Break These Bad Habits to Unleash Your Inner Entrepreneur

If you think you'll leave your J-O-B on Friday afternoon and walk into the world of entrepreneurship on Monday like it's no mean feat, you're fooling yourself. This is a tough transition made tougher if you've developed bad work habits while working for "the man". As an entrepreneur there's no safety net. A do-over means your venture has failed; your pocketbook is lighter, and others confidence in you is circling the drain.

The biggest favor you can do yourself before making "the jump" is to become the best employee you possibly can. Time is on your side and you'll have a canvas in front of you to paint an entirely new picture before you ride off into the sunset. The fatal four bad work habits I'll cover here are developed over time, making them that much harder to break and replace with character-based habits that guarantee success. Start now or put your entire venture at risk.

Procrastination

If you procrastinate at work or you have a home full of half-finished projects, how do you think you'll tackle those big problems in your own business? Don't believe for a minute the prospect of losing it all will provide enough motivation to help you break through and finally get something done. There's a root cause to your inability to finish what you've started and finding it now is the key to making a successful transition to calling your own shots.

In my life, I've noticed procrastination is always tied to fear. However, the fear exists at both ends of the spectrum and here's what I mean by that. Although I've procrastinated out of fear of failure, I've put things off far more often out of fear of success. Seem strange? Follow along; it'll all make sense soon.

If you procrastinate out of fear of failure, take a long hard look at your self-image. Is achieving goals important to you? Do you measure yourself by your successes? Folks who value achievement allow failure to cut to their very core. To fail is to *be* a failure and being a failure is the ultimate in unworthiness. This feeling is to be avoided at all costs so the more daunting the task at hand, the further onto the backburner it goes.

With those who fear success, character is often the issue. What if the outcome is exactly what I'd hoped for? The thought of the next challenge, increased responsibility, or greater recognition is too much to bear. These feelings are also tied back to the self-image. Instead of wanting to avoid situations where feelings of unworthiness result, those who fear success see themselves as unworthy already. They cannot possibly imagine themselves receiving the spoils of a job well done.

There's a saying, "You can't outperform your self-image for very long." This applies in both scenarios I've described. Moral of story, before you can work on overcoming procrastination, you must determine where your procrastination comes from – fear of failure or fear of success.

Tardiness

Do you know someone who is habitually late for work, meetings – even dates? They've got great excuses and sometimes their bad luck tales are quite believable. They try new things and they love to talk about their new strategy to show up on time but they just can't seem to get it together. It's always something, in other words. Something as simple as being on time for appointments can set the stage for building trust with employees, business partners and customers. Ever heard of a business book called, "The Tardy Millionaire"? There's a reason why…

Let's be honest, here. Tardiness very seldom has anything to do with bad luck. Having struggled with tardiness myself, I can tell you with full honesty that character is most often the root cause. We can sincerely want to be on time and be 100% committed yet still fail when the time to perform actually arrives. This happens simply because we lack the character to deliver on the promises we've made.

Lacking character does not make you a bad person. Character is a set of skills that can be developed, just like reading and writing. Growing my character enough to start arriving at work on time boiled down to a few key steps.

- Understanding why it was important and what was at stake
- Deciding it meant enough to me to give it my best effort
- Reverse engineering my morning to determine each step I needed to take and when I needed to take it in order to arrive on time

For me, being on time conveyed respect for my team, our vendors and our customers. How could I ask them to do anything I was not willing to do myself? I decided it meant enough to me on a professional and a personal level to give it my all. I sat down and planned my arrival time all the way back to my alarm going off in the wee hours of the morning.

If I could get up when my alarm went off, be finished with breakfast by a certain time, finish my workout by a certain time and depart the gym by a certain time – my on time arrival at work would be guaranteed. Traffic and weather were the only remaining variables and each could be managed.

Fear of Conflict

Would you rather hide in a closet than face someone you knew wouldn't agree with you? Do you do anything and everything possible to avoid delivering bad news? So many of us fear conflict and do everything we can to avoid it at all costs. Being a successful entrepreneur requires you to put on your big boy pants and face down your adversaries.

