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10 Really Good Reasons to Quit Your Job and Start Your Own Business

By Michael J. Katz

It's been five years since I made the decision to leave my corporate job and start my own company. No question about it, leaving nice co-workers, a stable paycheck, and 12 years of tenure with one company was the scariest thing I'd ever done. And yet looking back, it was the defining moment not only of my career, but of my personal development as well. The fact is, I am now so enamored of blazing my own trail that I could never go back—I am hopelessly, incurably, unemployable.

As a result, I receive a steady stream of, "Can I buy you a cup of coffee?" invitations from old colleagues, new friends, complete strangers—anybody who is considering a change, and who wants to know, "Why should I start my own business?" This is what I say:

1. You'll dance to your own music. There's a lot of noise in the corporate world. Not physical noise, but opinions, rules, history, and a whole lot of, "that's the way we do it around here," always just an inch or two below the surface. In such a setting it's hard to find your path, or as I like to say, "hear your own music."

Once you're on your own, you'll suddenly begin to hear what's there, and the more you can hear it and have the courage to follow it, the more enjoyable and yes, profitable your life will be. The fact is, there is no right way to live, to act or to grow a business.

2. You'll never have to retire. Retiring is a strange concept to the satisfied, self-employed person. It implies that work is something you want to be done with, something you wish were over. When you truly find your passion however, the concept becomes meaningless. Do painters stop painting? Do musicians stop playing music? Do comedians stop being funny just because they've reached a certain age? Not if they are doing what they truly want to be doing. Sure, you may slow down or change focus as you get older, but the game is never over, since the game and your life will be one.

3. You'll put your money where your mouth is. I never planned to start my own business, and I always secretly believed that I didn't have the guts to be successful on my own. When I look back now, I'm not even sure how I managed to convince myself to leave the perceived safety of living within the protected walls of a large corporation. When I finally jumped however, I was surprised by the number of friends, former co-workers and family who remarked on my "courage." Frankly, I'm not any braver now than I was before, but I know with certainty that I don't need a corporation to take care of me (and neither do you).

4. You'll no longer live in two worlds. I used to be two people: "corporate Michael" and "home life Michael." Corporate Michael was less friendly, less intuitive and a lot less interesting. I found it easy to switch back and forth between the two Michaels, and for a long time it didn't even strike me as odd that I would make decisions at work based on a completely different set of criteria regarding what was fair, what was smart, or what was worth doing. That's over—I'm now one person no matter what I do, and I have a more balanced, more humanistic approach to business.

5. You'll know your own power. Swept up in the turmoil of working as part of a corporation, there's a tendency to blame others, wait for others, think that others are making things happen. Working alone you'll realize how much control you actually have (and have always had). That realization will give you the courage and drive to do more things than you ever dreamed of when you saw yourself as an insignificant part of a big machine. You'll have nobody else to blame, and even more importantly, you will see how much credit you really do deserve for everything you've created.

6. You'll be free to walk away. When you first start out on your own, you will probably be grateful for whatever business comes your way. The thought of "walking away" from a client may seem suicidal. It isn't. As your reputation grows, people will approach you, ready to hand you their money and have you begin work. That's terrific. However, in some cases, the fit won't be there—something in your gut will tell you it's a bad match. You will learn that you can say "no thank you" and walk away. Nobody assigns projects or clients or teammates to you anymore. You and only you decide who you work with and on what terms, and if it doesn't feel right you need only say so.

7. You'll make new friends. If you've been with the same company for a long time, you've probably developed several close relationships. You may be afraid that you'll be lonely and isolated out here in the "cold cruel world." Nothing could be further from the truth. Starting your own business gains you immediate entrance into a collegial world of fellow sole proprietors and entrepreneurs, eager to have you along for the ride. We hold meetings, we have events, we meet for lunch, we talk on the phone—we share ideas, support each other and hang out together. Price of admission: a friendly demeanor and a willingness to help other people find their way.

8. You'll pick the players. Wherever you sit in a company, you've got people you interact with every day—your boss, your direct reports, the head of the legal department, the desktop support guy, the receptionist. Hopefully you like and get along with most of these people, but whether you do or not, you're stuck with each other. When you run your own company on the other hand, you pick who's on the team. You get to choose your attorney, your accountant, your landlord, your printer, your partners, your clients—everybody in your daily life is there because you decided to put them there. You get to choose.

9. You'll have real problems, instead of imaginary ones. In a corporate setting, your happiness and success are dependent upon dozens of intertwined relationships and handed-down decisions, any one of which can change your world in ways you may not anticipate or even understand. With so much out of your control, it's hard not to spend time "What If-ing" and worrying about the future: "What's my boss really think of me? What if I don't get put in charge of that new project? What if they cut my budget next year?" Fear of what might happen can become worse than the situation itself—imaginary problems.

When you're building your own business you're immersed in reality. Sure, you may have days where you worry about paying the mortgage, but you'll be in the game, fighting the good fight, and no longer obsessed with the possibility of being blindsided by an unforeseen shift in the corporate winds.

10. You'll find your purpose. You didn't come here to follow somebody else's vision or sit on the sidelines watching the clock tick away until retirement. But somehow, somewhere along the way, you forgot. Now, after so many years of following the pack, you've come to see work as a place you go to earn enough money to do the things you really want to do. It doesn't have to be that way. Working on your own will give you the freedom and focus to find the exhilarating, balanced, self-directed career you've always dreamed of.

One of my favorite quotes is from the book, *The Artist's Way*, and I've had it taped to the top of my computer monitor for the last five years: "Leap, and the net will appear." Go ahead, I'll be waiting for you.

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