

Small-businesses Owners Leave Their Comfort Zone

One factor can be found among most small-business owners who start, survive, thrive and grow. That factor is the willingness to leave their comfort zone.

Business-development experts frequently encourage small-business owners to be attuned to the market and ready to adjust to outside influences and changes in their business environment.

Yet internally, owners, or those wanting to be owners, face moving from the comfort of stability.

“We see that occurring when some 60 percent of youth and 40 percent of people age 50 or older envision starting a business,” says (Insert name and title) of (Insert county). “Yet the new business development rate is stagnant or even dropping.”

“While this may reflect the recent recession and an economy that is growing at a very slow pace, it also reflects how difficult it is to move away from the known and into the unknown,” (last name) continued.

In other words, leaving the comfort zone.

And it is not only startups who face it. Existing small-business owners also struggle leaving their comfort zone. You may face it as your business grows or when it is stagnant or even, we hope not, when downsizing or even closing the doors is a possibility. Other changes that can cause a lose of comfort happen when:

- Adding new product lines, services or markets
- Adding employees
- Taking on, or having to give up, various roles and responsibilities. Often a business starts with the owner doing something for which he or she has a passion. As the business grows, the owner may have to give up being on the production side and become management, over-seeing human resources, a sales team or a large, complex accounting system.
- Moving into online marketing and social media
- Bringing family members and friends into the business or, even worse, having to let go family, friends and some employees who are not adding to the bottom line

“These changes create feelings of risk as well as a loss of security of living in the known,” says Glenn Muske, the North Dakota State University Extension Service’s rural and agribusiness enterprise development specialist. “These items - many more could be added to the list - mean trying on something new within the organization or leaving our comfort zone.”

So how can leaving one’s comfort zone be made more palatable?

- It begins before you ever go into business. Know who you are and what makes you tick. Ask yourself: How much does having to make internal changes in life in general bother you?

- Try to figure out the size of your comfort zone. In what areas might you be able to give a little, and in what areas are larger movements possible?
- Understand what tools or tricks you use or are willing to try to make such adjustment manageable while limiting your stress level.
- Identify what items you simply are not willing to move out of your comfort zone.
- Have a mentor or someone with whom you can have deep, long and potentially emotional discussions. This may be a family member or a friend, but finding someone totally removed from you and your business, as well as those closest to you, probably is better.

All of these steps won't alleviate the anxiety you may feel about moving out of your comfort zone. That anxiety won't go away completely. What these steps will do is help you more easily make some of the tough transitions that are in your future.

“The bottom line is that business owners should not have expectations of being able to build and maintain a comfort zone,” Muske says. “Stay flexible. Understand that the steps you take are being done for your business and your personal well-being and family.”

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 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.