



Entrepreneur

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Rearview Mirror Lessons

4 things I wish I'd known before starting my business

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Ask any uber-successful entrepreneurs about the origin of their biggest opportunities. Most will tell you the biggest successes came after tripping up or falling down. While "learning the hard way" can be hard, it is generally the failures that teach us the most.

To wit, I give you entrepreneurial rearview mirror lessons, brought to you by the mistakes, assumptions, missteps, bloopers and mess-ups familiar to every one of us:

Oops, I Did It Again. Chances are good you've made your share of mistakes as an entrepreneur. Chances are just as good that you will continue to make them.

Once you are willing to view your mistakes not with regret and self-deprecation but with appreciation, you'll find that each one is a gift. Each mistake you have made, each mistake you agonize over making, each mistake you are sure to make going forward is its own enormously valuable lesson. These are lessons about countless things, such as what works and what doesn't, what's smart and what's a waste of time, what you are best at and what is best left to someone else, and what's worth talking about and what's worth staying silent on.

Rearview Mirror Lesson: Instead of focusing on what you did wrong or how you messed up, invest time and effort into examining specifically how a mistake moves you and your business forward in a positive, productive and transformative way.

It's Not You.Really. Regardless of the specific nature of your business, nearly everything you do, sell, say or create as an entrepreneur is in some way a reflection of who you are, what you do, what you stand for and what matters to you.

While all of that is pretty personal, you will end up being drained of much energy, time and other resources if you take anything that comes from an external source (such as a person or another company) personally. When a potential customer chooses to do business with your competitor, a client avoids paying an invoice, or you receive feedback that a product or service you sold didn't meet expectations, your natural inclination as an entrepreneur (and as a human being) may be to view these actions and reactions as personal affronts.

Rearview Mirror Lesson: Put simply: It's not you; it's them. People think, behave, speak and act based on what is going on inside and around them. Accepting that you can't please all people all of the time and that not everyone is meant to be your customer can go a long way in allowing you to focus less on trying to figure out or control other people's actions



and reactions. In the meantime, focusing less on figuring out these "whys" and "hows" will allow you to focus, instead, on those who are pleased, satisfied and begging for more.

The Leader of the Pack. Sure, every industry has success stories and leaders worthy of emulation and admiration. And while following proven leaders can be a great part of your entrepreneurial education, too much of a good thing can be too much. If you are over-intent on mirroring someone else, your business will cease to reflect what really matters to and represents you.

Rearview Mirror Lesson: Trying to be someone else takes a lot of work. Chances are, you went into business for a variety of reasons, none of which was to be just like other people or their companies. The more you focus on the uniqueness you bring to the table, the more you can develop skills, create products or services, and provide value that makes a difference while also making money.

Take It Easy. For us entrepreneurs, "9 to 5" is closer to some abstract math equation we learned in high school than it is to a description of our work hours. Truth is, there is little to no separation of business and the rest of our lives. Activities related to our businesses often take up most (if not all) of our waking hours.

As we focus and concentrate day in and day out on efficiency and getting it all done, often we push aside one of the biggest productivity boosters of all: rest. We forget to stop, pause and just be, or we consciously avoid taking time for ourselves.

Rearview Mirror Lesson: One of the hardest parts about being committed to--and maybe even addicted to--productivity is accepting that rest in its many forms is not a maybe but a must. Finding ways to build in and take time to just stop--or at least pause--is crucial to getting more done.

[Allison Nazarian](#) is widely known as one of the most honest and innovative voices in marketing, blogging and the online world today. The author of [Copywriting 101](#) and [One Minute Copywriter](#), Allison has been featured in the Wall Street Journal and Fortune Small Business. Allison writes on the entrepreneurial life, working from home, working moms and real life uncensored.

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