

Think Process, Not Product, When Doing Small-business Planning

Is 2015 the year you want to start your small business?

If so, have you sat down to develop your business plan yet?

Check out most how-to business guides and you will find a section on writing a business plan. Yet ask business owners and you often hear that they did a plan only because it was recommended by books and consultants or they wrote it to get money.

Thus, the business plan has gotten to be something that is beginning to seem less and less valuable in the popular press and academic writings.

“Business plans are seen more and more as something that the banker requires,” says (Insert name and title) of (Insert county). “The business owner is more likely to view them as something, once written, get put on the shelf to gather dust.”

Business owners also are likely to hear from their peers that they started a business without putting everything down on paper.

“This view that a plan is unnecessary, however, misses the important aspect,” says Glenn Muske, the North Dakota State University Extension Service’s rural and agribusiness enterprise development specialist. “It’s not the plan, which is just a thing, but the process or the doing of the plan that is the value.”

He adds that the idea of developing a business strategy and thinking about the why of developing the business, the who will benefit from the business, and the what it means to the potential customer and to the world are crucial when developing a successful business.

Developing these elements means coming somewhat from a different mindset. It also means that the owner is thinking how all of the elements may change. Change becomes part of the strategy.

A plan often becomes the end in itself. It is static and may not reflect the passion and excitement of the owner. A strategy gives a sense of what you want the final goal to be. By stating that, the path on how you get there opens up the options on how you reach the goal.

President Eisenhower focused on this difference between the process and the end result when he stated, “Plans are nothing; planning is everything.”

So if you are headed into business in 2015, you need to go through the planning process to increase your chances of business success.

For help, contact your local Extension Service office at [insert phone number and email address]. Also visit NDSU’s small-business support website at www.ag.ndsu.edu/smallbusiness and sign up for the monthly newsletter. Or check out Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/NDSUextsmallbiz> or Twitter at @gmuske.

Other resources include <http://powerofbusiness.net> and www.eXtension.org/entrepreneurship. The Small Business Administration and its related organizations, such as the Small Business Development Centers and SCORE, also can be valuable resources.

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For more information, contact glenn.muske@ndsu.edu or call (701) 328-9718. You also can visit our website, www.ag.ndsu.edu/smallbusiness.