

## The Reluctant Leader, Part II

I'm comfortable where I am.

Not all businesses are started with the intention of becoming the next Microsoft, Zappos, or Superfish. People start them for lots of different reasons. Sometimes it's because we just want a different job than the one we currently have. For some heavily involved in their faith, they may create a business that provides them with the freedom to live out their values or allows time for volunteer or missionary work. Sometimes, family priorities, recreation, or athletic pursuits are the driving force in our lives, and the businesses we create are intended to support these priorities.

Occasionally, we start companies because we make lousy employees, and the best way to stay employed is to create our own jobs, eliminating the possibility of being written up or fired by our bosses. In fact, according to research conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau, almost 78% of all businesses registered in the U.S. have no employees other than the owner. That's a lot of solo operators!

Even for those companies that do have employees, only about 25% will scale above \$1,000,000 in annual sales. For many, that's just fine with them.

I'm not one who subscribes to the Wall Street myth that, if you don't grow your business, you die. While that might be a popular thing to say, and it might hold merit with large, publicly held, multinational corporations, I simply don't think it's accurate for most small businesses.

Jay Goltz, owner of Artists' Frame Service (a very successful art framing company in Chicago), refers to himself as "a recovering entrepreneuraholic." In the book, *Small Giants*, he says, "Successful

entrepreneurs have a demon they have to get rid of.” While that demon might be unique to each person, many of us are constantly questioning ourselves about missing opportunities or leaving money on the table. Goltz advises us to ask ourselves, “How do we keep the success bug from turning into the success disease?”

This is a tough lesson for some entrepreneurs to learn. For too many, it takes driving themselves to sleepless nights, behavioral outbursts, and broken marriages before they do. The lucky ones avoid this misery by aligning what’s truly important to them with their means for achieving it and by being able to sort through all the chatter heard in the business press about overnight success stories or bigger always being better.

Sometimes, going solo or surrounding ourselves with just a handful of committed, trusted employees allows an owner time to coach his kids’ sports teams, do volunteer work, or enjoy other non-business activities. Other times, what might look like a stalled business is really just a deliberate strategy on the part of the owner to enjoy that stage of his and his family’s lives. Kids grow up and move on. Sometimes, an owner finds himself with more time and emotional capacity to invest back into the business after they do.

Just because an entrepreneur doesn’t grow his company to one of the biggest in his area doesn’t mean he doesn’t know what he’s doing. In many cases, he knows exactly what he’s doing, and he’s comfortable enough where he is to sleep pretty well at night.