

Understanding the Unsanity of the Entrepreneur



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It became one of those off-the-wall conversations as soon as he described himself as a successful entrepreneur who might be interested in some coaching.

“Let’s see,” said I, “If you’re like most *successful* entrepreneurs, you found a great business opportunity, jumped in, and created a business. You developed that business and handled most of the operation yourself. After a while the business grew to a point where you couldn’t keep it all in your head any more, and you got stuck there because no one else could run the business like you. You’ve tried to hire people to help, but you keep doing the work yourself. Whenever you create a system with rules and people to run it, you keep breaking your own rules and messing up the system. On top of this, you have lots of other great ideas, and it’s extremely frustrating because you don’t have enough time or resources to develop them all and keep your existing business running. How did I do?”

“You nailed me,” he laughed.

This is a snapshot of the “unsanity” of the entrepreneur. Unsanity occurs when a **sane** person thinks or acts in a manner that is not sane —which often can describe the plight of the entrepreneur.

As business people go, they are generally not well understood. They actually have a very identifiable behavioral profile. Here are a few things that most, not all, entrepreneurs have in common.

Entrepreneurs are on the edge. All the time. They are opportunity driven and are very comfortable with levels of risk that would stop many astute businesspeople in their tracks. Finances are likely to look like a roller coaster. It’s not unusual to have to go sell something at the last minute to keep the doors open.

Entrepreneurs are not very good with details. They passionately hate paperwork. This often causes headaches for the accountant, with anyone trying to work with them and with the current project.

Thinking BIG is a chief characteristic of entrepreneurs. They exaggerate and are overly optimistic, which helps keep their spark going. They have lots of ideas, many of which are already a “done deal” in their minds, though it might take a while before the deal is really done —or not.

They can’t focus. They spread themselves too thin. They don’t have the time, energy and resources to finish everything they start. They keep adding to their projects and spreading even thinner.

Entrepreneurs are great at starting a business, but then they have to run it. Considering their fast paced ideas, ambitions, exaggerations and energy, *chaos reigns*. The mantra of their employees is, “If he would just stay out of the office/store/shop, we could run it just fine. He messes up the system every time he comes in the door!”

If you're afraid to drop the ball, you'll never learn to juggle. Entrepreneurs tend to become excellent jugglers in life. It's messy and stressful, exciting and engaging, challenging and compelling all at once. They keep lots of balls in the air, and they play to win.

Entrepreneurs pay a high price for the way they are. They are driven to be independent and successful. This makes them unique and keeps them on the leading (or bleeding) edge. They learn by doing, failing, and rising from the ashes with a fresh spark and the fire to go again.

Personal relationships suffer. They often feel different, alone or odd —and they are— because that's how it is out in front of the pack, and that is the way they are wired.

The success of the business will tend to follow the limitations of the entrepreneur. There can be a pretty severe learning curve as an entrepreneur matures, develops new business skills, and learns to delegate, outsource and either take the business to the next level, sell it or lose it.

The challenges in dealing with an entrepreneur are not what one might expect. Each entrepreneur is a unique individual who requires unique structures for his or her success. The challenge is in discovering which structures will work for which entrepreneur. The challenge is to shorten their learning curve and accelerate their success, to give encouragement and stop trying to fix them.

There is no known cure for entrepreneurial insanity. Entrepreneurs do not come with warning labels, operator's manuals or antidotes. Don't expect security, stability and a steady pace. Expect them to keep stirring the pot. Remember that stress, risk and overload bring out their best. And if you have an entrepreneur in your life —try to enjoy the insanity.

Special offer: Just for fun, email me at thecoach@mackarrington.com for a 20-item Entrepreneur Reality Checklist. Put E-Reality in the subject line.

Mack Arrington, PCC, is an ICF board certified Business and Personal Coach. He coaches people to get what they really want in business, balance and life. Mack offers a FREE 30-minute "test drive" coaching session, and invites coaching questions at 336-856-1600 or email thecoach@mackarrington.com.