

The Second Trait: Tenacity

Some entrepreneurs are incredibly lucky. They have a new idea; they start a business, and the money rolls in. All they have left to do is count it. If that is your expectation, I am afraid you are in for a disappointment. Some businesses succeed because they were in exactly the right place at exactly the right time, but those represent a small minority.

I have asked hundreds of business owners whom they would rather have for a partner, someone who was very, very talented, or someone who was just very, very lucky. Every last one of them picks the lucky partner each and every time. Not one experienced business owner has ever opted for talent over luck. They know that some luck is required to succeed, and that a lot of luck is better than a lot of skill.

I will assume you are among the other 99.99% of us—the ones who have to make it happen. For people like us, things don't always work on the first try. Sometimes things don't work on the twenty-first try. In fact, I've met many business owners whose companies *should* have failed. They were not a great idea to start with, and the founder lacked the business skills to develop the idea properly. Through sheer tenacity, those owners managed to keep a business alive until they learned how to make it successful.

Lara August owns Robot Creative, an award-winning design firm. Like many creative businesses, Robot started out with one person—the owner. As time passed, Lara began adding employees to work on design under her supervision.

Robot Creative grew, and Lara's overhead grew with it. She joined a business owners' peer group (one of mine in The Alternative Board®) to combine her brainpower with that of other small business owners.

One morning, Lara was very quiet in our monthly meeting. When her turn came to discuss business, she was nearly in tears. "I'm afraid this will be my last meeting," she told her group. "My office rent is due Friday and I can't pay it. We've gone two months without landing a new project. I have just enough in the bank to make the next payroll and then we are done. I don't know what will happen when I can't pay my rent. Will I be kicked out? Will they lock the doors and take my equipment?"

The other members started laughing, which was *certainly* not the kind of supportive reaction that Lara expected. Then they went around the table, one by one.

"Why, I once had to pay my rent in services for almost a year. The landlord wasn't happy, but he could use my services more than he could use the empty space."

“I had to give up my office and forwarded the phone number to my home for a few months. I had voicemail put on it. ‘For accounting, dial 1, for sales, dial 2, for customer service, dial 3.’ It didn’t matter what you dialed, it rang on the phone in my kitchen.”

“You aren’t broke. Broke is when you have taken the last of the family’s savings out of the bank to pay company bills and you don’t dare tell your spouse.”

“That’s nothing. It is when you take the last of your savings, put it in the company checking account, cut yourself a paycheck, then go home to show the check to your wife as evidence that the business is finally becoming successful. That’s when you *know* you have to come through!”

Lara realized that she wasn’t the first to face the dark abyss of business oblivion. She took the group’s advice on negotiating with her landlord, increased the pressure on her employees to help her hunt for work, and the business survived. Robot Creative continues to win awards and wow clients today, more than ten years later.

The stories from Lara’s peer group remind me of a t-shirt my son wore as a high school wrestler. You’ve probably seen the cartoon before. A crane is swallowing a frog. All that is visible of the frog are his back legs and one front leg stretching out from the crane’s beak down to its throat, which the frog is clenching tightly to prevent the crane’s swallow from being completed. The caption is, “Never quit!”

Hunters never quit. There are no defeats, only setbacks. In the toughest times, they still focus on the next sale, the next problem, the next deal. Success is just a little further down the road.