

Spirituality and Entrepreneurship

Entrepreneurship is a spiritual process – a manifestation of a person’s deeply held dreams and values.

With every case study of innovation and entrepreneurship, at its heart is an individual or small group of individuals who are heartfelt about making the venture happen. The grander or faster the achievement, the more clearly they have focussed on their dream and identified themselves in the role.

Business is more like raising children than passing an exam. There’s a creative moment of passion, nine months of planning, the birth, quickly followed by the realisation that the planning was just a perfunctory first step into the complexities of parenthood. Then for some reason we parents wholeheartedly commit the next twenty years to raising the child, iterating between planning and doing, learning and trying, getting it right and getting it wrong. Such commitment is not for some tidy, logical reason like getting the family name through to the next generation or as a superannuation policy. It’s a deeply held spiritual process. We simply choose to be great parents because it matters to us. Period!

But if business advisors had their way, there would be no children until individuals acquired a PhD in child psychology and a business plan for the next 20 years detailing income, expenditure, roles, responsibilities, risk management, parenting principles and the colour of the nursery wallpaper. Somehow such a process would sap the passion.

Too often we try to reduce entrepreneurship to mechanistic business plans and processes. These simply don’t work. In fact the 2500 business plans that I confess to working on have reduced the probability of success. Why?

Well business plans focus attention on the reasons **not** to go into business - the marketing problems, the finance problems, the legal problems and so on. But entrepreneurs are motivated by the reasons **to** go into business. Most often the main reason is to be their own boss, followed by making an idea happen, or thirdly to earn a living. Interestingly less than 3% of entrepreneurs say they started their business with the intention of getting rich.

Too much planning diverts attention from the dream. Of course we need to plan, but we also need to act. Wherever feasible, entrepreneurs need to start in a small way, iterating between planning and doing as their business grows. This is the same way we learn to swim, at some stage getting wet and eventually progressing beyond the comfort of the shore.

So how do we support the spiritual process of entrepreneurship? How do we shift people from wanting to choosing? How do we help people to gain a deep sense of knowing who they are, to be inspired by their dreams, believe in themselves, draw on their talents, commit to the path, and attract the bounties of God, the universe or providence?

Visualisation is a good first step where entrepreneurs can see, smell, taste, touch, hear, and know their dream. The visualisation needs to be so clear that they can imagine themselves making it happen **now**. Sharing the dream, writing it down or in some way “putting it out there” is a powerful step. It is important to building confidence in their own past experiences, talents and capacity to solve problems. Too often business advisors triumphantly point out failings and weaknesses.

Our dreams are built on our values – those things that we hold most dear to identifying ourselves. Successful venturing is a creative dance between the mind and the soul, finding expression in action. The soul is charged by a positive mental attitude with self talk that

affirms and encourages. The soul provides resilience to setbacks and the courage to make decisions. The soul is like a deep pool of water full of potential which, when released by the mind, cascades into action.

The mind hunts for creative answers, willing to explore new options. The soul answers often unfolding creative solutions after quiet reflection. Deep relaxation and meditation increases self-actualization according to a statistical meta-analysis of 42 independent studies¹. It also increases people's belief in themselves as well as perceiving their "actual self" as significantly closer to their "ideal self."²

Some planning helps, but wherever possible it needs to be aimed at overcoming the first step. Doing something, anything! If it is selling craft, then making the first sample counts. If it is identifying markets, then picking up the phone and talking to prospective buyers counts. Choosing a company name. Setting up a bank account. Making the first sale. Very soon, like parenting, the venture becomes their being.

Deb Gilbertson
Te Kaihau Ltd
www.windeaters.co.nz
deb@windeaters.co.nz
Phone +64 4 589 5011

¹ Journal of Social Behavior and Personality, 6: 189-248, 1991

² Journal of Psychology, 4: 206-218, 1976