

1 Why Start a Business?

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How often do you get up on a Monday morning and feel excited about the week ahead, like you're doing what you love every day, what you were born to do?

There are a small number of people out there who spend every day doing what they've always dreamed of, doing what they feel in their gut is the right path for them. Maybe you're one of them, and I congratulate you if that's the case.

For one reason or another, a lot of people take the safe options in life or make the choices that they were told were right, and find themselves in jobs that unfortunately they don't love.

You've heard it a million times before and you'll hear it a million more, but happiness, enjoying every day and feeling fulfilled in yourself, is the most important thing in life. I find it really sad when I think of the millions of people who spend every day working in jobs that don't inspire them simply to pay the bills.

What makes me even sadder is that I know that everyone has what it takes to start a business or come up with a killer product or even set up a charity that could help thousands of people. The only thing stopping you is your mind, a fear of what might go wrong.

Maybe you fear the humiliation of failure, or quite reasonably are worried what might happen if you wind up not being able to keep up with your mortgage repayments. Perhaps you feel trapped in the daily cycle of work to pay

the bills and look after your kids. It is fears and worries like these that stop you from giving your own venture a shot.

You may well feel that because of this, your family and friends might not be supportive of you taking the leap and leaving the security of what you're doing. You might be worried by the thought of having to quit your job and borrow a stack of money even to try your idea out. And then what happens if it doesn't work out and your business goes down the pan?

In my mind, these are fears that you don't have to feel. The risks you have to take to start your own business are a lot lower than you probably imagine. It is even possible to get an idea off the ground without the need to quit your job and without having to borrow a great deal of money.

It is super easy to try out your ideas in the evenings and weekends after work on a small scale without having to put huge amounts of money on the line. You don't have to jump in at the deep end and try to get your product into a thousand stores on day one. Think small. Make a few, see if people like them and take it from there. Once you have proven for sure that there is a market for your idea, *that's* when you can take the leap and leave your job or borrow money to take it to the next level.

It is commonly said that nine out of ten businesses fail. That simply isn't true; of course a lot of businesses are not as successful as their founder had hoped, but very few actually go bust.

I always suggest that, at whatever stage in life you're thinking of starting a business, you should make sure you have a safety net. Don't pack up your studies or your job right away, don't remortgage your house and don't spend your pension on your idea. If you don't take crazy risks, you'll be free to walk away at any point, if you feel it isn't working out like you had hoped.

I know it isn't easy to jump ship and change career. It's especially not easy when you have kids and mortgage payments to look after. That's why I'm fired up about encouraging young people not to start walking down a path in life that doesn't feel like them. It's a lot easier to follow your passion when you're young.

I'm really grateful that I was able to find my passion so early in life and could give it a shot without much risk. If my jam-making business hadn't taken off, it wouldn't have been such a big deal because I didn't have a family depending on me to make it work.

Although it is in some ways easier to follow your passion from day one, there is nothing stopping you making a change later in life, though. You might be having second thoughts in the middle of your career or even be retired. I've met loads of people who have left well-paid jobs in the City to start businesses, choosing to ditch the mad hours of the rat race for the flexibility that comes from setting up on your own.

Starting a small business can be whatever you want it to be; it can mean three days a week or seven, it can mean being

out on the road selling or working from home. You can create a business to suit your lifestyle and grow it to whatever size you are comfortable with.

Family Influences

Where we find ourselves now in life has a huge amount to do with our families, where we grew up and the advice we received when we were younger.

Aside from perhaps my gran, there is nobody I need to thank more than my mum and dad for inspiring me to do what I love. When I was growing up they always let me make my own choices in life and never told me that I had to take a particular path.

When my dad was younger, his dream was to become a doctor. When he didn't get accepted to study medicine at Glasgow University, rather than staying at school to get the grades he needed, he decided to become an engineer. At the time, electrical engineering was being heavily promoted as the future for Scotland.

I was still growing up when my dad was made redundant and I saw the problems he and his friends had with the fear of job loss due to the nature of the technical industries in Scotland. By the time I was in my teens, he had taken a break from being an engineer to become a lecturer. Although he was a great teacher, he found working in colleges frustrating and ended up not particularly enjoying his work.



