



Hong Kong Social Entrepreneurship Forum

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Social Entrepreneurs Newsletter

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左手打工, 右手創業

Why you should be 'having a job and starting a business' at the same time

This is actually the title of a book I bought in China a couple of years ago. The title intrigues and excites me. It turned out that the book was not very well written. But that didn't matter. What matters were the insights it provided me with. In the past twelve months, I have initiated a number of talks bearing this title for different audiences. The response has been most encouraging. I will be given another talk on this topic at Good Lab later this month. Please refer to the details on the last page.



Here I would like to give you the gist of what I will be covering and hopefully when you come to the talk we could spend more time to address your personal concerns and plans.

A Special Note to Bosses

Some bosses might not like what I will be describing. They might think that I will be luring their employees to set up businesses of their own. My response is this: Whether you like it or not, there are bound to be some employees in your organization who would like to start on their own, especially the more capable ones. If you want to keep them, you might have to design more challenging jobs, come up with more creative compensation, put more meaning into their work, and perhaps create an entrepreneurial (or intrapreneurial) element in their careers. And if they still want to leave, there is nothing you could do about it.

10 Major Insights

Here are the ten insights for 'having a job and starting a business'.

Insight 1 進可攻, 退可守

Well positioned to attack or defend

It is a well known fact that starting a business is many salaried employees' dream. But few of them actually make the decision to do it. There are many factors involved, but chief among them is the fear of foregoing current income and not being sure about success in the new business. To many, the opportunity cost is just too high. But if you adopt the strategy of 'having a job and starting a business', you would be quite safe. The key thing is that 'starting a business' is a process, and it entails long preparation; it is not just a decision to quit the job. If you are serious about starting a business, you should do the preparation while you are still having a job. Wait till you are well prepared before you say good-bye to your current employer.

Insight 2 未創業, 先學做老闆

Before you start your business, learn from your boss

The best preparation for starting a business has to do with your mindset. Most salaried employees only have an

employee mindset and not an entrepreneur mindset. If you want to run a successful business, you have to start thinking like an entrepreneur. A great way to do this is to learn from your bosses. If you work for a relatively small company, the owner-entrepreneur would be your learning target. If you work for a relatively large corporation, you have to identify the right level of bosses who have the entrepreneurial mindset – in some cases, this person might be your big boss. Then learn from them. Ask yourself and make deep observations on such issues as: how to find enough customers, how to delight customers, how to design or develop a product, how to market the product, how to manage cash flow, how to recruit good people, how to inspire them to work hard, how to reward them properly, how to develop relationship with suppliers, how to handle conflicts and crises, etc.etc. All these have always been observable to anyone, but until you want to start a business of your own, you might not bother to take a serious look at them. Try to consolidate your learning into 三要三不要: ‘three things I must do and three things I mustn’t do when I have my own business’.

Insight 3 廣建人脈,無往不利

Build a network as stepping stone for success

Starting a business is not just about having an idea and capital. Having a network of people who would be your ready source of knowledge and support is critically important. Simply put, never start a business without first having built a network of support. But network is about people, about relationship, about give and take, about trust and friendship...all these take time to build and nurture. So the best time to start building the network is when you are still having a full time job. More often than not, it is your job that enables you to build the network that you need.

Insight 4 未創業,先轉工

Change your job before starting your business

Preparation for starting a business could be a lengthy one and there could be many twists and turns. Sometimes in order to prepare for launching your dream business, you might have to change your job first. For example, you might want to get into a particular industry, a certain type of company, or master some new technology, or simply to build customer and supplier networks, or find a better boss to learn from. This is not a must, but it should be an option to be considered. And when you are keen to enter a particular field or company, be prepared to lower your expectations on compensation or status. After all, it is only a strategic move in your preparation process to start your own business. Once you are on a new job, seize your time to learn from your boss and build your network.

Insight 5 選擇與自己性格及專長不相同的人做夥伴

Find a partner (or partners) who is different from you in terms of temperament and skill set

To start a brand new business, you definitely need a partner, or sometimes, partners. Your partner should share your dreams and passion, but should not be one who is like you in terms of temperament and skill set. Otherwise, it will just be 1+1=1. You and your partner need to complement each other, have a bit of arguments from time to time, and enjoy doing different kinds of work and challenges. ‘Nobody’s perfect, but a team can be’. Even a small team of two has a much better chance of success in starting a business. There is an old Chinese term 畏友 which means ‘a friend you respect and fear’. Your partner should be one of these. You like and respect each other so much that you are ready to experience all the joy and pain of starting a business together; but you also fear each other because each of you would give honest feedback to each other without hurting the relationship in any way. What if you could not find such a partner? The chances are you haven’t done well enough in building your network.

