

12 great business ideas and some great advice

Starting a business? Being your boss and building a business is one of the toughest things anyone can do. Here are some must-read pieces of advice from people who 'danced in the rain', survived, grew, earned their customers' respect and became real entrepreneurs.

[1: Business is tough, get used to it](#)

Derrick Bell who, after taking redundancy in 2009, established a company called [Toby Wagons](#) that makes timber pull-along wagons for children. One of the lessons Derrick learned about dealing with the unpredictability of being in business came from a conversation with a friend of his. "I told a friend of mine about the delayed Christmas order wiping me out, and he said, 'Do you know what that's called? Business.' His words stuck with me, and I realise that setbacks and problems will occur in business. Accept them, don't dwell on them and keep moving forward."

[2: You should be slightly ahead of time with your idea](#)

Another interesting insight is from [Mark Little](#). The former RTÉ journalist left the safety of Montrose to set up his social media news agency called Storyful in 2009. Little sold the business for a reported €18 million in 2013 but, as he told us, many people initially did not understand his idea with some friends even thinking that he was having a breakdown. The lesson Little learned is that for those with a 'new' business idea that has not been implemented before. "You have to be slightly ahead of your time – just not too much. If you are proposing an idea that everybody understands from day one, maybe you've got the wrong idea, chances are it's already been done."

[3: The hardest job is to make a simple idea work](#)

John McGuinness, the founder of [Mulch](#), has more traditional advice regarding business ideas which is to concentrate on what is needed. His business model is accepting garden waste and recycling it to create peat free compost that he then sells on. "The hardest job is to make something simple. It was my concept, and it came about because it was needed, I needed it and didn't see anything like it on the market, so I decided to make it. The most basic needs of every gardener are places to get rid of their waste and places to buy compost."

[4: Without hard work, continuous hard work, you will fail](#)

Two businesspeople gave the same simple, yet true, piece of advice with us. Both [Jamie Heaslip](#) (Irish rugby international and entrepreneur) and Anthony Kearns (owner of Guy Clothing menswear

store) believe that the blood, sweat and tears that you put into your business outweigh any natural ability or talent that you bring to the table.

Jamie Heaslip: "Hard work and discipline beat talent every time."

Anthony Kearns: "Hard work beats talent every time."

[5: If you don't love what you do, do something else](#)

[Michael Crean](#) set up MicksGarage.com along with his brother Ciaran in 2003 in Co. Mayo. The business expanded rapidly and is currently the largest online retailer of car parts and accessories in Ireland and one of the biggest in the UK. When talking to ThinkBusiness, Michael emphasised the importance for entrepreneurs of loving what you do: "What makes a successful business is a love for the business. If you have a love for what you do and can make a business out of it, the business will grow rapidly." He also shared the best piece of business advice he received. "The best business advice I ever received was to go for it, or you'll always regret it."

[6: If you get the wrong advisers - banker, accountant, lawyer - your fight to survive becomes harder](#)

If [Pat McDonagh](#), of SuperMac's fame, were to do it again, he would have ensured that, from the start, he got a lawyer and an accountant who he "could trust" and a "good bank". Along with Alex Pigot of Tico Mail Works, he emphasises the importance of having good advisers. "When you're starting out, discussing business ideas, you need people who are looking out for your best interests rather than, perhaps, putting their priorities first. Initially, I got the wrong people. You do need people around you can depend on, and I didn't put enough research into finding the right ones."

[7: Get your money up front or as soon as possible](#)

[Eamonn Fitzgerald](#) of Fitzgerald Kitchens in Dún Laoghaire gave a very useful piece of advice for retailers with lessons for all businesses. His company struggled with overtrading and cash flow problems due to customers paying in arrears. To solve this problem, Fitzgerald introduced an incentive to encourage customers to pay upfront. "Ask for your money upfront. By offering them [clients] a small discount as a reward, we managed to go from a situation where we had €300,000 in payments outstanding at any one time, to just €20,000."

[8: Be yourself and don't compare yourself to others](#)

This gem from [Margaret Farrelly](#) of Clonarn Clover Eggs is both top-notch business advice as well as a great life lesson: "Be yourself. Let the rest of the world do what it does. Don't be constantly comparing your business to that of others in your industry. Do what you do and do it well."

[9: Hire smart people and delegate](#)

The importance of delegation for business owners was discussed by [Stephen McCormack](#) of McCormack's Family Farms when we interviewed him. Stephen realised that he could not do everything himself and had to learn to trust others with important duties. "I would have delegated more. Like many entrepreneurs I had the urge to do everything myself, I wouldn't cede control. The problem with that is that for every one job you do well there's two you'll do badly. We'd have developed quicker if I had realised that sooner."

[10: Know what your customers want and sell it to them](#)

Alex Pigot of Tico Mail Works emphasises the importance of businesses is doing what the customer wants, but [Alan Kingston](#) of Glenilen Farms adds another angle, albeit borrowed from Ben Dunne, which is that businesses can also influence what the customer wants.

Alex Pigot: "Give the customer what they want, not just what you would like to sell them."

Alan Kingston: "I remember hearing Ben Dunne say: 'Give the people what they want and you'll be grand. But sometimes you need to tell the people what they want.' It's not perfect, but I thought it made a lot of sense."

READ MORE: If you want to grow your business, here's a very useful [marketing plan template](#) to help you.