

Psychological edge: doers and gamblers

BY DAVID GOLL

Entrepreneurs hold a special place in American society.

In a culture that venerates business success and individualism, those who strike out on their own are often highly respected by both risk-taking peers and those content to punch a time clock until they retire.

But many people do dream about sloughing off their roles as wage slaves. They think about opening a nice little Italian trattoria in the neighborhood, a motorcycle repair shop on the boulevard, a consulting business in their home office.

Someday.

But someday seldom comes — daydreaming is about as far as most people get. What sets the entrepreneur apart from the average company "lifer" or — perhaps more accurately today — frequent job jumper?

It's a very simple distinction, in the view of Ricardo L. Singson, director of Cal State Hayward's Center For Entrepreneurship.

"They are doers, not dreamers," said Singson, professor in the university's School of Business and Economics. "They take advantage of opportunities for which they feel prepared, rather than suffering from paralysis through analysis. The entrepreneur's definition of luck is where preparation meets opportunity; therefore, they feel they are not gambling."

But that doesn't mean the decision to become an entrepreneur typically happens suddenly, prompted by some dramatic turn of events.

"It's usually a more subtle process," said Jerry Engel, executive director of the Lester Center for Entrepreneurship and Innovation at UC-Berkeley's Haas School of Business. "Most people tend toward incremental investigations of ideas they've had, not making big commitments all of a sudden. They talk over coffee with someone who has a business, and, a few weeks later, attend an event where they can hear a panel discussion featuring entrepreneurs. Even something you regard as a casual endeavor can push you in that direction."

Perhaps bucking the stereotype of having a hard-driving impetuous personality, Engel, an entrepreneurial veteran himself, said one of the most valuable personality traits for a business self-starter is stability.

"They have a tendency toward emotional maturity, a sense of self-confidence and a positive self-image," he said. "They don't personalize rejection. Obviously, ambition is a very important quality for entrepreneurs, but resiliency is even more important to their long-term success."

Another stereotypical notion Engel likes to debunk is that of the lone entrepreneur, the rugged individualist battling against all odds to carve out a niche for his or her business.

To loosely paraphrase a prominent U.S. senator and former first lady — it takes a village to raise a company.

"They need to form entrepreneurial teams to be successful," he said. "Whether you want to call them co-founders or team members, or whatever, at crucial moments in a company's beginning, it's so important for them to be there to offer expertise and support. A smoothly operating team can be the difference between a successful startup and a failed idea."

As vital as resiliency and the ability to work with others is for an entrepreneur's prospects, there's no substitute for experience. James S. Greenan started his own law practice in San Ramon 29 months ago after working 28 years for someone else. He practiced employment law for the San Francisco law firm of Cooper, White & Cooper LLP, which also has a branch office



STEPHANIE SECHST EAST BAY BUSINESS TIMES

Patrick Galvin caught the entrepreneurial bug from his father. After stints in government and corporate bureaucracy, he started Galvin Communications.

in Walnut Creek.

"I spent years wondering what it would be like to run my own firm," said Greenan, who established Greenan, Pepper, Sallander & Lally in January 2001. "With a larger firm, you have less latitude to pursue what you really want to do."

When he finally decided to take the plunge, Greenan was ready because of his years with a large firm. Stability can indeed be an asset.

"I have some of the same clients today I had at Cooper, White & Cooper," he said. "I had many connections in the industry because of my work there. My reputation made it easier to attract new clients."

Recruiting partners and associates was easier, too. Starting with eight lawyers, Greenan now has 21 working for his firm, located in Bishop Ranch Business Park. Four of his partners are former colleagues at Cooper, White & Cooper. Other associates "sort of trickled over" following his firm's launch.

Specializing in business litigation, Greenan's clients today include the likes of Pleasanton-based Safeway Inc. and Ross Stores Inc. of Newark. But even savvy, well-

connected attorneys must beat the bushes. Being shy and retiring doesn't cut it among the entrepreneurial set.

"You have to get out and network," Greenan said. "You have to go to meetings, join organizations, the chamber of commerce, etc. You talk to people at your kids' soccer and baseball games. You ask your brother-in-law for referrals."

While Greenan said most people regard entrepreneurs as risk-takers, he doesn't necessarily share that opinion.

"I didn't see it as taking a risk," he said. "There is the time when you first start your business, when you're getting by on a line of credit. It's a bit scary. If you ski, there's the moment when you turn your skis, you're hanging in the air, waiting for stability to return. It's like that in the beginning."

For him, it returned in a few months. And the risk — or whatever you call it — was worth taking.

"I never saw myself spending my career in one place," Greenan said. "The rewards have made making this move very worthwhile."

Just as Greenan's children may someday, Patrick Galvin caught the entrepreneurial

Put your entrepreneurial ambitions to the test

- Do you want your own business badly enough to keep working long hours without knowing the monetary reward?
- Have you ever worked in a business like the one you want to start?
- Have you ever worked for someone else as a foreman or manager?
- Do you have business school training?
- Could you make more money working for someone else? Is that important to you?
- Does your family support your plan to launch your own business?
- Do you know where to find out about new ideas and new products?
- Have you discussed your plans thoroughly with a lawyer? An accountant? A commercial banker?
- Have you read some books or attended a seminar on starting a business?
- Have you searched the Internet to learn about your market and competitors?

Source: StartupJournal.com

bug from his father, who left a job with the federal government in 1976 to start his own furniture business in San Francisco.

"I was 11 at the time, and we moved from a big house in Massachusetts to a little house in San Francisco," Galvin said. "But we could all see how much happier my dad was. He went from wearing a suit and tie every day to wearing Guatemalan shirts and selling hammocks."

After graduating from Georgetown University with a degree in foreign service, Galvin tried his hand at working for others, from a sales job with a water filtration company in Fresno that frequently sent him to Latin America, to a bureaucratic position with the city of Los Angeles. He even worked for his dad's furniture business for a while.

Eventually, though, drawing on his father's example, the Berkeley resident started his own business — a public relations firm in Emeryville, working with clients such as realty firms, retailers, breweries and a company that updates old Airstream trailers, which have become trendy again.

Besides following in his dad's footsteps, Galvin said he went into business for himself — specifically public relations — after being frustrated over the lack of professionalism he saw in other firms when trying to promote the family business.

Now on his own, running Galvin Communications with partner Ellen Grosshans, he has no regrets.

"I definitely have what I think is a common trait among entrepreneurs — a strong drive for independence," he said. "Entrepreneurs have to be determined and creative. They also must be comfortable in selling, because you spend a lot of time selling yourself, your services and your clients. If you don't like selling, I'm not sure you'll be successful."

You also have to be the type who can tolerate change — constant change, Galvin added.

"As an entrepreneur, you never feel completely out of the woods," he said. "You have to be able to cope with change and uncertainty. That element of risk is probably what dissuades most people from starting their own business."

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