Insight 6 千萬不要與品格不好的人合作

Never partner with someone whose character you have doubts

This is a cardinal rule. Never, never work with such people. This is despite the fact that sometimes such a person might have all the skills, experience, capital and networks that you desperately need. Why? Simple, if someone is not trustworthy or has a dubious character, your partnership is doomed to fail. Sooner or later, there will be endless arguments, conflicts, and possibly litigation. Simple doesn’t worth it.

Insight 7 發夢的藝術

Learn how to dream

Most people have dreams, so do entrepreneurs and would-be entrepreneurs. But we need to distinguish two types of dreams: personal dreams and impersonal dreams. When you say your dream is to make a lot of money, buy a big house, own an aeroplane, retire at the age of forty, live overseas...these are ‘personal dreams’. You are entitled to dream whatever you like. But these have nothing to do with starting a business. In the latter, what you need are ‘impersonal dreams’, that is, dreams about such things as: how your customer will experience your products, how you would inspire your customer to buy from you, how they would be delighted by what you offer to them, how they would become champions of your products, how you would be able to attract talented people to work for you, how you would be able to lead and motivate them to deliver exceptional service...These are called impersonal dreams because they are not about you as such, but about what others think about you, like about you, feel about you. Regular readers of this Newsletter would recall that the best book on this subject is Richard Gerber, **Awakening the Entrepreneur Within**, in which the author leads the reader through the art and science of dreaming to start a business.

Insight 8 “人生最大的困擾是甘於平庸”

Life's greatest misgiving is being contented with mediocrity

This statement came from a speech delivered to the CUHK graduating class of 2011 by the Vice-Chancellor, Prof. Joseph Shen. Whether or not one would be contented with mediocrity is a matter of choice. Even God has no plans to earmark anyone to this state. Everyone is the master of their own destiny. To be sure, not everyone needs to start a business to prove that they are not mediocre; one could also excel oneself as a salaried person. But starting a business requires a deep and hard look at oneself and making a decision in this direction entails making more demands on oneself, moving out of the comfort zone, exploring the unknown and having the courage to meet whatever challenges that come along.

Insight 9 創甚麼業?

Start what kind of business?

There are two broad types of business to consider: ordinary business and social enterprise. (I have to declare my interest: I favour social enterprise). But up to this moment, the foregoing insights apply equally to both types of businesses. You are free to choose whatever type you want to engage in. The greatest difference between an ordinary business and a social enterprise is that in the latter the entrepreneur is passionate about addressing a pressing social issue; so passionate that he or she is ready to invest the next five, ten or more years to do something about it through the vehicle of a self-sustainable social enterprise. Interestingly, if you choose ordinary business, you are very much on your own; not many people or organizations are interested in assisting you (except perhaps some government-sponsored support for SMEs). But if you want to start a social enterprise, you will find that there are a lot of individuals and organizations you could call on for all kinds of support. It does not mean that it will be easier to start a social enterprise; in fact it is often more challenging because you have to look after a dual bottom line at the same time: creating a profit and realizing a social mission. But precisely because of the social mission, you might attract a lot of support and encouragement. (I will talk more about this at the workshop).

Insight 10 任何創業者都要經過這個階段

All entrepreneurs pass through this stage

Except those rare cases where someone becomes an entrepreneur without any prior working experience, it is a fair bet to say that all entrepreneurs need to go through the stage of ‘having a job and starting a business’. The question is just how conscious they are in doing the preparation. The insights mentioned above offer some practical ideas on how to make the transition more systematic and productive. If you are interested in starting a business – social enterprise or otherwise – I would suggest you take a serious look at these ideas and come up with your own transition plan. Good planning and disciplined follow up would enable you to save not only a significant amount of time but also the agony of drifting along with little sense of direction.

Do come along to my talk on August 29 at the Good Lab. Details on the next page.



日期 2012年8月29日
時間 7:00pm to 9:00pm
地點 好單位
(長沙灣通州街500號
星匯居L1)
語言 廣東話
收費 每位港幣100元

「左手打工 右手創業」工作坊

打工就一定不能創業?

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- 為甚麼要考慮創業?
- 為甚麼不專心打工?
- 為甚麼不乾脆創業?
- 為甚麼要「左手打工，右手創業」?
- 創甚麼業最有意思?
- 創辦「社會企業」與一般企業有何異同?
- 如何「左手打工，右手創業」?
- 誰會提供協助?
- 誰是理想創業夥伴?

主講嘉賓

—— 謝家駒博士



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