

The Entrepreneurial Vision

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Getting ready to start a business? Not quite there yet, but preparing? Want to? Wonder if business ownership is for you? Does small business fit your Anabaptist lifestyle?

This article is for you, the “start ups.” Discover the challenges and rewards of a family business!

The Entrepreneur

Entrepreneurs start stuff. In this article, an **entrepreneur** is a person who, for the sake of profit and personal satisfaction, assumes the risk and the challenge of organizing and directing a new project, a new venture, or a new business. He gets it going.

Today in the United States there are about 15 million businesses. 90% of these are family businesses, begun by entrepreneurs like you. However, less than 5% will survive to the third generation. Why?

The Vision

It takes more than just a person who says, “Go!” It takes **vision**. One of the well known warnings from the Proverbs is about the lack of vision: “Where there is no vision, the people perish.” Notice it doesn’t say “the business will perish,” but that the very “people perish.” Vision is essential to succeed in life. It’s the mental acuteness and keen foresight that visualizes not only the idea, but the people, the location, and the raw material essential to the project. Vision perceives the market, and sees how to distribute the product. It understands the finances, and the organization.

Combine vision with the courage to say, “Go!”, and you

have Entrepreneurial Vision. You have a combination that stands a chance of lasting beyond the grandchildren, and securing that elusive place among the 5%.

Combine vision with the courage to say, “Go!”, and you have *entrepreneurial vision*.

Entrepreneurial Traits

Just go get the ketchup

Entrepreneurial instincts are illustrated by the story of four men enjoying a backyard barbecue. When they sit down to eat the burgers, one man says: “Where’s the ketchup?” The second man says: “Yeah, these sure would be better with ketchup.” The third man agrees with the others, and wonders aloud why no one thought to bring any. The fourth man is an **entrepreneur**. He gets up, and goes to retrieve the ketchup. That’s what we’re talking about. Just go get it.

Leave the harbor

Entrepreneurs are decisive risk takers. Like a baseball player who can’t steal second base until he makes himself vulnerable by leaving first base, the entrepreneur sprints for the next goal by fearlessly marching his ideas in front of whomever or whatever may oppose

them on their way to materiality. Like a ship, whose value is determined by its ability to leave the safety of the harbor and take its freight across the violent seas, the visionary entrepreneur takes his ideas out of the harbor of the imagination, and tests their buoyancy in the unforgiving waters of reality.

Do what you love

Entrepreneurs take these risks because they're optimistic and have high expectations. They love what they're doing. This creates passion and enthusiasm. Even in the face of detractors and naysayers, they continue on because they believe in their product and in their service.

Recently an insert in *The Budget* pointed out that of 88 counties in the state of Ohio, the one with the lowest unemployment rate was Holmes County. This county also has the highest number of new business filings. Why? "Because of the Amish," it said. The Amish have a rich heritage of entrepreneurship that goes back hundreds of years. These visionary entrepreneurs forge ahead with optimism and enthusiasm, finding niches and open doors. They do what they love. They leave the harbor. They go get the ketchup.

Is Business Ownership for Me?

In the early years of this country, its development and expansion was led by brave men, women, and families we call the **pioneers**. They dragged their dilapidated wagons and belongings across the hills and rivers, into uncharted lands looking for something new, something better. You Visionary Entrepreneurs are the pioneers of today. You head into the future looking for something new, something better. You are today's adventurers. But, as with the pioneers, this adventure is not for everyone. Many of those courageous pioneers lost much more than they gained for themselves or for their country. Be wise. It's not worth becoming an Entrepreneurial Casualty.

Employer or employee

There's an inclination to think of the employer as holding the more desirable position, but that's not the case. Many people are happier being the employee. This does

not make them lazy or second rate. They provide skills, man power, and a good work ethic. These people are essential to every business. We can't do without them, and the employees should not feel inferior or unappreciated for the valuable role they play. Determine which one you are.

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Motives

Many of us fantasized for a long time about the prestige of being the owner, the boss, or the entrepreneur. We would be respected by the community—perhaps even beyond the community. And there would be wealth to go with it. We need to ask ourselves why we want to start a business. Do you feel *called*? What *voices* have you listened to? What values guide you? Some people view business as a game. They play with other people's money.

