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## The Entrepreneur's Roundtable

By Zithobile Nxumalo

I recently had the great pleasure of interviewing six entrepreneurs whose businesses are based in the Piedmont Triad. I wanted to find out more about the greatest challenges they face in order to see if there exist any recurring themes. More importantly, I wanted to learn about how they choose to face those challenges on the road toward building a successful enterprise. I'm a huge fan of collecting stories that contain secrets to one's success, and these six leaders did not disappoint.

### THE CHALLENGES

**Business ownership can be a lonely road.** Several times, I heard it mentioned that going at it alone is a great challenge. Unlike the structure afforded by the traditional 9am to 5pm workday, being one's own boss means what one entrepreneur defined as “self accountability.” She stated, “There's no one there to give me assignments, deadlines, or quotas. It's all on me.” Each person spoke about the difficulty of getting others to understand the mindset and lifestyle of an entrepreneur. This particular path, one said, “is not always easy for everyone to understand.”

**Business ownerships can be unpredictable.** Entrepreneurs often struggle to find stability on the lonely road. One stated that his daily burden was “consistently offering the highest quality products and services, while being creative enough to gain new clientele.” Another owner expressed frustration over the financial ups and downs. While always hoping for a “big break” or the next lucrative contract, each person shared the uneasiness of “the mundane day-to-day tasks... the small steps that lead to big outcomes.” Entrepreneurship is an agreement to risk the security of a weekly or monthly paycheck, which is a scary prospect for most.

**Business ownership can make work/life balance more difficult.** The day-to-day demands of running a successful business make it very difficult to find time for oneself and family. The contradiction kept coming up – business owners devote their time to building the business, while losing the chance to spend time with the very people for whom their work is being done. One leader, lamenting over the loss of time with her family, stated that “spending time with my family is a big challenge. How do I overcome it? I'm still working on it!”

### THE SOLUTIONS

Amidst the struggles, however, the brave souls with whom I spoke also shared some amazing suggestions for ways to face these sometimes daunting hurdles. Take note, folks:

**Connect with self.** One owner, when discussing her desire to maintain her own health and sanity, stated, “I have a lot going on, but one thing I always make time for is myself. I take time to do things I love, that bring me peace and joy. There are a lot of people depending on me so I have to be at my best on all levels, mentally, physically, emotionally, and spiritually.” One relished in hot baths, another in running on the treadmill, yet another in prayer and meditation. The message was clear – take care of yourself to avoid burning out.

**Connect with others.** Several mentioned the importance of remaining open and honest with the people most impacted by their chosen lifestyle. It was obvious that the support of family members – or “buy-in,” as one put it – has an immense impact on the success of a business. When talking about the importance of communicating well with her family, she said, “I share with them so we can all be clear. I need their buy-in.”

**Appeal to new AND old clientele.** Rocky market conditions put business owners in the position of needing to retain current customers while finding ways to attract new ones. In order to do so, one owner suggested that businesses have to not only offer special perks to potential consumers, but to those who have been loyal for years. “We’re often willing to extend ourselves and do special things to gain new business,” he said, “but, we forget to reach back and invest in the relationships that we have with our long-time supporters. It’s important to nurture both.”

Owning a business is tough. As one owner declared, “[Entrepreneurship] completely changes the way you operate within the world. You see things very differently, you move differently, you plan differently.” Hats off to all who would dare to take a seat at the Entrepreneur’s Roundtable. Such a call is certainly not for the faint of heart.