

So, You Want to Start a Business?

Written by Jamie Wolf

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Your Shortest Path to Entrepreneurial Success

Listen Intently, Part 1 of 6

This is a series about getting your entrepreneurial feet under you ... about how to get from where you are now to where you want to be – in a situation where you have a "business".

Here's a reminder of the big picture. To start a business, take the following steps:

- Make Decisions
- Take Action
- Fail Frequently
- Listen Intently
- Develop Yourself

So far, we've covered the first 3 in depth. We've discussed the who, what, when, where, why, and how for making decisions and taking action. We've discussed 6 different types of failure, all of which lead to growth if you let them. The point of all these steps is two-fold: when you master being the CEO of you, you can then successfully be the CEO of a business; and when you learn to create and implement systems and processes, you run your business rather than letting it run you.

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What does listening intently have to do with being a successful entrepreneur? A lot!

Let's say you want to see results like an increase in sales or a workforce that shows up and is motivated. Or you want to meet payroll without stress or know that you can make your mortgage payment or your kid's tuition payment like clockwork. If that's what you want, you have to be able to hear and respond to feedback. You have to be coachable. You have to be open to critique and failure in such a way that you can pivot and respond favorably for your business. If your lender calls hassling you, if your suppliers are later and later in paying you, if your customer stream is down to a trickle, or if you resist using that closing technique you paid to learn, the problem isn't external – it's you. It's your inability to listen intently.

I use the word intently to draw your attention to the difference between hearing – basically watching someone's mouth move while you yes them to death – and listening with focus, with receptiveness, with willingness to act on the data you receive whether it's comfortable or not. Meaning, the information might be uncomfortable and the action it requires you to take might be uncomfortable. Listening intently requires active engagement. It also requires you to let down and let go of your defenses. If you want to be right, have at it – but I thought you wanted to have a successful business!

What are the reasons people go into business? We've mentioned some of them during this series but here are a few more:

- to have work that is meaningful and stimulating to you – in other words, to do something that fires you up
- to provide for yourself and your family
- to allow you to support your community, either through employing people or through making enough revenue that you can be charitable
- to run things your way instead of the way of a former boss, to create a company culture that resonates with you
- to afford you freedom and flexibility, of time, of money, of interest – for example, a freelance business may allow you to work on a project basis and take on a variety of projects
- to have a business that meets certain physical criteria – for example, you want to work outside or with your hands or you want to travel

These very reasons to go into business become the source of your feedback, the things to which you must listen intently. Does your business still capture your imagination and provide for intellectual growth, does it provide amply for you and your family, are you tithing to the extent you envisioned, do you have the flexibility you anticipated, and are you still feeling healthy, rested, relaxed, and energized from your work? If not, there are messages intended for you. Are

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you listening?

Let's look at it from a different angle. Who or what is giving you feedback? When is information coming to you and from where? How are you responding to it and why? Keep these questions in mind when you think of what

- Your business tells you – your customers, the market trends, the economy, your suppliers, your staff, your investors or lenders, your Board
- Your body tells you – your energy, your interest, your passion, your stress level, your boredom, your anxiety, your weight, your overall health, your soul/spirit
- Your community tells you – your spouse, your kids, your siblings, your parents, your friends, your colleagues, your teammates – whether they're bowling league teammates or United Way fundraising campaign teammates

In the coming weeks I will make a case that your shortest path to entrepreneurial success lies on a road on which you have agreed to pay attention to the signs all around you and to respond to them nimbly, even eagerly, in anticipation of improving your journey, achieving your destination, and perhaps even surpassing your greatest expectations.

Beaufort resident Jamie Wolf is the author of 'Start Over! Start Now! Ten Keys to SUCCESS in Business and Life' and ten accompanying guidebooks. ☐ If you're ready to be Master of your Fate and Captain of your Soul, she invites you to come on board! Jamie offers online courses and coaching for entrepreneurs and people interested in starting over or in starting their own business. Visit her at <http://www.thestartover.com>

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