
Un-trepneurism:

You Could Be Killing Your Own Business
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Un-trepreneurism is a malady common to a particular breed of businesspeople. It generally attacks entrepreneurs and higher-level managers who have significant control over the direction and success of their businesses. *Un-trepreneurism* can stop a company cold, but one doesn't need a doctor to identify the problem; one need only identify the symptoms. Sound easy? Just be aware that identifying the symptoms can be painful - and some people simply don't want to think about it.

A lot of business people are afraid to look their business squarely in the eye. If they've made it past the number one business killer - undercapitalization - they're probably surviving, but wonder why they aren't thriving. Chances are it's not because of the competition, or location, weak advertising or even a soft business model. Chances are that the malady is not the result of poor sales, a lack of valuable products and services, or limited prospects. Nope. The business is actually dying from the inside out.

The business is suffering from what I'm calling "*Un-trepreneurism*." And when a business owner stares the business squarely in the eye, he or she sees their own reflection.

Un-trepreneurism is an inflammation of the entrepreneurial spirit. It erodes joy; it stymies progress. *Un-trepreneurism* infects the soul of the entrepreneur causing frustration, isolation and a general malaise. Business people suffering from *Un-trepreneurism* wonder where the fun went. They're able to hold on to hope, but their organizations have slowed to a crawl. The good news is that there is a cure; but first, let's look at you as the patient and see if we find any of the symptoms.

Entrepreneurs are drivers. They are risk-takers, independent leaders who get a charge out of setting goals and achieving them. They have energy and enthusiasm that others find hard to understand, let alone mimic. *Entrepreneurs* have the courage to fail, as well as the self-confidence to know that they can survive failure - and learn from it. Entrepreneurs are all of these things; yet in spite of what they consider their best efforts, they often share the malady of *Un-trepreneurism*. It is the undoing of the entrepreneur.

Here are some of the symptoms:

- 1. Feeling Isolated.** They say that it's lonely at the top, and it really can be. This feeling of isolation wears heavily over time, and erodes the spirit. If you're feeling isolated, you already know that you don't have enough contact with others who have similar issues, business or personal. You're probably making decisions in a vacuum. Advice and perspective are hard to come by. Others may think you're sitting on top of the world and yet, you're feeling alone.

2. Spinning your wheels. You're not really making progress on the parts of your life and your business that you know need the most work... that you know are fixable. And it's not for a lack of vision. You are full of dreams and direction. The frustration you face is found in the huge chasm between where you are and where you want to be. You may be very busy, but you're not making progress in areas in which you want and need to make progress.

3. Feeling lost. You've lost your sense of self, and lack balance in your business and personal lives. You hear yourself asking, "Why am I doing all of this?" and "What about *me*?" You are one of the myriad entrepreneurs and managers who feel lost in their businesses. You live as if your life is your businesses, but you know better. Life is supposed to be about living, and this isn't it. Your most important relationships have become strained and there is a strong feeling of a lack of control. You wonder how, and if, you'll ever find a way out.

4. Too many urgent issues. Here's another very common symptom: everything is important. It's hard to decide which items deserve more attention. You feel distracted and frustrated, being driven by your business rather than the other way around. The long-term goals you want to reach are hard to attain because you're constantly tripping over the urgent and immediate.

5. Loss of hope. This is the worst symptom of all. If you feel a loss of hope, you've really got it bad. When *Un*-trepreneurism goes unchecked for a long period, a loss of hope is imminent. You must be aware that this loss of hope is only an emotional symptom, not a real circumstance - even though it surely feels that way. Unchecked, this loss of hope can prove deadly to your entrepreneurial spirit and to your business. But as you will shortly see, there is always hope. In fact, there is more than hope; you can enjoy a real expectation that things will change for the better. Here's how you can kick the disease right now, and immunize yourself from succumbing to it again.

The first and most important part of the remedy is nothing more than a mindset. You have to *want* to get better. If you choose to make no changes, and yet you expect your future to be different, stop reading right now and go get yourself a latte. You must accept the fact, in your heart and in your mind, that you need to make some changes. None of them will be difficult, but you need to know right now that you'll go nowhere without doing something. That said, here's what to do:

1. Take time to plan. Make planning both a priority and a regular and ongoing event. When the days and months of days and months all begin to look the same, you need to get away and do some thinking. Get out of

the office. Shut off your cell phone. Ask the big questions; “Why am I really doing this?” “Is this helping me to become the person I really want to be?” “What do I hope to accomplish?” “What can I do with what I’ve got?” “What’s working and what is not?” “What else do I need to make progress?” “What’s holding me back?”

When every day begins to look the same and you’re not making headway, the time has come to do some planning. Without a plan, most of us fall into the habit of walking through the course of days, looking at our feet. Every step looks the same as the last and there is no particular direction. We’re moving, but we’re not going anywhere.

Get away to do some planning at least once every quarter. There are lots of online resources that will help you do it. Ask the big questions. Create the big vision. Forget about what you have and think about what you need. Your mind craves this kind of stimulation and won’t disappoint you with ideas. Let your creative energies take over for a while and look far out into the future – your future. Then bring it all home and work up a list of ways to get there.

