys, while working from home. Once the children were settled in preschool or with Dad or a babysitter, she closed her office door and told her family they could interrupt her only if disaster hit. She often started work at 5:00 A.M., which enabled her to end her work day in time to meet her kids when they came home from school.

- Take pride in ownership.
  There is a certain pride of ownership that comes with being an entrepreneur. I know that my clients could use someone else for business analysis; they come to me because they know and trust me, and they are confident that I will be able to help them. I feel a great deal of satisfaction knowing that I can create an income doing what I love doing.

- Reinvent yourself.
  We entrepreneurs can reinvent ourselves every six months if we want to. Since we are talking directly with our clients, we know what they want and value, and we can shift in response to their changing needs. No need to consult with the boss or the boss’s boss or run it by three feasibility committees. If it sounds like fun and passes the straight-face test for feasibility, we try it.

- Dream big.
  We can have absurdly big dreams and make the choices to bring those dreams to life. Entrepreneurs tend to see the glass as half full; we see that our business has unlimited possibilities. Our businesses are a way to manifest more fun in our lives as well as a way to make a living, so we assume that there will always be a joyful way to accomplish anything that needs to be done.

- Be part of a network.
  We can create a network of support around us, and who doesn’t need some support? We find mentors, we create mastermind groups, we consult with colleagues, we even enlist our friends and loved ones as cheerleaders. There are also professional associations for everything from acne researchers to zoologists; see if there is an association for your professional interests. If you don’t already know of an association of people just like you, check out the Gateway to Associations, described in more detail in Appendix A: Resources for Entrepreneurs.

- Develop life skills.
  We develop life skills that enable us to feel comfortable with uncertainty, take strategic risks, operate rationally when we are afraid, listen to our gut, and trust ourselves. We learn how to accept responsibility, not blame, and how to maintain a constant state of curiosity. We build the skills to listen without filters, think creatively, and assume that there is a solution for any problem.

- Love your boss!
  You don’t hear most employees saying how much they enjoy their job, their co-workers, or their boss. The self-employed, on the other hand,
have a good working relationship with their boss, whom they see in the mirror every morning. While I jokingly complain about how much my boss makes me work sometimes, she also has a casual dress code and lets me bring my dogs to the office.

- “Think outside the box” — what box?
  One of the most frustrating aspects of working in a traditional job, at least for me, was the bureaucracy that inevitably slowed down innovation and change. If I wanted to develop a new initiative, it required meetings, proposals, focus groups, and approvals. A certain amount of structural inertia is built into almost any organization. While that provides stability, it also means that change takes time. As a one- or two-person business, you can change your approach whenever it is needed. Want to offer a new service to your clients? Expand into a new area? Start a blog? Refocus your marketing to a different client base? No problem! You can be fearless in your approach because you know that you can regroup if you see that something does not work as you had expected.

- Increase your job satisfaction.
  An entrepreneur does not get an annual review (or pay raise) from the boss, and the lack of formal feedback and reinforcement can be difficult for some people. On the other hand, you can find a lot of satisfaction in knowing that your clients keep coming back to you because they really like what you do and they are willing to pay you to do it. A related benefit is the supportive note that comes when you least expect it. As I was writing this chapter, I received a message from someone who follows me in the social media, telling me how much she appreciates a webinar I created and how grateful she is that I took the time to do it. That kind of response makes my day. I believe that entrepreneurs hear more genuine thank-yous than traditional employees do; our clients are far more aware of what value we bring to them than employers are, since our clients are directly paying for that value.

- Choose who you work with.
  One of the less-tangible benefits of running your own business is the ability to turn down projects or clients you just don’t want to work with—within reason, of course. Sooner or later, everyone runs into the Client from Hell, someone who makes unreasonable demands, is consistently rude or abrasive, or represents an organization or cause with which, for whatever reason, you would rather not work. Since you’re running the show, you can decide that you simply won’t do business with that person. By the same token, you can decide to discount your rate or donate your services to a nonprofit or charitable organization that you do support. Being able to incorporate your personal values into your business can be a gratifying aspect of entrepreneurship. For more discussion on establishing and maintaining good relationships with your clients, see Chapter 8, *The Care and Feeding of Clients*.

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