

SELF-WORTH VERSUS HUSTLE

WHEN EVERY HURDLE TO YOUR SMALL BIZ FEELS LIKE A PERSONAL BLOW, IT'S HARD TO GET PERSPECTIVE. REBECCA PARKER TALKS SEPARATING SALES FROM SELF

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You're a creative. There you are, pouring your heart and soul into everything you plan, make and share. It's a superpower. It's what people connect to and it's got you this far. Showing up as an individual is what sets small businesses apart, but the flipside is it can make you feel vulnerable when things don't go to plan. As Aime Cox-Tennant from marketing agency Studio Cotton (www.studiocotton.co.uk) points out: "When we don't build a barrier between ourselves and our businesses, it feels like each time you tackle challenges with less than 100% accuracy it's a personal failure." Not a good way to maintain healthy mental wellbeing.

Harnessing indie power without your self-worth depending on the success of your biz? That's the gold you'll wanna dig for, and it's something artist and writer Martina Martian (www.martinamartian.com) knows to be important. "Remember all the other things that make you valuable as a human," she urges. "Your value cannot be reduced to how well your business or product does. You are so much more than that! Someone rejecting your business or product is not a rejection of you as a whole."

GROWING PAINS

What matters most is finding resilience and value when things go south. Perhaps a product or service flopped, a risk didn't pay off, or you've lost a client. So how can you bounce back when the disappointments feel personal? Firstly, take a breath. "Every experience is an opportunity to reflect and grow," Martina explains. "Don't waste the opportunity to learn. Analyse what went wrong, think about what you'd do differently next time."

There are business lows a cuppa and some distance can fix, and there are those that call for a shift in thinking. "I find it helps to be mindful of the language I use," Aime shares. "Recently we had to pull some workshops. The gut reaction was 'Aime failed to sell enough tickets because nobody likes Aime,' but in reality, 'Studio Cotton cancelled some workshops due to low ticket sales.' It happens."

"The first thing I do is allow myself to feel disappointed," says money and business coach Ray Dodd (www.raydodd.co.uk). "I might have a rant and a cry. Then I ask myself, why do I think this happened? How is it different to things

that have worked? And then I pick myself up and try something else. I'm not immune to failing, no one is." For Ray, once you acknowledge that failing is a necessary part of running a business, "that cycle of berating ourselves and questioning our worth can start to be broken down. It comes to separating facts from fiction and looking for evidence that lies beyond our feelings."

You might be working solo, but you don't have to figure this all out alone – never underestimate the power of a sounding board. "Rely on the support of your community," insists Aime. "When I started Studio Cotton, I didn't know anyone with their own business, and so every challenge felt like it was happening to me, and therefore my fault. I'm now lucky to have a group of friends with businesses who help each other gain perspective and ideas."

REDEFINING SUCCESS

There's more to business than stacking up the sterling. And, loving your hustle is easier when you can recognise the merit in your achievements. What gives your work meaning and makes it worthwhile for you? Defining success in your own terms is a big one for Ray. "I encourage my clients to create their own markers of success rather than the one perpetuated by social media," she advises.

Ray recommends setting goals for sales, but also placing value in other areas. "I used a new skill in making this, I did something I've never done before, I experimented with how I sold this, I showed up more consistently, I upped my price unapologetically – you get the idea," says Ray. "Those alternative markers are arguably as important as sales, because they feed into creating habits that'll enable you to build a sustainable business."

It's your brand, so it makes sense that you write your own definition of success. Remember why you started your small biz in the first place – maybe to achieve that elusive work/life balance, feel passionate about your job, or work in a creative environment? "A business should be a tool that helps us achieve the successful lifestyle we want, not the object of success itself," Aime reminds us.

Learning to reframe what rules our self-worth will open up the way we work. Because guess what? You are not your business, and that's actually amazing. 🍵