How does God call a business man? What would be Biblical goals for a business? We are stewards of God's resources. Whom would He help? What causes would He consider important? Why do you want to start a business? What are your motives? Be serious. Be genuine. Be careful. And pray, pray, pray about it. Patience purifies the motives. Wait for God's leading.

Your spouse

Being an entrepreneur (a pioneer) is difficult. In a business, things don't always go well. In fact, sometimes they go very badly. The stress of a pioneer is hard to bear alone. If you are going to survive, you need at least

one person who will bear it with you; one person who will support you, and cheer for you. That person is your spouse. Where are they in it all? Will they support you? Even if they don't understand the business, do they understand you, and know how to encourage you? If you don't have your spouse on board, you aren't prepared to be a pioneer.

The family impact

Often in the excitement and adventure of the quest for a successful business, the family gets lost. Bravely examine the impact this business may have on your children. It's easy to consider only whether the business will provide monetarily for your family, but have you really thought about whether the business experience will shore up the values and lifestyle you want to pass on to your children, and to their children? As a real pioneer, you must not only conquer new territory, but you must do it with your family intact, or you have failed. A pioneer gains more than he loses. A foolish man loses more than he gains. Don't lose your family just to say you were a businessman.

Business ownership isn't for everyone. Perhaps you need to wait for a spouse to get on board. If so, wait. Perhaps your motives are skewed; you are hungry for power and respect. These things are damaging to yourself and others. Spend more time with the Lord—the One Who is calling you. Learn to trust His values and His direction. You may be one of the under-rated talents, who finds the most joy as an employee helping the

entrepreneur produce his product. If so, embrace it as a noble gift. Whatever you do, determine carefully how it will impact your family, and choose wisely.

Launching the Business

When to begin

Have you ever been around someone who has talked, and talked, and talked, and planned, and planned, and planned... but never started? These are not entrepreneurs. They will accomplish more as employees. Business ownership is probably not for them.

Two bits of advice regarding timing:

1 | Don't start before you are ready. Get a basic business plan in place. Seek counsel from experienced businessmen.

2 | Start soon. The sooner, the better. *Good intentions minus action = nothing.* Get started or you will go nowhere.

Choose an entity

Will you be a sole proprietorship, a partnership, a limited liability company, or a corporation? Research these options, if you don't understand them, or get guidance from experienced businessmen or an accountant. As you choose your entity, think into the future. What works today might not work 20 years from now. This is a common mistake made in partnerships. When you're 22, and your brother is 24, and your brother-in-law is 25, a partnership seems practical and ideal. But envision the business growing and succeeding on into the next generation. Now you have sons, and daughters, and in-laws who want a piece of the partnership. Squint into the distance as you make these choices.

Transition from employee to owner

Virtually all business owners started out as employees in someone else's business. As an employee, they tended to be the ones who were diligent workers. They were the ones who showed up, and produced. They made things happen for their employer. If you are this type of person where you are now as an employee, you are much more likely to be able to handle the rigors of ownership and

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leadership as an entrepreneur and business owner. Prepare yourself for your own business by making a success of the business that employs you now.

Choosing a business name or logo

When a customer meets you for the first time, his initial impression of you is formed by your appearance and demeanor. A bad first impression diminishes your chances of winning a new customer. A business name or logo is one of the ways a customer forms his initial impression of your business. Often a business name refers to its owner, location, and/or product. For example, “Spring Garden Woodworking” is on Spring Garden Road, and its products are made of wood. At first glance the name seems like a practical and attractive one, but this name limits the business in two ways: 1) It can only be located on Spring Garden Road; 2) It can’t expand its product beyond woodworking.

A business name or logo becomes the business identity, and if it doesn’t make sense, it makes a poor first impression. Choose a name that allows you to expand both products and locations.

Choosing a location

Location also has its limitations. Just because you have a plan, a good work ethic, and can produce a quality product, doesn’t mean that you don’t have to consider location. If you have a piece of land out in the boondocks on a country, dirt road, selling firewood there makes sense. On the other hand, trying to sell retail furniture doesn’t. Location can greatly affect the odds of your business succeeding or failing.

