

Entrepreneurs are a special breed of small business owner

By Bruce A. Love

The term, “entrepreneur,” often is used to describe any small business owner. However, a small business owner is not necessarily an entrepreneur, and an entrepreneur may grow well beyond most definitions of a small business.

Ever since the mid 1990s (when I served as Director of the Bucks County Small Business Development Center), I have had the privilege of working with numerous small business owners. Each one has had unique and often inspiring stories of how they got into business and became successful. One client bought a floral shop from her retiring boss. Another launched a magazine just for kids. Two young couples pooled their resources to open a health and fitness center. But, as exciting and inspirational as these stories are, none were what I would call entrepreneurial endeavors.

Gary Wineland, of Roaring Spring, is one example of an entrepreneur. When I first met Gary, he had just launched his company, Applied Innovative Solutions. He came to our office with an urgent request for a web site. He told me about a product he had developed and patented. The new device, designed to monitor industrial conveyor systems, was just nominated for 2003 “Product of the Year” by “Plant Engineering Magazine.” Wineland’s speed switch, which ultimately won a silver medal in this competition, was the result of an innovative approach to solve a nagging problem.

According to Peter F. Drucker, author of “Innovation and Entrepreneurship” and many other great management books, “entrepreneurs are a minority among new businesses. They create something new, something different; they change, or transmute values.” In other words, entrepreneurs think outside the box, and offer the rest of us new and innovative ways to see and think about things. Innovation, it turns out, is the primary tool of the entrepreneur.

Drucker identified seven sources of innovation – any of which can lead to entrepreneurship. Gary Wineland had encountered at least one of these sources. Drucker says that “Incongruities” (discrepancies) between what is, and what ought to be, can spark innovation. He also lists as

one of his seven sources “Process Needs,” which start as a job or task to be done. While everyone else in an organization or industry may recognize that a need exists to fix or improve a process, no one does anything about it until the entrepreneur comes along.

Four years ago, Gary Wineland had had a disappointing day at the office. He had sent a field engineer out to install a speed switch on a large conveyor system. This required drilling and tapping into one end of a conveyor roller to mount the switch. After several hours, the engineer returned without success (both drill bit and tap had snapped off in the roller). Gary Wineland knew there HAD to be a better way!

He went home that day with the problem churning in the back of his mind (Personal Observation: one characteristic of the entrepreneur is a great sense of dedication to their work). As he was helping his daughter get ready for a road trip, he popped a magnetically mounted mobile phone antenna onto the metal surface of his daughter’s car. In an instant, the idea developed that if a magnet could stay affixed to a speeding automobile, it could also stay attached to a rotating conveyor roller! After some research and experimentation, Gary Wineland developed a magnetically mounted device that could be attached to most industrial conveyor systems in a matter of minutes. The rest is history!

The path to entrepreneurial success for Gary Wineland is typical of many entrepreneurs. He keeps his eyes and ears open for ways to do things better, and he thinks in innovative ways. He has a highly developed instinct for recognizing unfulfilled needs, is dedicated to his work, and is not afraid of failure.

These characteristics can be learned and cultivated in ordinary people. When I asked Gary what he felt was most important for others to know about becoming an entrepreneur, he gave me a response that I have often heard from others like him. He said, “Never give up!” Stated more clearly by Winston Churchill, “Never, never, never, never give up!”

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