The Reality of Running A Small Business: Prepare Yourself (And Your Loved Ones)

One of the most common requests for business help is for the potential CEO who wants to start a new business. There are so many aspects to the request of “I want to start my own business” so I will dedicate a few columns dedicated to this new dreamer because it is a wonderful dream and at the same time, like many dreams, there is the reality of actually doing it. This can be the greatest thing that ever happened to an individual, but unfortunately, it can also be a big nightmare if it is done with lack of good preparation.

Starting a business isn’t for the faint of heart. Being your own boss offers rewards—and plenty of challenges as well. Transitioning from working for someone else to running your own company brings changes that not only you need to navigate, but that your family and friends also need to adjust to.

I like what one of my SCORE mentor colleagues said recently to a group of potential new CEOs, “Realistic expectations are required by both the entrepreneur and close family. It must be a ‘team sport’”.

As you prepare to start your business, here are some key things to keep in mind so you—and your loved ones—can more easily transition into the brave new world of entrepreneurship.

**Income might be unpredictable at first.**
Without a steady paycheck coming from an employer, you might find it challenging to keep up with expenses both professionally and personally. When you’re starting out, revenue from your business will take time to ramp up. It takes time to build a network of connections and clients.

**You may need to forego some luxuries.**
Prepare to make some personal sacrifices when self-employed. A daily caramel latte and Friday dinners out at your favorite five-star restaurant probably won’t be in the budget for a while.
Working from home requires discipline.
If you decide to run your business from an office in your home, you’ll face a whole new set of distractions that can threaten your productivity. Tuning out the personal to-do list and spontaneous requests from friends to meet up for coffee during the workday demand concentration—and the strength to say “no.”

Expect to work really hard.
Starting a small business requires a significant amount of time and effort. Many new entrepreneurs find themselves working harder and for longer hours than when they worked for an employer. Finding ways to maintain a comfortable work/life balance might be challenging in the beginning, but it’s necessary for the well-being of you, your family, and your business.

Realize that your new business will need a variety of help and advice. You will need to form relationships with professionals you may not have needed to collaborate with before. To better your chances of success, consider creating a business development board comprised of legal, accounting, banking, and industry experts who will agree to provide pro bono guidance as you begin. Having a team to guide you can help you prepare yourself—and your family—for what to expect from running your own business.

SCORE mentors, with their breadth of experience, are often willing to serve on business development boards. Also consider talking with other entrepreneurs in your community who have walked the same path and can offer valuable insight and experience about the realities of entrepreneurship.

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