

# Entrepreneurs: the Lifeblood of Canadian Business

by Jim Townley, President  
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In a recent discussion with my significant other, I was asked the pointed question: “Why do you want to be an entrepreneur so bad?” One of my personal strengths, as an entrepreneur, is that I can think quickly on my feet, but in this case I felt stumped and at a loss for words. For those that know me, this is no small admission! I spent the following couple of days deep in thought on the question and to be perfectly honest, I had NEVER asked this specific question of myself, let alone been asked that question point blank. I never realized I “wanted” to be an entrepreneur consciously, or wrote it down during one of the goal-setting exercises that I do from time to time.

There are specific text-book definitions of what an entrepreneur is. Wikipedia has one, and the University of Victoria has launched an “Entrepreneurship” program and stated their beliefs: “*We view entrepreneurship as new value creation (economic, social, and environmental value) and entrepreneurs as people who create new value in new ventures, existing businesses (corporate entrepreneurship), not-for-profit organizations (social entrepreneurship), or government. Sustainable entrepreneurship is a central program theme.*”

My entrepreneurship journey started at age 22, with my first business being a health club. After 10 years of redefining what a fitness club looked and felt like on the Saanich Peninsula, I went into the Craft Beer industry, working on contract for a couple of years with Vancouver Island Brewery, applying my marketing and sales skills. I then went on to discover coffee, and have worked over the past 17 years to redefine what freshly roasted organic coffee is all about and how the industry defines the sustainability of coffee roasting itself. I didn’t just want to own a “same as” coffee house as there wasn’t enough “brain candy” there for me. Instead, I teamed up with a couple of genius inventors and together we pushed and pulled each other’s view of what existed; we have shaped what is now one of the most sustainable coffee roasting business models in Canada, and recently opened our third location.

Entrepreneurs open themselves up to failure on a regular basis, and this is the secret ingredient. We are willing to continually



test our theories and tirelessly innovate. I compare it to the sport of baseball, where the best hitters in the game, those that hit over .300 in a lifetime, essentially fail 70% of the time. Imagine being considered an All Star because you failed 70% of the time! Entrepreneurs do this under the pressure of continuous improvement, and the requirement of developing new skills in a now global economy. Many people talk about entrepreneurship in the context of being visionary, and I think this is where people misunderstand us most often. We’re not always visionary, but most true entrepreneurs have developed the innate ability to “feel” what needs to be done next and know when, and more importantly when not to, diversify. We are a special breed that takes action when others talk, and are usually the first to volunteer in the community. We, the entrepreneurs, are the lifeblood of Canadian business and innovation, and we regularly practise the most important rule in business which is: ***There’s only one thing worse than no business, and that’s bad business.***

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