



The Lazy Entrepreneur

I chuckle as I write this article because in so many ways, I'm anything BUT lazy. In some ways I can be maniacal about being responsive to clients, pouncing on opportunities, and achieving success! But, I've realized in the past few years that my definition of "success" was very different from the norm in so many ways. When I left my position as a management consultant to start a small training/consulting business, my goal was simple... to work as little as possible! Now, a decade and a husband and two kids later, I've double down on this philosophy out of necessity as much as desire.

Ever since my first trips to Europe in my 20s, I've been really clear on the fact that there's more to life than work and work/life balance is an absolute must for me. I remember going to Barcelona and being amazed at seeing everything shutdown mid day for siesta so that workers could go home and enjoy time with their families and take a nap! I thought...*Sign me up for that!* I'm ashamed to admit though that my capitalistic leanings immediately made me think that I should open a restaurant there that's only open during siesta when everyone else is closed! Even so, I definitely got the bigger picture that their culture simply placed a higher appreciation/value on quality downtime/time with family. And for me, that made complete sense. Almost literally in that moment I knew that whatever I did professionally going forward, my goal would be less and less, not more and more.

As a small business owner, it's been such a tremendous blessing to have real clarity on how I define success because it's helped me scope my business and make critical business decisions. It's incredibly easy to buy into the illusion that more is always better, and as a small business there's a subtle but powerful inertia pulling you to grow and grow – more employees, more clients, more deals, larger footprint, larger reach, more products/services, etc.... BUT, what we fail to consider is what is the growth/expansion costing us? I've always said that an empire can turn into a prison really quickly so be careful what you ask for!

So, is the moral of this story – Don't grow your business? Of course not! But if you're interested in developing a more intentional business philosophy, here are a few tips....

1. Clearly define success very early on

I think that this is such an important step that so many entrepreneurs skip completely. I think most entrepreneurs just assume that their goal is to increase revenue/profit year after year and for me, that's not even close. For my business, I track three metrics every year: 1. Revenue per year 2. Days worked/year 3. Average revenue per day. (*Yes, my accountant keeps track of operating profit, cash flow, etc. but my expenses are very low so my focus is on these three*). My main goal is to increase average revenue/day year after year (more so than increasing revenue) because this is what ultimately allows me to work fewer days – my real goal!

For you, success could be a business that...

- Enables you to work part time while bringing in enough money to cover half the family's living expenses
- Is ego gratifying
- Allows you to give back to your community or fill an altruistic need
- Positions you as a leader in your industry
- Allows you to do something you love everyday



- Creates passive revenue
- Establishes a business opportunity that you can pass on to your kids
- Affords you autonomy and flexibility
- Nets \$500K per year

Take the time to consider how you truly define success. What would success look like for you? Everyone's situation is different so feel free to define success in a way that's most meaningful for you.

2. Don't forget to pay your dues

One of my favorite sayings is *"Do what you gotta do until you can do what you want to do."* It may seem antithetical, but it truly embodies my "lazy entrepreneur" philosophy. I never set out to be "lazy". Quite the opposite, in the early years I worked like a dog to build a business that would enable me to later have the lifestyle that I wanted – focusing as much on life as work. Virtually any small business requires good, old fashioned hard work in the beginning – don't start a small business if you're not willing to roll up your sleeves.

Now, instead of having ten active clients at any one time, I choose instead to only juggle half that amount. But I consciously give them amazing service so that they not only want more, they refer me to colleagues which significantly decreases the amount of time I need to spend marketing/soliciting new business from the types of clients I really want. I'm obsessively responsive – usually responding to emails within the hour, virtually always within 24 hours. I strive to make every training/speaking event absolutely amazing – usually finding some unexpected "extra" like a free instructional DVD or white paper that I can throw in to go the extra mile. Ironically, when you're serving fewer clients, you can provide much higher quality and that builds a stellar reputation which is invaluable.

3. Develop a growth strategy consistent with your goals

As a small business, you probably want to grow. The key is to grow "smart". In my case growing smart means identifying ways that I can accommodate more clients and/or increase revenue without necessarily working more hours. Last year, my revenue was approximately double what it had been about four years prior, but I worked 18 fewer days. For me, that's success. Each entrepreneur though must identify the growth strategy options that will best support their ultimate goals.

For my business' growth strategy I've resisted bringing on lots of employees (because that's more work ☺) and instead identified a few methods to grow in a way that still pushes me in the right direction. In my case I've developed products to augment my services, developed a speaking business to complement training (with a fraction of the labor required on my part), brought on a great assistant and a couple other part time support staff to help make me much more efficient and do a lot of the leg work, and increased pricing. For others their growth strategy might include partnering with other businesses, purchasing another business, providing online products or services, staffing up, etc. The key is to think about *how* you want to grow before you need to. In fact, if you don't plan for growth in advance, you could jeopardize your current business stability.

Bronnie Ware writes in *"The Top Five Regrets of the Dying"* that regret #2 was *"I wish I didn't work so hard"* (No. 1 by the way was *"I wish I'd had the courage to live a life true to myself, not the life others expected of me"*). I definitely don't want to wait quite that long to really reflect on what's important and design my business around that philosophy.



Admittedly, with that process comes some sacrifice. I will probably never sit at the helm of a multi million dollar company, but for me that's not only ok...it's really a relief.

Having developed a small business over the past decade, Dana Brownlee is an advocate for helping other small businesses succeed. She is President of Atlanta based training company Professionalism Matters and is an acclaimed keynote speaker, corporate trainer, and team development consultant. She can be reached at danapbrownlee@professionalismmatters.com and on Linked In and Twitter @DanaBrownlee.