

I never considered what running a business entails before cashing in my meager retirement account and renting an empty building. I knew what I know well, which is how to repair an automobile. I knew nothing about business plans, SBA Loans, or start-up capital, and even less about management. Fortunately my wife is a skilled manager, but neither of us understood finance, so we failed to properly fund ourselves. We cashed out a \$[REDACTED] Simple IRA and netted \$[REDACTED] in a new checking account, from which we immediately wrote a \$[REDACTED] per month rent check.

Holy shit...what were we thinking?

I quit a decent paying, low stress job and Lisa abandoned a much-loved return to college. Together, we jumped on the merry-go-round that is small business. Almost 20 years later, we're still going round and round, dealing with the same stressors, still scrambling to make a dollar.

The numbers are bigger, but we still can't claim a bigger piece of the pie.

Lisa watched the stock market and predicted business trends. "Watch. The markets are down...we're going to see a dip next week." Later, flipping through deposit receipts, there it'd be...a slump in income exactly where she predicted.

I lacked the mental capacity for financial analyses. I stayed too busy helping customers, wrenching into the evening to finish repairs. I beat my head against the wall for ten years before acknowledging the obvious: repairing automobiles and running an auto repair shop are entirely different jobs. Both are full time and neither can be neglected. Still, I'm doing both, feeling old before my time.

Troubleshooting and repairing automobiles is almost therapeutic. I slip right into the work mode industrial psychologists call "flow." It's confidence inspiring. Uninterrupted, I'll repair cars all day without skipping a beat.

Uninterrupted.

I've forgotten what it's like to be uninterrupted. The front counter and telephone assail my senses. It's a steady stream of interruptions piled on top of each other.

In the news I keep reading the economy is healthy. Where and for whom? Empirical data collected in my head over two decades calls bullshit. The same loyal customers who once told me "just fix it" now ask me if they can "just get by" for a couple more months.

Meanwhile, I'm up to my armpits with jackasses trying to 'keep up with the Joneses,' driving cars they couldn't afford in their wildest dreams. The eighty/twenty rule applies. Eighty percent of our income comes from twenty percent of our customers. Conversely, eighty percent of my time is spent dealing with poseurs, repeating some variation of the mantra "have pity on me please sir, for I drive a fine European automobile," as though cost of ownership is magically subject to my discretion.

I bite my tongue all day long, holding back the truth: “If you can’t afford a new - insert European car name - you can’t afford a used one,” or “Look at the bright side...if you can’t afford to repair it, it’ll look impressive parked outside your house!”

Dealing with folks trying to live beyond their means is soul crushing and spirit robbing, yet after the proverbial weeping and gnashing of teeth, I manage to smile for the next person who walks through the door.

Sometimes, my dissatisfaction with the economy, modern consumers, and their desire for instant gratification leaves me feeling victimized, but I know the only thing I’m victim of is my own naiveté. Had I not been naive, I’d have never gone in business for myself and wouldn’t know the joys and pains firsthand.

My wife often has to remind me of “joys” like not having a car payment or auto repair bill...ever. I equate struggling in business with failure. Lisa considers a twenty year run on a \$██████ investment a smashing success. I wish I could adopt her optimism.

I still talk to my old boss once in awhile and we laugh about how hard business can be. Speaking for both of us, Donnie says “nobody could tell us how hard it is and if they could, we wouldn’t listen anyway.”

That’s okay because I thrive on the principle that nothing worthwhile is easy.

I went into business trying to alter public perception about my trade using mechanical savvy. Now I’m preparing to confront the same challenge using communication skills. I don’t want to quit repairing automobiles. I just want it to be enjoyable again.

Whether or not the pen is mightier than the wrench in my hand remains to be seen. I’ll clutch both until my last breath.

You may have to for now cut some of it out to do what I recommended in my comments, but that is alright. I think you have a lot of good imagery and personalization to play around with, perhaps relaying from the factual to the personally expressive and back again. It is an interesting essay for its uniqueness of topic.

I hope I helped even if you think differently that what I recommended.

Hope