



Mental health and entrepreneurship: tips and tricks to finding balance

Description

Mental health and entrepreneurship sometimes feel like parallel concepts because of the strain running a business can put on you. The amount of time invested to be successful in entrepreneurship does not leave time for much else.

For many entrepreneurs, self-care is an unaffordable luxury. Additionally, entrepreneurship itself puts a strain that compromises mental health. It would be tough enough on a healthy mind, but for those with some mental health issues, it's a different proposition altogether.

For me, I fall into the latter category. Life long struggles with depression, anxiety and mild OCD have made entrepreneurship a tougher journey. As someone prone to negative emotions and panic, the roller-coaster nature of entrepreneurship has been very tough on me.

I was so painfully aware of the uphill battle I had ahead of me, [keeping sane as an entrepreneur](#) is one of the first things I blogged about. But even then, I wasn't fully aware of just how tough it would be. Having acquired a little wisdom from navigating entrepreneurship for a little while, I thought I'd share what I have learnt.

The most important lesson being, you can have it both; Mental Health and Successful Entrepreneurship. So here's a little look into how to reach that nirvana.

Mental Health Should Be A Priority

Failing to prioritise mental health was both a cultural and an adopted habit for me. Culturally, I grew up in a society that powers through everything, not just mental health. As a result, I have always tried to

push through and meet my goals, regardless of my mental state.

The fact that I have always somehow managed to manage no matter how tough I was struggling mentally did not help. However, entrepreneurship is a whole different ball game. The pressures are great and unrelenting, and hardly ever give you an opportunity to regulate. As a result, it's important as an entrepreneur to prioritise your mental health, over and above your business.

You cannot brush anything aside at the expense of managing your mental state. This goes for entrepreneurs with no history of mental challenges, as entrepreneurship can break even the strongest minds.

At the first site of trouble approaching, it's important to make time and deal with the problem. Remember, the longer you take to recognise and deal with these issues the longer it will take to recover. And the more difficult it'll be to return to normal functions.

Recognising you are struggling as an entrepreneur is not a weakness, but the first step to building yourself up for success. The odds are greater than as an entrepreneur your mental health will deteriorate at some point than that it won't.

As a matter of fact, you have a [72% chance of struggling](#), so you are by no means alone.

[bctt tweet="No great mind has ever existed without a touch of madness," username="MutConsulting"]

It seems Aristotle himself knew what we are up against because believe me, being a successful entrepreneur takes a touch of madness.

Build a Business Around your Passion

It's not a secret that money seems to be a motivating factor very quickly in life. Just look at Maslow's hierarchy of needs, physical needs, which includes what money can buy and money itself are at the very bottom.

You may believe money can indeed buy happiness, but that's a discussion for another day. As a result, going into business for the sole purpose of making money will drain you. Not only is this because money might take time to come in, but also because when it does, it'll motivate you only so much.

As a result, you will be stuck slogging it out every day for something that doesn't really bring you joy. And that is a recipe for serious mental strain. Something you are passionate about on the other hand will keep you going, even during tough times.

When you have your passion as a business, you have a lot more to celebrate. Even the smallest things bring you joy. You measure success beyond the bottom line, and you can find reward even before breaking even.

You can earn a return on your investment even without making a profit, and this will keep you going. One of the things that has kept me going with Mut-Con is my passion for business development. As a result, business consulting brings me joy.

I enjoy even the little things, like sitting and listening to innovative ideas, and how entrepreneurs overcome challenges. That environment of thinking out the box and innovation coupled with an opportunity for me to do the same and add my two cents keeps me going. It gives an endorphin rush that carries me through the everyday challenges of entrepreneurship. Balancing mental health and entrepreneurship is a lot easier if you can have fun every day.

Mental Health and Entrepreneurship Require a Rested Mind

If God required rest, you definitely do too, it's as simple as that. Okay maybe let's expand a little. Rest is an important element of everything, particularly when you wish to create. Any good bodybuilder will tell you that in order to create muscle, you need to rest it as much as you work it.

The same goes for your business, to create a successful one, you need to rest your mind as much as you use it. A rested mind works faster, recognising opportunity and solving problems a lot faster than a fatigued one.

