



ENTREPRENEURIAL SPARK

Columnist Elizabeth Saunders launched Grace Communications Inc. in October 2005. As director, Saunders writes articles, produces photos shoots and forms strategic alliances.

Fostering the potential

IN THE FALL OF 2005, I FOUND MYSELF IN THE FRIGHTENING AND THRILLING NO-MAN’S-LAND KNOWN AS THE GAP BETWEEN JOBS. I SPENT MY TIME THERE TAKING A PROFOUND INTEREST IN THE MAGNIFYING GLASS-SIZE PRINT AT THE BACK OF THE PAPER, SHOWERING NETWORKING EVENTS WITH MY CARD, AND DEBATING HOW MANY TIMES I COULD WEAR A SUIT BEFORE I TOOK IT TO THE DRYCLEANER. AFTER A WHILE, I HAD PASSED GO AND EXHAUSTED MYSELF AND EVERY ENTICING OPPORTUNITY IN DES MOINES.

So I started parental negotiations about a temporary relocation back home to the Chicago area. The job listings in that metropolis dwarfed Des Moines’ offerings, and I was dabbling with the idea of grad school.

It took a stranger at an event two weeks before my impending departure to point out the obvious: My traditional job seeking exploits hadn’t paid off, but I had begun a fledgling freelance writing and researching business without much effort. My journalism contacts had simply started sending work my way, and I loved serving them. I opened myself up to the possibility of entrepreneurship and my company, which I would later christen Grace Communications Inc., was born two days later. This marked a turning point in my career and my relationship with Des Moines.

Did I have a business plan? Nope.
Did I have start up capital? Nope.
Did I have a large steady contract? Nope.

But what I did have were in-demand skills for writing and photostyling coupled with a hefty dose of business savvy and a constantly expanding Des Moines network.

There are rules and there is reality. The rules say you have to have a perfectly thought out business plan and lots of money to run a successful business. Reality says this preparation helps tremendously, but implementation doesn’t always happen according to textbook rules. More often than not, you’re flying by the seat of your pants and hoping the fabric doesn’t rip before you reach solid ground. TAKE NOTE: The amount of planning and financing you put into your business should increase with the level of risk. Don’t squander your life savings on an ill-fated dream. But before resources are sought, one should look inward and answer these questions. (You should be able to stare at yourself in the mirror and answer these questions affirmatively without looking away—I’m not joking.)

1. **Are you an entrepreneur or do you have the desire, determination, and discipline to become one? This game is not about performing a particular skill but about building an entire business.**
2. **Do you have a profitable business model and are you willing to constantly adapt it to keep it viable? Markets change, technologies change, and tastes change. You have to be committed to serving your clients’ evolving needs not your set of plans or preferences.**

3. **Do you realize what it means to start your own company? Do you believe that you’re entitled to success? Do you have the courage and tenacity to grab this venture by the horns and hold on for dear life and the wisdom and humility to know when to let go?**

If you responded “yes” to these questions, it’s time to start moving forward. And Des Moines is an ideal place to plant business headquarters. It offers low-cost, low-stress living and embraces new businesses. I’ve found support from members of the private and public sector and abundant training opportunities, with groups ranging from the Iowa Entrepreneurs’ Coalition to the Young Professionals Connection. In my search for a traditional job, I needed to modify my search or move. But my Des Moines marketing and communications firm can and does serve clients from Seattle to Miami.

Those considering the idea of starting a small business, contact the local office of the Small Business Administration. This organization’s mission is to help small businesses succeed. They’ll provide the necessary the tools and information or provide direction to them.

The following is a cheat sheet of some of the first steps to check off your list:

- **Determine personal goals:** This clarifies what you view as success for your life and business.
- **Write a business plan:** This defines what the business does, how it does it, and whom it serves.
- **Bring in the experts:** Partner with small business accountants, lawyers, bankers, and insurers to build a solid legal and financial foundation.
- **Next comes financing, marketing, and a continually evolving list of opportunities to develop a fantastic business.**

Whether you choose to start a company or work in someone else’s business, remember that success ultimately comes from openness to possibilities. See uncertainty as opportunity. **core**

Small Business Resources:

Des Moines office of the U.S. Small Business Administration
515.284.4422
www.sba.gov/ia

Des Moines SCORE
515.284.4760
www.scoredm.org

Iowans for Social and Economic Development (ISED)
515.283.0940
www.isedventures.org

Iowa Department of Economic Development
515.242.4707
www.iowalifechanging.com

Des Moines Higher Education Collaborative
515.235.4600
www.dmhec.com

Iowa Entrepreneurs’ Coalition
Networking and professional development group open to anyone
Under the “New Iowa” Entrepreneurs’ Meet Up Group
www.entrepreneur.meetup.com

Young Professionals Connection
www.ypcdsm.com