2. Engage your future with simplicity and intensity. One of the finest attributes of entrepreneurs is their ability to come up with solutions, new ideas and new directives. That gift can also be a curse. Because of their aptitude to see possibilities, it is particularly difficult for many entrepreneurs to limit their focus. Don’t limit your dreams; just limit their numbers for a while. Think of it as taking only a handful of fertilizer (your business resources), and spreading it over the whole garden (your opportunities or goals) with the hopes that it will cause a significant benefit. You’d be better off to select the plants that can have the most overall impact and spread the fertilizer on them alone.

Choose one or two of your most important goals, plans or projects and align all of your resources behind them. The others can wait for now. Shape your entire company to act as the fertilizer for only these goals and get rid of the rest of the distractions for the time being. Don’t be afraid to let some of the old plants die. They were looking pretty poorly anyway, weren’t they?

3. Follow through. Once your plans are clear, it is imperative that you transfer those plans into action. This is where things so often fail. Even the best planning will fall on its face without action. You will need to break your goals down into tiny pieces that are “actionable.” And this will only be effective if you have first simplified your goals. Everything you do must be an action that is related to your limited, carefully selected goals. If you’re doing something that is outside the scope of these goals, either you have selected goals that aren’t really compelling and important, or you’re wasting time on something that doesn’t deserve your efforts.

Activity doesn't mean progress. The two are not related. Progress is made in doing *appropriate* activities - activities that are aligned to your goals. Busy-ness is not business. Limit your actions to only those actions that support your goals. If you're not used to this, you need to know that it's not an easy habit to change. You can do it, but you may need to...

4. Find a support group. Isolation needs immediate treatment. You need some buddies and you need them now. We've found the best solution in peer-to-peer groups. Peer-to-peers are small groups of like-minded individuals who want to grow and help others to grow as well. Together, they have a well-spring of knowledge that's nearly impossible to find in any other setting. And since everyone benefits from the group, it builds a tight bond of trust and ongoing support.

Imagine having your own board of directors and consultants who have been where you are and have managed to move on by finding solutions and implementing them. Think of how you'd benefit from the advice of years of others' experiences. In this unique environment, you'll address your fears and doubts rather than hiding from them. You'll help others, too; you've been in business for a while now and you've built up a significant library of experience on your own. Share it with others while enjoying the benefits of their knowledge.

The groups should be small, consisting of at least 6 but no more than about 10 people. Some groups find success meeting monthly. Others meet quarterly. What is most important is that you make a commitment to meeting with others. It's like food for the entrepreneurial soul.

5. Commit to continuous learning. *Un*-trepreneurism is like a cold sore; it wants to keep coming back. You can fend it off by making a commitment to continuous learning. That learning should come from your peers, as above, but it will also come from traditional sources such as seminars, books, publications and plain old study. Don't assume that you'll learn anything new by sitting behind your desk. Get out and do something about it. Audit a college course. Participate in a seminar series. Attend programs put together by your local Chamber of Commerce. Whatever you do, plan to include it as a part of your life for the long haul.

If you are going to flourish, you must evolve. It is my contention that all business development is about continuous learning. You need to make a promise to yourself for continuous, life-long learning, and the very best way to do this is to have someone bring learning to you. You don't have time for dredging around, blindly running into chunks of unconnected material with the hope of stumbling upon the one gem that solves your every challenge. Attend a series of seminars that target your particular interests. Seek out an ongoing program with an appropriate

curriculum and attend it regularly. It will cost you time or money or both. Make the commitment to continuous learning and don't worry about the financial investment. You'll get it back in spades.

6. Make yourself accountable. I believe that the boss has the hardest job of all. Why? Because the boss has no boss other than self-discipline. And when the symptoms of *Un*-trepreneurism show up, self-discipline is probably already long gone.

Get it back. Make yourself accountable to someone. Peer-to-peer groups are the best method, but if that is not accessible to you right now, get a business buddy. Find someone you trust who has enough experience behind them to understand where you are in your business and personal life. Inform that person of your intentions; you are going to tell them your overall goals and give them all the details. Then, expect them to hold you to your word; to be accountable. Meet with that person regularly and review with them your goals for the coming period. Show them where you succeeded since you met last, where you failed and why. Suggest that they participate with you in return.

You can easily see why peer groups are the best medium for this type of activity, because they add so many more dimensions to your growth. Still, one on one is a powerful way to start. Whichever you choose, decide today to make yourself accountable to someone.

You can kick this disease – but you have to make it happen by taking action. This doesn't mean that you have to do it on your own, but you need to decide to do something about it.

You might as well make that decision now. If you don't do it now, then when? You see, successful businesspeople aren't necessarily more intelligent, talented or dedicated than you are. They are people who look their businesses squarely in the eye, identify what needs to be done, and take action. In reading this article, you've already made a few steps toward good entrepreneurial health. Act now to immunize yourself against *Un*-trepreneurism.

You have everything at your disposal to make significant change, but you also need a strong intervention program that will bring the joy back. If you need help, contact us. We'll listen, and we'll write you a prescription.

The cure is at hand. And as others will tell you, our medicine tastes pretty darned good.

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Dear Reader,

If you've found this article to be of interest, and think that you might benefit from coaching and/or a peer group environment, contact us. Our organization is built around others just like you who want to make great progress. We learn a lot from each other. You can, too.

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Your new friends are waiting to meet you!

Best Regards,

Jeffrey Tobin

Founder

The Concept Coach