Of course, had he ignored what everyone said and become a doctor, he would have been a lot more successful and found himself enjoying his work a lot more.

Having seen my dad do what ‘they’ told him taught me to listen only to my heart and to put all of my energy into doing what I love. That means I didn’t listen too carefully to the advice of careers advisers or anyone who laughed at my jam idea. After my dad was made redundant, I didn’t have a lot of faith in the security of salaried jobs.

When I was a kid, I was always coming up with harebrained ideas to try to make some extra pocket money. A lot of parents wouldn’t let their kids try things out like mine did, but I think they wanted me to make mistakes and learn from them. Thankfully, they never tried to force me to become a doctor or a lawyer or anything else that I didn’t want to be. They knew the importance of doing what makes you happy.

Being Your Own Boss

My first few attempts at setting up my own little business weren’t really much of a success, as you’ll find out later. It was fun each time, though, and I soon began to decide that one day I would start a real business and it would be my career. I concluded that I never wanted to work for anyone other than myself and at 14 started to really think about how I was going to set up my first proper business.

When you make that decision to start up your own business, you are setting yourself a challenge and putting faith in your

own ability to make it happen. You have an idea that you believe in so much that you nurture it over years and years until you get to where you're trying to go.

Having the idea is the first step. Then you have to figure out how to make it happen and convince yourself to work hard enough to get things moving. There isn't anyone there telling you to do the work in the morning—you have to tell yourself.

When you're employed, you rely on your boss to value you, respect you and take care of you. In many companies, as an employee, you're little more than a number. The bosses' motivation in the morning is not to make your life better; it is to enrich themselves and their shareholders. If they can do that by laying you off, they will.

So setting up on your own is about taking the responsibility for creating your employment fully into your own hands, not relying on a big company or the government to keep you in a job. It's down to you, which can sometimes mean a lot of pressure and sleepless nights. But it also means a great deal of satisfaction from knowing that all of the fruits of your labour are yours to keep. After tax, at least!

And even though you may have to work on your idea in the evenings and weekends after work, when you're already exhausted, it shouldn't really feel like work. When you're doing what feels right in your gut, the excitement and adrenaline of seeing your ideas becoming reality motivates you to work harder than you've ever worked before. If what you're doing is authentic to who you are, it comes easily.

What is important is having that desire to give things a go and wanting to do them purely for the thrill and fun of it. There are continual setbacks in setting up a business and a lot of ideas fail completely. But if things don't work out in the way you had hoped, you can always learn something from the experience. The most important skill is having a willingness to try again, try something new or change your idea a little, based on what you learned from its not working out. As an entrepreneur, you get satisfaction from trying again and again until one of your ideas is eventually successful. And, when it is, you'll have the pleasure of getting up in the morning and being in charge of your day, and of being your own boss.

Being an Entrepreneur

Being an entrepreneur is a whole way of life. It isn't necessarily about being a 'businessman', wearing a suit or sitting in an office working on a computer; it can be whatever you want it to be. It's up to you what you wear, what hours you work and which ideas you try out. You can choose to spend every waking hour on your business or take time out for the things you value in life: your family, friends, interests and community. It's about looking at life as a big adventure and feeling like you can give anything a shot. You have that big idea and you don't stop thinking about it from the moment you wake up until the moment you go to sleep.

Entrepreneurs are a bunch of people who look at the world differently to everyone else, see things we don't like and try

to change them. We have a certain spark that drives us to look for opportunities and to try to solve problems in the world around us.

Entrepreneurs are everywhere. Think of all the people who create new products, set up small companies, social enterprises and charities. Maybe you're a Dyson who wants to build a better vacuum cleaner or an Anita Roddick who's horrified by the idea of testing cosmetics on animals.

I started my entrepreneurial journey very young, although some people start even younger than I did. In a lot of ways, starting at such a young age has an advantage: the naivety of youth makes any dream seem possible!

