

# Forbes

## How to Lead Like an Entrepreneur



Lemonade Stand. Getty Images

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"I'm thinking about starting my own company!" It is a comment I frequently hear as a subtle alert that I am about to be queried on the "how-to's." I launched my business over forty years ago and have enjoyed a fun, successful ride. I am still learning. However, at this point, the rhythm of my highly practiced work probably looks to a wannabe like easy street. It is far from easy. And there have been many challenging moments along the journey.

The uptick in "how to" queries is partly tied to an improving, post-pandemic economy. It is also fueled by Gen Z or Zoomers more interested in freedom than a gold watch as reward for faithfulness to a single employer. And it sometimes comes from naïve contenders unaware that over 80% of start-ups crash and burn within the first 18 months.

As my friend, Elizabeth Lortardo, notes in her new book, *Leading Yourself*, "A recent *Harvard Business Review* survey found nearly 90% of respondents said they expected to experience a substantial degree of joy at work, yet only 37% reported such an experience." The rules of the road for successful entrepreneurs have equal applicability to people employed by an organization. Here are five critical success factors for most entrepreneurs—passion, distinction, intelligence, sacrifice, and resources along with their leadership implications.

### **Passion: The Groundwater of Entrepreneurial Spirit**



The opening statement – "I'm *thinking* about starting"—always gives me pause. I typically respond, "Come back when it's 'I *have* to start...'" "Thinking about" suggests a passing fancy or timid exploration. Under the emotional surface of every successful entrepreneur is an unquenchable drive, zeal, and yearning. It is the source of their die-hard tenacity and never-give-up persistence. Employed people often live their work on the job; entrepreneurs always live it. It's not like an obsession, although some are obsessed. It is more like a child waiting for Christmas morning. Filmmaker George Lucas said: "It's hard work making movies. It's like being a doctor: you work long hours, very hard hours, and it's emotional, tense work. If you don't really love it, then it ain't worth it."

*Message for Leaders:* Search for what associates could be personally passionate about and help them anchor it to your team's mission. Tell stories about what greatness looks like for your team. Be a role model of noticeable passion. Remember: making a difference can be much more motivating than making a living. So, what if you have associates seemingly uninterested in anything? Take an honest look at your selection process. *Change* the people or change the *people!*

### **Distinction: The Marketplace Differentiator**

Successful entrepreneurs look for marketplace holes of opportunity—products that solve problems, solutions that have meritorious appeal, and services that fill unique needs. Uniqueness creates a story that fosters a buzz that grows a reputation. Distinction helps answer the question: Why will customers want to do business with me? A couple elected to start a pizza business. He was a wine connoisseur; she loved cooking gourmet pizza. They opened a restaurant and then closed it within months. Their passion for their product was not enough. There were already two pizza restaurants nearby. Their offering was good but far from a unique value proposition. They were unable to tell a story that was out of the ordinary. Bottom line, your distinction is a virtue only if it is one valued by your target market.

*Message to Leaders:* Coach your associates on how to better market their skills and talents to you and others. Encourage associates to constantly look for ways to improve their roles and help them "pitch" the merits of their suggestions. Mentor them to think like marketers, not just workers. Ask a colleague to let your associates interview for a role and get feedback on their selling practices. Remember, benefits score; features bore.

### **Intelligence: The Source of Preparation**



Intelligence is not about mental quickness; it is about reliable information regarding your target market. Intelligence helps answer the question: who will do business with me? It means homework on demographics, competitive analyses, a candid SWOT (Google it), assessment, plus marketing, social media, and public relations requirements. It comes from interviewing successful start-ups in the same space but in different markets. Too often, a budding entrepreneur starts with a website and business card design with little thought regarding how to drive traffic to their website or create contexts to provide a business card. Brand trappings must be thoughtful responses to market research. Intelligence helps answer the question: how will I serve my target market?

*Message to Leaders:* Share everything you know about your customers with your associates. Provide detailed updates to them much like you would conduct briefings to your superiors. Help associates gain and retain a clear line of sight with customers. Ensure they value their role and understand they are accountable for meeting customer needs rather than merely performing tasks.

### **Sacrifice: The Fuel of Entrepreneurship**

I was attending a dinner at an association meeting. Half the group of twelve owned their businesses; half worked for major companies. The topic was popular television programs. The employees chatted about TV trivia; the entrepreneurs had not seen any of the programs. Entrepreneurs are oblivious to work hours or even workdays. Their work rhythm is driven by what needs to be accomplished, not by hands on a clock. It is not that they are workaholics; their quest for results drives them, and they are willing to sacrifice to achieve them. Successful entrepreneurs view constant change as their advantage, not their adversary. Their orientation is: "I'll quickly adjust as my competitors wring their hands." They remained focused on a goal, not the side shows or rabbit holes. Sacrifice helps answer the question: how much am I willing to invest to be successful?

*Message to Leaders:* Nurture such intense pride in work that your associates become so completely stimulated by what they do that they lose sight of quitting time. Provide sincere, frequent affirmation and celebration. You obviously must respect labor laws, but genuine commitment is about being inspired, not feeling enslaved. Demonstrate your inspiration and invite them to join you.

## Resources: The Tools for Confidence

Successful entrepreneurs take risks. Not fool-hardy, bet-the-baby's-milk-money recklessness, but thoughtful risks. Risk-taking comes from confidence and confidence comes from the peace of mind that you have backing. Resources include a network of people who can give you candid advice—like your own "board of directors." It means a carefully crafted business plan and a smart staff chosen for valued talents that bolster your weaknesses (not your brother-in-law because he works cheap). Resources include a line of credit, not a huge debt. My business partner, John Patterson, enjoys saying, "Confidence is the swagger of someone wise, humble, and wealthy; or at least someone convinced they are!" The centeredness John describes only comes from a stockpile of relevant, respected resources.



*Message for Leaders:* A major part of your role as a leader is to supply associates the resources that enable success. This includes empowering all associates to be resourceful—always on the hunt for assets and methods that bolster their excellence and ensure achievement. It means helping them "think like an owner," not like a worker bee. It includes treating failure by associates as a valuable learning opportunity, not as a reason of rebuke and blame. It means following up and remaining attentive to what is needed.

Being an entrepreneur can yield a fun, happy lifestyle. But joy comes from success borne of discipline, organization, planning, and investment, not just an exciting vision or clever idea. It emerges from a determined hunger for the freedom to order one's life in a meaningful manner. The next time you encounter a self-assured, successful entrepreneur gracefully swimming through life like a swan on a lake, never forget there is a much different view under the water's surface.

### *About Chip Bell*



Chip R. Bell is a renowned keynote speaker and the author of several award-winning, best-selling books. Global Gurus in 2024 ranked him for the tenth year in a row in the top ten keynote speakers in the world on customer experience. He is also an alliance partner with On3.ai that specializes in mobile based, AI-driven field learning programs with high level transfer of learning and retention and an instructor with MyFuel.io. He can be reached at [www.chipbell.com](http://www.chipbell.com).