



SYSTEMS THINKING

What's the one quality that all successful business owners share?

By Michael Gerber

What makes an entrepreneur an entrepreneur? What traits and characteristics best describe a person who successfully starts and grows a business?

Some say entrepreneurship cannot be taught; some say it can. Some say you're born with it; some say you acquire it. Some define entrepreneurs as artists; others as scientists.

Some see entrepreneurs through a prism of words: passion, leadership, tunnel vision, clarity of mind, focused, disciplined, charismatic, creative, competitive, possessed, obsessed, intense, consumed, rigid, insatiable, driven.

Some describe entrepreneurs as obsessive compulsives; others as control freaks. Some as insiders; others as outsiders. Some as risk takers; others as risk averse.

Yet great entrepreneurs possess one fundamental skill which is the basis for their success: the ability to perceive the world as a system.

Your business isn't simply a group of people doing work. It's a business system that's operated by people. The systems do the work, and people operate the systems. Your business should be systems-dependent, not people-dependent.

With no systems in place, your business depends on you and on a few people who run things for you. If you or they disappear, even for a short time, your business is thrown into chaos. But if you have the right systems in place, the systems run your business, and nearly anyone can run the systems. You can decide suddenly to take a three-month holiday and your business won't skip a beat. Your key employees could quit, and you could replace them easily with no ill effect.

If performance isn't up to scratch, rather than blame your people, you simply adjust the system. If problems and opportunities arise, you create new systems or adjust existing ones. With the right systems in place, you can work every day, or not. It's your choice, because the system is what's really running your business.

Systemic thinking is the real secret behind building a business that works. If you wish to become a great entrepreneur, learn how to become a systems thinker. Develop a passion for seeing things as a whole.

What is a systems thinker?

It's someone who intuitively sees the whole picture, the oneness of it, as opposed to merely the sum of its parts. A systems thinker:

- Transcends the world in order to transform it.
- Is an inventor as opposed to an engineer.
- Sees purpose in everything, and sees the system as the realisation of the purpose.
- Sees meaning in everything and, if not, pursues everything until the meaning becomes clear, until the system reveals itself in all its glory.
- Is possessed by the meaning of things.

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