“You’re just going to leave your job completely?” said my husband when I told him in the summer of 2009 I was going to officially start a full time private practice. He spoke the words slowly as though he thought I might be losing my mind. He, like my family, had always had a secure salaried job that provided a set paycheck each week. I, on the other hand, despised having a set paycheck each week. In college, I was a waitress and found the open-ended pay based on number of shifts worked and quality of customer service highly motivating.

I didn’t set out to be a business owner. I am a Licensed Mental Health Counselor and knew I wanted to use my expertise to make a difference in the lives of professional women. I had a unique vision of how exactly how I wanted to carry out this mission and the only way to make it happen was to start my own business.

With a lack of entrepreneurs in my family (by lack…I mean none), I didn’t know what starting a business entailed, I just knew I needed to do it in order to carry out my career vision. Being a 1st generation entrepreneur, I wasn’t fully prepared for some of the challenges that lied ahead:

• You must be willing to face your fear of failure. People will have doubts about your ability to succeed in starting a business. You must be confident enough in yourself and the service/product you are offering to translate doubts into signs of caution, but not to accept them as accurate predictions.
• As independent as you may be, you must be willing to humbly ask and accept help. There will be endless personal and professional obstacles you will need to navigate when owning your own business. Surround yourself with people who believe in your business and are excited to assist in building its success. After my husband came out of his state of shock, he immediately became my number one fan. The financial, physical, and emotional support from my friends and family have been a key factor in my success.

• Accept that your lifestyle will differ in significant ways compared to your employed friends and family. You will need to learn to adjust to fluctuating income and to prepare for slow seasons. Your hours will be flexible (sometimes in your favor and sometimes not). There is a misconception that people who are self-employed can just do what they want because they are their own boss. The reality is that people who are self-employed often have to make major sacrifices to do what is needed, as their income depends on it.

As with anything we do in life, the more accurate our expectations are, the more likely we are to be satisfied in the end. However, a familiar career path is not always the best fit for your future. For anyone seeking to start their own business and lacking entrepreneurial role models in your life, I encourage you to utilize the wealth of resources and support offered by the FIT Women’s Business Center. Their staff and volunteers really helped me gain insight into the aspects of business I didn’t know!

“Life is not a multiple choice test, it’s an open-book essay exam.”

— Alan Blinder (Princeton)

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