The Edge: Need a cheerleader? Do it yourself

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“Whether you think you can or you think you can’t, either way you are right.” — Henry Ford

We are all wired differently. I admire strong women who run businesses and seem to remain confident in all things. These women persevere. I see them at community events, heads held high, smiles bright, they seem untouchable. I want that!

I often wonder if these women have had the same moments I have. Moments of self-doubt, wondering if their business will survive, making mistakes and beating themselves up over them. I’m sure they have, yet they march on, setting examples for the rest of us.

I started my business four years ago. Two years in I was up to three full-time staff with benefits and a half dozen contractors or so when I lost my biggest client. The one that paid the salaries. In tears, I had to lay off my staff and even began looking for a job myself — feeling defeated. I still had some work, but the blow was enough to have me wondering if I could really do this … be a successful business owner and entrepreneur. Had I made a mistake?
This is when I decided to participate in a second-stage business mentoring program. I was simply at a point where I was feeling helpless, not knowing what my next move should be, but knowing that I needed to support two children and a mortgage that were non-negotiable.

To that point, my business had all come from existing relationships, and sales was not my strong suit. I was a strategist, not a salesman. How would I grow this thing? Was I kidding myself that I had a viable business model? Advertising agencies abound but PR agencies can be a tougher sell. “Maybe I should just go back to the comfort and security of the corporate world?”

One of the biggest lessons I learned in mentoring sessions was that I was dealing with some pretty serious negative self-talk issues. My worst enemy was my own mind! I’m a positive person on the surface, but I see competition around me that appears to be thriving. It makes me nervous. Is what I bring to the table unique enough? Can I compete? Am I a fool to think I can?

I make mistakes often, and after each one deal with negative self-talk. It’s just how I’m wired. Losing my largest revenue stream and my staff was a huge blow to my (still) very fragile ego and I remember being on the verge of tears talking to my mentors, describing my feelings of doubt. “Cancel, cancel!” became the mantra of one of them. Every time I said I couldn’t do something or wasn’t good at sales or that I couldn’t compete, she’d say it over and over again. “Cancel, cancel! You CAN do it and you WILL.”

I spent a lot of time reminding myself why I made the choice to be an entrepreneur in the first place. To have flexibility for my kids. To grow a dream. To prove that I could offer a higher level of service in my field than was currently available in the marketplace. To be a positive role model to my daughter and show her that a woman can do anything she sets her mind to. Heck, to prove that exact thing to MYSELF.

I’ve come to realize that we all have different drivers and that as a woman it’s OK to make career a priority. The results of this drive are already paying off. I’ve chosen to run a business that, yes, can be a hard sell initially, but clients quickly see the value and make us part of their corporate family. As a result of my entrepreneurial choices, I am able to be a more engaged mom for my kids than I was as a corporate employee. I make a good living and can afford to have a wonderful life balance and enjoy traveling adventures in my off time. Who could ask for more?

My business is still relatively young, but I have learned some truly incredible lessons along the way so far. The most important of which is to keep persevering — never quit. When it comes to sales, I’m still a work in progress, but I don’t give up because it’s all integral to keeping the dream a reality. When those negative thoughts creep into your mind, acknowledge them and let them go. You’re undoubtedly going to make many mistakes along the way, but just keep getting
up and being your own biggest cheerleader. Surround yourself with positive people and never be afraid to ask for help at any stage.

“I’m convinced that about half of what separates the successful entrepreneurs from the non-successful ones is pure perseverance.” — Steve Jobs

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