Business and the Anabaptist lifestyle

In an ever-changing economic landscape, one thing that is constant is the need to adapt. At one time 90% of the Anabaptist community farmed for a living. Today, in many communities, that ratio has reversed, and 90% of the workforce is employed off the farm. This is not a recent phenomenon, however. For hundreds of years Anabaptists have been adapting to changes. They have never been opposed to good change, but they have

been selective—selecting fields of work that promote core values and abide by core principles.

One of those guiding principles is 2 Timothy 2:15: “...a workman that does not need to be ashamed.” If we start a business, we need to put some thought into how it will affect or promote our simple lifestyle, our integrity, our community, our family, and our church. Here are a few things to consider.

When the father works at home

This isn’t possible, of course, in every line of work, but it is one of those guiding principles that has given strength to the family, to the community, and to the church. The father’s presence at home is invaluable in working alongside his spouse, getting his children involved at a young age, helping them think, and helping them dream. This is the time and the place to foster their entrepreneurial vision, and the father’s presence for this is irreplaceable.

Work is not a curse.

Work is a blessing.

The work ethic

Work is not a curse. Work is a blessing. By teaching our children the value of hard work and that motion is not the same as progress (a rocking chair has motion, but gets nowhere), we are blessing them with one of the greatest advantages possible. Since things of value are produced only by continuous, hard work, children learn the fortitude and stamina necessary to push through hard times to success.

A Christian witness

Can a business be a means for spreading the Good News? Absolutely! In fact the most practical and convincing way to demonstrate the Gospel is in our normal, daily work. How we respond to the man who gives us a bad check (or no check at all), or how we treat the

disgruntled customer—that’s where people detect the distinction between us and the non-Christian. It tests and displays our values, our purpose, our love, and our priorities.

Challenges of a family business

Priorities

Sometimes the business has to sacrifice because of family needs, and sometimes the family will make sacrifices for the sake of the business. This is normal, but it can cause friction and tension in relationships. That tension isn’t solved by having the business make all of the sacrifices. Instead, it is necessary to have common goals and boundaries agreed upon up front. We are entrepreneurs, eager to meet the needs of customers. However, we need to listen to the needs of our family and find creative ways to combine our goals, and agree on our boundaries. Take time regularly to discuss these goals and limits with your spouse and children.

Greed

Never think you are above the temptation to exploit your resources and your people. In the parable of the sower, Jesus warned that the “deceitfulness of riches” makes a man fruitless. The very nature of deceit is to get you to do something without believing that you did it. If you are deceived, you will not know it. Jesus also warned that it is difficult for a wealthy person to enter the kingdom of heaven. Don’t be deceived into thinking that you are exempt from the warning of greed.

Balancing work and recreation

Running a business is stressful. If you are going to survive, you will need to get away and disengage from it from time to time. The design of recreation is to revive us, recreate us—not to make us selfish or lazy. Just because we make our own schedule, and can afford to take some

time off, doesn’t mean we can indulge. The challenge is to keep even our recreation in line with our values, and guided by the same core principles.

Rewards of a family business

1 | The ability of the father to be much more involved in the training and growth of the children.

2 | The relationships that are developed through work. This gives you influence in the lives of your employees, customers, and suppliers, and literally extends into far-reaching parts of the world.

3 | It gives you an opportunity to provide for others. This includes not only employment for those who need it, but also a healthy environment for all employees including youth. It also often gives you an opportunity to extend opportunities and resources to those in your community with special needs.

4 | It gives you the leadership experience needed in non-profit situations. Often organizations or community leaders are looking for people who are accustomed to overseeing work projects. As an entrepreneur, you have the skills for many community challenges.

5 | The entrepreneur often has deep satisfaction of well learned responsibility and work well done.

In summary

You have a dream. You know what you would love to do. You can envision it. Maybe you’ve even jotted down notes, interviewed relevant people, thought through cost and labor, and imagined the deep satisfaction of successfully providing a product or service, but you can’t quite work up the courage to take your ideas out of the safety of your imagination and launch them into reality.

You have the vision. Now for the courage to say, “Go!”
Be an entrepreneur. Go get the ketchup!

Now *that’s* Entrepreneurial Vision!

See Wayne Wengerd’s biographical information on page 11 of this book.