It is definitely a lot less likely to make problems worse or miss key opportunities for growth. At any given time when you think you can just add one more hour to an already long day, you are doing more harm than good. It's important to remember;

[bctt tweet="work expands to fill the time allocated for its completion" username="MutConsulting"]

So however much time you think you should work to complete your work, there will be work to be done. Even if you add an hour or two, there will be work. Instead, try to allocate some time to rest. Instead of chasing a ballooning timeline, take a rest and start refreshed, you will achieve a lot more.

More importantly though, when you are rested, your mind will be healthier. You will be less prone to frustration. You will be less prone to thoughts of doom and gloom that would eventually lead to mental deterioration.

With adequate rest, you will be more in control of your thoughts, allowing you to better manage your mental health, even as your entrepreneurship gets tougher. The growth your rested mind will give you in your entrepreneurial journey will also improve your mental health. It's a two-pronged strategy.

Physical Health is Important for Mental Health

An Interesting Side Note

One interesting story about Mut-Con is the colour in our logo, it's a shade of green, that you can find by Googling the hex 004b55. It's the kind of colour you wonder how one came up with it.

The simple answer, it was a mistake. When the Mut-Con site was being created, it took about 72 hours of back to back work with minimal breaks. As a result, looking at the semi-transparent colour of the header, which was black, made it appear that colour.

We liked the look, so we just retained it for the rest of the site. So a mistake gave us a colour scheme. We owe our entire brand look to fatigued eyes.

How it Relates to Mental Health and Entrepreneurship

While the above anecdote makes a good case for rest (if this was a client site it might not have been such a happy story), it applies to physical health. Routine is a very tough thing to maintain as an entrepreneur.

We work long hours, constantly adding one more to meet deadlines. Food, sleep, and exercise become an afterthought, and we can easily find ourselves sitting in the same place for hours on end.

In my case, it was a good 72 hours. As a result, entrepreneurs tend to suffer a notable decline in physical health. And you can't keep a healthy mind in an unhealthy body. Simply put, [there is a strong relationship between mental health and physical health](#).

An unhealthy mind may manifest physical symptoms. More importantly, an unhealthy body may lead to mental deterioration. If you are going to navigate entrepreneurship while retaining a healthy mind, you will need to maintain a healthy body.

Take note of your nutrition and make sure to hydrate. Exercise is also a definite must, it need not be anything hectic, some cardio or yoga will do the trick. Just be sure not to be the productive couch potato, itâ??s just as dangerous.

From my own experience, when the body gets tired enough, the mind canâ??t even tell the difference between transparent black and green. If thatâ??s not a sure-fire sign not to work long hours straight, I donâ??t know what is.

Donâ??t Isolate Yourself

Perhaps what causes the greatest discourse between good mental health and entrepreneurship is how isolating entrepreneurship can be. For the average entrepreneur, an office is an affordable luxury, not to mention a staff complement.

This can often translate to working from home, all on your own. As a result, entrepreneurs have to face challenges on their own, celebrate the small victories on their own. It is quite a lonely existence, and with isolation, a mental strain may begin to crop up.

It is very important for entrepreneurs to be wary of this. You need to have a support system, both to formally and informally deal with your challenges. You need to consistently engage with friends and family and discuss your challenges.

They may not be able to help much, but since Froyd smoked a pipe we know talking about problems helps. You also need a technical support system, one that can help solve issues you are facing.

Despite having a robust support system, entrepreneurs rarely reach out. Be it financial or operational, there are a lot of groups, forums or organisations you can join or reach out to. With financial challenges, reach out to [financial aid organisations, private or public that support small businesses](#).

For everything else, marketing, financial management, operations, there are groups you can turn to. From Reddit to Facebook to Stake-exchange, you can ask anything and get help. There are communities for every product or service you provide, even if you are reselling.

There are even groups for entrepreneurs to celebrate their little victories. The moral is, you are not alone, and your mental health can benefit from you reaching out. You will grow your business with the relevant networking too.

Accept Entrepreneurship is Hard

Perhaps one of the most difficult things to accept is that entrepreneurship is tough. Us entrepreneurs are a proud bunch. And while that pride may help us overcome challenges, it brings along with it some problems.

We tend to suffer alone under the heavy yolk of entrepreneurship at the cost of our mental health. It could be fear of failure or fear of losing the adulation we were getting for our successes, we suffer in silence.

And this has led to many breakdowns. In addition to suffering in silence, entrepreneurs tend to hold themselves to an unrealistic standard of success. Many entrepreneurs lack patience, we want to succeed in a jiffy. We want to achieve everything our competition does.

