

Five Questions New Entrepreneurs Could Ask Themselves

You decided to say goodbye to your 9 to 5 cubicle life. Very well, now you'll start mastering your time, your mind, your decisions and your thoughts by doing things your own way. Welcome to the sunny entrepreneurship world!

Before jumping in with all your momentum, slow down, put yourself these questions and try to be honest:

1. What is my business offer?

You may have had accumulated some work experience by now, so you have lots of things you do very well, and you enjoy doing them. One of the most frequent mistakes when starting your first own business is to offer too broad range of services. You may say: OK, what's the problem here? If I offer many services, it means I'll have more clients in total; I'll have more possibilities of finding potential customers, thus increasing my chances of earning more money, and get a recurring income from customer service.

This is FALSE. Think of how you are going to promote your brand new start-up:

a. You'll want to make use of your relationships (this always works and it's far more profitable than cold calls). In this stage, you want your acquaintances to associate you with your services, so whenever they might need them, you come on top of their mind. What are you going to tell your friend, or former colleague, or former boss who now owns a big company you could do some work for: "Well, I'm doing internet marketing, trainings, websites, all kind of below the line campaigns... and I also organize weddings... and I run a publishing house". Guess what your friend is going to remember from your pitch?

b. Let's suppose that you decided to treat each contact differently, and promote only one of your services: if you guess wrong and that service of yours is not needed, it is very hard to come again and make an offer for the other ones. This looks highly unprofessional and it looks like you are almost starving and going to die soon if you don't get some business. Don't ever look like you're broke, even if your last shampoo bottle has finished last month and you are happy that you did not throw away those good old shoes you did not like anymore. In this world in which even kids make money sometimes, it's probably not OK to admit that you don't. You know the good old saying "fake it till you make it".

2. Which of all above mentioned skills gives me more satisfaction when doing it?

If you don't have a lot of money, it is most probable that you won't have any employees in the beginning, so you'll have to do all the work, including the most boring and time consuming tasks. If do well with programming, but you don't enjoy doing it, don't jump into web design.

You'll have to spend hours and hours fine tuning the code, in order to get what your client wants. If you don't enjoy it, then you lose. You'll go crazy in three months or so.

Here I have myself as an example: when I started the publishing house, I thought I could handle everything for one year, before I would have been able to hire some people for the basic tasks. So I did: together with my partner, we handled everything, for a whole year, from gathering the articles from the authors, to correcting the final layouts, to taking the magazines from the printing house, printing labels, distributing the magazines to the subscribers and handling the subscriptions lists, and we even tried some Autocad design services for one particular client. Not to mention the administrative things required by the law. When the business finally started to grow, I was so sick and tired of all that stuff, that I sold my part of the company to my partner and I never want to hear again of publishing to this day. Do you know why my partner was not sick of doing all those things? Because she loved what she did. Publishing magazines was her passion, so she wouldn't mind handling the day to day tasks with calm and with a smile on her face.

So, start with your biggest passion. After you get it moving, you can diversify your services, without having to do everything by yourself.

3. What is my USP?

USP stands for Unique Selling Proposition and it is a very well known term in advertising and marketing. We are exposed to lots of messages every second of our lives. It is impossible to notice all of them. In order to stand out of the crowd and make people pay attention to what you have to say, you have to be unique and to communicate this in a very clear, simple and straight way.

Think of watches. What comes to your mind first? Is it Rolex? Now think of coffee? Is it Starbucks? How can you become the Rolex of your field? Know your competitors and be different. And better.

4. What is best for me: going solo or looking for a partnership?

Partnerships are good. It's much better to have somebody to share your ideas with, and not only ideas. You can do twice as much if you are two. You can split tasks between yourselves. You can do two things in the same time. Nevertheless, try to understand your future partner deeper before making this step. If your work habits, values and principles are very different, you may end up in sorrow and disappointment. Imagine this: you agree with your partner a job he has to do and he agrees. When the delivery time comes and you ask for the work, he turns to you, smiles and says: "Did you really expect me to do that?". How many of those can you take until you blow up?

So beware: a partnership is different than the other work relationships you had so far. As an employee, you usually have bosses and subordinates, you do your job in an established,

vertical hierarchy, so in case of disagreement, usually **the highest ranked person dictates the actions**. If you are equal, you have to share some life principles and to have an internal discipline which would help things getting done.

Being equal is about knowing how to lead and how to let yourself be led and most of all, knowing when to do that. It is like tango: coordination and alternative leadership is the key to harmony.

5. How much can I resist before earning any money?

Don't expect your business to bring profit from the very first day (or month, or even year). It may happen so, but most probably it won't. Be prepared to support yourself for about two years, before you'll make a living from your business. This can happen much faster, but it's better to be prepared than sorry. When I first jumped into self employment, I had savings for two years. Luckily, after one year, real profit started to come in. But that was also the moment when I decided I did not want to run that business for the rest of my life. So I started everything over, this time with savings for only one year. If things wouldn't have improved by the end of that summer, I would have been in the situation to go back to the nice and cosy corporate world, full of bosses, regulations, papers, important meetings and reports.

And so this leads us to the last question, which I challenge you to answer by yourself:

Am I prepared to go back, in case things go wrong?