Of course we'd like everyone to agree with everything we say and do. Our perception is life would be so much easier if we didn't have to deal with disagreement. Would it be? Hasn't conflict ever helped you come up with a better solution than the one you had drafted on your own? Hasn't an argument ever helped you see something you needed to change about yourself? Without those conflicts – where would you be today?

Let's dig into some reasons why some people are so conflict-averse. When I'm preparing for a conversation with someone who I expect to disagree with me here's what often goes through my mind…

- Am I right?
- Will I be able to explain myself effectively?
- Will they be angry with me and how will I react to that?

There's a problem with this – can you see it? All my thoughts are focused on the negatives and how *I* will feel during the conversation. But what about the person I'm talking to? Where do their needs enter the equation? Why aren't I focused on how I can best serve *them* during the conversation?

Here's a different set of questions to ask and maybe you'll notice something once you've read them all.

- How can I make sure I understand the other party's point of view?
- How can I make sure I understand the other party's needs?
- How do I remind myself that my principles are not open to compromise no matter where the conversation may go?

Notice a trend? The questions aren't focused on me anymore. Not even the last one, although it may sound that way. I'm reminded of the late Stephen R. Covey's, "The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People", notably Habit #5, "Seek First to Understand, Then to be Understood." This is a great habit but I encourage you to take it one step further. How about, "Seek to understand, then understand some more."

Do this and you will find conflicts fading away. You won't have to explain yourself and who's right or wrong becomes irrelevant. People will be drawn to you because of your ability to listen, demonstrate understanding, and show you value what they're saying. How helpful do you think that might be when you're trying to get your venture off the ground?

Inability to Make Quick Decisions

Ah yes - the paralysis of analysis. Conventional wisdom tells us we need all relevant data in order to make the best possible decision. Problems must be analyzed from all angles before solutions are formulated. But how often have you ever had all the relevant data before making a decision? Is it even possible to know everything you'd like to know before pulling the trigger?

Have you ever noticed the people who believe they need to know everything seem to take the longest time to make decisions? Problems have often spiraled out of control by the time some decisions get made, rendering those decisions completely irrelevant.

I can remember over-researching and over-analyzing issues on many occasions before finally making a decision. I would visit website after website looking for data and past precedents. I would solicit second, third and fourth opinions before finally settling on a course of action.

Often, I was still dissatisfied with my decision even after spending extra time to make sure I'd examined the issue from every possible viewpoint.

Malcolm Gladwell wrote a book titled, "Blink" about how making quick decisions with limited information is often just as effective as taking the time to compile reams of data before making the call. This seems to defy common sense but the empirical data was beyond dispute. So what does this tell us about entrepreneurial decision making?

Successful entrepreneurs go with their guts. They understand their businesses' success often relies on adapting quickly to changing markets, customers, and technology. Waiting for all the data in order to make a decision can spell certain disaster, especially when the competition has already acted.

Why do we fall into analysis paralysis so easily? It's the fear of making a mistake, silly. Let's revisit the self-image again. Perhaps you didn't have very forgiving parents. Your every move was criticized and it never seemed like you could please them, no matter what you did. How would that effect how long it takes you to make a decision?

I bet it would make decision making a long, drawn out process of examining things from every direction, to minimize your chances of blowing it. After all, making a mistake leads to someone's disapproval which is a huge blow to your self-image that has been taking a beating your entire life, thanks to your folks' misguided passion for perfection.

The most successful entrepreneurs, alive and dead, made tons of mistakes costing them millions upon millions of dollars. Still, they weren't afraid to make snap decisions when called upon. They understood mistakes were inevitable and actually outstanding learning tools.

There it is – four bad habits to totally eliminate before bowing out of the corporate world. Without these habits completely expunged from your psyche, you may find yourself hesitating when the hot iron should be struck, putting off what needs to be done to keep your company afloat, and turning away partners and customers because of interpersonal conflicts and a lack of respect for their time.

You may also find yourself out of business.