We want to be the best there is, know everything and be in control of everything. And that takes a great mental toll because moderate achievements start to feel like a failure. At times, even some very good ones start to seem run off the mill.

This leads to consistent disappointments and eventually depression. Entrepreneurs need to stay aware of and stay clear of this mentality. Entrepreneurship is very hard. Gruelling is the more appropriate word. You need to remember this always and appreciate all your efforts.

Not every challenge or failure is because of your shortcomings. Equally, every victory is a reason to celebrate yourself. Constantly being in the dumps will not do your mental health any favours, nor your business for that matter.

Toby Thomas described entrepreneurship best;

[bctt tweet="It's like a man riding a lion. People think, This guy's brave. And he's thinking, How the hell did I get on a lion, and how do I keep from getting eaten?" username="MutConsulting"].

Take a moment to appreciate the fact that you are riding a lion, and you haven't been eaten.

Redefine your Idea of Success

In addition to being very difficult, a business is a long term investment, a very very long term investment. Unfortunately, as a result of how entrepreneurship is looked at in our culture (we revere the success but never stop to explore the challenges behind those success stories), and the feelings of grandeur most entrepreneurs carry, many of us go in unprepared.

We come in bright-eyed and bushy-tailed, expecting our innovative idea to change the world and net us millions quick. This is not how business works at all. Even with the brightest ideas and the right attitude, your business will take time to succeed, and it may fail.

It's important as an entrepreneur to not only manage your expectations but be multidimensional about what success means. If you go into your journey willing to accept success only when you earn a certain amount, you will drive yourself into depression. This is even worse if you go in thinking this will happen overnight.

Entrepreneurship is about celebrating the little victories because the big ones are few and far in-between. For everything that goes right in every single day, take the time to acknowledge and give yourself a pat on the back. It will give you the energy you need to forge on.

Another important factor to consider is to not expect entrepreneurship to be a substitute for hard work. You'll probably have to work harder than when you were employed, for a start at least.

That guy telling you he works up at eleven to check emails on a beach in Ibiza on your Instagram, he's lying. Whatever yarn he's spinning for you is as fake as his ownership of that Ferrari he's standing next to.

That's why you never see Bill Gates or Elon Musk on Instagram, selling get rich quick schemes from Borabora. If you want to be an entrepreneur, be willing to show up and do the work, don't be caught wondering how you got on the lion.

Hope for the Best While Preparing for the Worst

Perhaps the biggest catalyst for the deterioration of mental health among entrepreneurs is the uncertainty of it all. We love the flexibility running our own show gives us as entrepreneurs but it comes at a price.

That price is stability, the unlimited upside potential comes with unlimited downside potential. This leads to an endless cycle of anxiety and obsessing that negatively affects the mental health of entrepreneurs. Prudent entrepreneurs, therefore, know the importance of managing this downside and their risk exposure.

While entrepreneurship is in itself an exercise in traversing risk for a reward, this risk should be managed. It's, of course, inadvisable to run a business believing it will fail, but it's even worse to run it believing it can't.

At any given time, be mindful and aware of the resources you have invested in your business, monetary, time or any other. You should limit your exposure to only what you are willing to lose should things go belly up. Entrepreneurial success is a reward for risk-taking, but not reckless risk, that's for gambling.

More importantly, you should always have a contingency plan. Your sensitivity analysis should give you a worst-case scenario, and you should have a plan in place for that scenario. And the part that matters most? The answer is simple: when that worst-case scenario comes, be willing to accept it.

A lot of entrepreneurs get themselves into greater debt trying to save a sunk ship that they would have if they had abandoned it while it was sinking. Limiting your financial exposure, and any other exposure for that matter will stop you from having a mini heart attack over every little thing.

Knowing what failure looks like will save you the mental anguish of exhausting yourself in a business you can't save. And having a contingency plan will save you the mind wrecking reality of having no place to start from when things do fall apart.

Conclusion

Unfortunately, when it comes to entrepreneurship, we tend to want to paint a pretty picture. We gloss over the trials and tribulations and jump right into the glory years of the journey.

Unfortunately, as a result, quite a few people go into it unprepared, particularly the difficulty of maintaining mental health in entrepreneurship.

Fortunately, though, it's not all doom and gloom. With the right strategies, you can enjoy the best of both worlds. The important thing is to be prepared and to be willing to reach out. Asking for help is not a sign of weakness, but it could, however, be the difference between a mental breakdown and a successful business.

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