When I was about 10, I visited a chicken farm and was fascinated by the business of collecting eggs from the hens. I asked the farmer if I could have a box of eggs, so that I could hatch them into chickens of my own, and sell their eggs.

The farmer gave me half a dozen eggs and laughed, saying that there was no way I could hatch them into chickens. She joked that I'd have to sit on them for three weeks.

When I told my parents about my idea, they weren't too pleased at the prospect of having chickens running around, as you can imagine, but they said that I could give it a go. I suppose they doubted that I would manage to hatch out the eggs.

I then had to figure out how I was going to keep a box of eggs warm around the clock for about three weeks. I thought about using lots of hot water bottles, putting the eggs in the

oven on a really low temperature or maybe leaving them in a greenhouse. Obviously, none of these ideas was going to work. Eventually, I had the idea of keeping the eggs on top of the cable TV box under the television. It was quite warm there if the telly was left on all the time.

I waited anxiously for weeks, checking every day that the eggs were OK. Finally, one morning, everyone was sitting eating breakfast and we could hear a little chirping coming from under the television. The first fluffy yellow chick had hatched out of its egg. I named her Henrietta, which, being 10 years old, I believed to be quite a witty name for a hen. Later in the day, another two of the chicks hatched and so I had to start thinking about what I was actually going to do with them.

Once the chicks got a bit bigger, my dad built a little house in the garden for them to live in. They soon started to lay delicious fresh eggs every day, which the neighbours were more than happy to buy from me for £1 a box. I had a lot of fun doing this, until a fox came and ate all of the chickens, rather tragically putting an end to my farming career. I was completely devastated.

Although this wasn't really much of a business, it was my first taste of being an entrepreneur. I got a buzz from that early little project and started thinking of more and more ideas as time went on. I always felt that this was the way that I could have an impact on the world.

Of course, you don't have to be young to start a business and I am amazed and inspired by the companies that are

started by people who have caught the bug later in life. They have the advantage of experience, of life and of the commercial world, when they come to start their companies.

The reason I'm sharing my story with you is not because I think it'll make you a millionaire. Starting your own business just might do that, but I hope that you'll be more excited by the prospect of going on an amazing adventure, having a lot of fun and, if it all works, bringing about a change in the world around you.

What Do You Want from Life?

The absolutely most important question to ask yourself before you embark on anything in life is: Why? Why am I starting a business?

There are all kinds of motivations for starting a business. Some people want job security while others simply dream of becoming rich. More often than not, people believe that they will feel they are doing something more worthwhile, more fulfilling and more exciting with their life than whatever it is they're doing currently. Wouldn't you rather be doing something that made you happier and was more fun, even if it was for less money than you get from what you're doing now?

Of course, for me and for more and more start-ups, the underlying motivation is a desire to have an impact on the world in a positive way. It isn't about trying to fulfil the

dream of one day being able to cruise around the Bahamas, gallivanting about with beautiful people, as wonderful as I'm sure that would be! It is about taking satisfaction from solving a problem in the world, doing something worthwhile in life and, of course, hopefully making a living from doing it.

There are lots of inspirational companies who have really embraced this and have much more of a sense of purpose than only making profit. Think of Innocent, The Body Shop, Ben and Jerry's, Patagonia, One Water and even Jamie Oliver.

Often, I find that my generation of entrepreneurs are willing to invest a lot of their time and profits in doing good for a particular community. Getting rich isn't the most important motivation in their lives. In my case, I take far more satisfaction from an elderly person telling me that our tea parties make them feel like a person again than I could ever take from trying to make lots of money to buy expensive clothes, for example.

Your motivation for getting into business is something personal to you and will determine what your goals and expectations are. It's up to you to decide how ambitious you want to be, how big you dream of your company becoming, or how important it is that you get to take time out for holidays, for your family and for fun.

In this book, I really want to give you the sense that a tiny idea that can start in a kitchen or a bedroom or a garden shed, with a bit of love and hard work and support from the

people around you, could grow into something amazing. Something that gives you a career, and maybe even creates a priceless opportunity to support your community. Something that changes your life—I know that SuperJam has changed mine.

