

Opportunity Does Not Knock, You Do

By Tim Knox



Q: I'm graduating this year with a degree in business and would like to start my own business rather than get a corporate job. I have a few business ideas, but none of them really gets me excited. Should I just put my business plans on hold and get a job until the right opportunity comes along?

-- Carlton M.

A: Congratulations on the impending degree, Carlton. Never having attended a higher institution of learning myself, I have great respect for anyone who can withstand four years of non-mandatory schooling and emerge with sheepskin in hand.

I drove by a college once. It looked hard, so I kept going. I do have a pair of sheepskin boots, but I don't think they ever helped me get a job. They do make me taller, but that's another story.

Seriously, I envy your position and applaud your efforts. You're young, you're educated, you're ambitious, you're probably much better looking than me, and soon you'll leave the comfort and warmth of your tiny dorm room to go out into the big, cold, cruel world to seek your fortune and make your mark.

The fun is just about to begin, my friend. I hope you're ready for the ride. If you think college was tough, just wait until real life sets in.

Now on to your question: should you put your business plans on hold and get a job until the right opportunity comes along. I really can't make that call for you. That's a decision you'll have to make for yourself, based on your situation, your goals, your finances, your responsibilities, your commitments, and all the other factors that make Carlton's world go around.

I can tell you that as a breed, entrepreneurs are an impatient lot and many jump on the first business bandwagon that comes along just for the sake of being in business. That's a big mistake that usually comes back to bite them in their entrepreneurial behinds.

You should always have a solid idea and a very clear plan of action before starting a business. It is the failure to plan that leads to the failure of most businesses.

You didn't plan on hating the business you're in, you didn't plan on needing so much money to get started; you didn't plan on growing so fast; you didn't plan on there being no market for your product; etc.

A failure to plan is a plan to fail. Of course you probably learned that in "Old Business Adage 101."

Starting a business simply because you have a business degree is not a smart thing to do. That would be like deciding to jump out of a plane just because someone handed you a parachute while standing on a street corner.

Start your business career only when you get an idea or find a business concept that gets you so excited and so passionate that you can't sleep at night. That's when you go into startup mode and not a minute before.

Now on to the soapbox part of our program (you didn't think you were going to get away without a sermon, did you?). Here's a word or two about waiting for opportunity to come along.

I know you were just using an old expression, but you pressed one of my hot buttons because many wannabe entrepreneurs do just that: they proclaim themselves as entrepreneurs, then proceed to sit and wait for opportunity to come calling with a business idea and a bagful of money.

These misguided folks better have a comfortable chair in which to wait because they are going to be sitting there for a very, very long time.

If just one more of these armchair entrepreneurs call me up and tell me that they are born entrepreneurs and all they need is the chance to prove how smart they are and will I please, please, please give them that opportunity, I think I'll hurl (in a business-like manner, of course). This ain't an audition for *The Apprentice*, folks. Who do I look like: Donald Trump? We both have great hair, but that's where the similarity ends.

The truth is opportunity does not come along. Opportunity does not knock. Opportunity doesn't even know where you live. Opportunity doesn't know your name, your phone number, or your personal situation. Opportunity does not appreciate your talents, your skills, or anything else about you. Opportunity does not care that you are a great person who just needs a chance.

Real entrepreneurs know that opportunity is not delivered like pizza. Real entrepreneurs do not wait for opportunity to come along. Real entrepreneurs seek out opportunity. They get up off the couch or get out of their cubicles, go out the door, and run up and down every street in town knocking on every door they come to. Sometimes opportunity answers the door, sometimes not, but real entrepreneurs keep knocking.

Real entrepreneurs know that you can knock on a thousand doors and never find opportunity waiting on the other side.

They also know that opportunity might be waiting just at the next stop, so they keep finding doors and they keep knocking.

When people ask where I went to school I give the old reply: The School of Hard Knocks! But I don't mean that life has beaten me up on my way to where I am today. I mean that I went up to a lot of doors and knocked as hard as I could and every now and then, opportunity answered.

So get your degree and catch your breath, Carlton. You have your whole life ahead of you. Then, when you're ready, get off your duff and go knock on some doors.

If opportunity is out there, you'll find it.

Here's to your success!

Tim Knox
Small Business Q&A

Contact:

Tim Knox
1277 Douglass Road
Huntsville, AL 35806
P: 256-895-0003
F: 888-526-8456
tim@timknox.com
<http://www.timknox.com>