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The 2 Types of Entrepreneurs: Which One Are You?

The problem for bottom-up entrepreneurs is they drown in the details. The challenge for top-down entrepreneurs is actually getting things done.



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IMAGE: Getty Images

The task of the entrepreneur is to envision the future of a business and turn it into reality, in some profitable way, day after day.

The problem is that some people excel at the envisioning part but struggle mightily to turn it into reality, whereas others have no problem running the day to day operations of a business but never seem to roll it up into an inspiring vision and a bigger future.

The difference lies in the way we think. Some of us are "top down" thinkers, and some think "bottom up." You can learn to balance both ways of thinking for better results in your business.

And you must, because this same dichotomy can be seen throughout a business. It shows up in the contrast between:

- Ideas versus details
- Trends versus data
- Intuition versus analytics.

Of course none of these should be dichotomies at all; the wise entrepreneur learns to bring them together for a more holistic view.

Let's define these two types of thinking and look at a few examples.

Top Down Entrepreneurs

A top-down entrepreneur starts with the big picture, and then eventually turns that picture into a framework and eventually the details to make it a reality.

If an artist was a top-down thinker, she would visualize a sculpture in her mind, and then consider several ways to start, and eventually begin the detailed work of sculpting.

If a web-developer was a top-down thinker, he would consider the big idea of the website and its purpose, then chunk it out into sections, and eventually fill those sections in as pages with content.

The challenge for top-down thinkers is that they can get very excited about their big ideas, but the more and more they have to chop their aspirations into practical decisions and day-to-day reality, they find themselves losing steam. In the worst cases, these entrepreneurs can be seen spinning brilliant ideas all day long but never actually getting anything done.

Up Entrepreneurs

A bottom-up entrepreneur starts with the details, then eventually see the themes in those details emerge into a framework, from which they can then expand into a big picture vision.

If an artist was a bottom-up thinker, she would enjoy the daily creation of new pieces, putting paintbrush to canvas, or creating multiple versions of a sculpture, or tinkering with different kinds of mosaics, all the time focused on the doing of the work. Over time, themes would emerge, and she would develop a framework--perhaps a series of sculptures, and eventually that series would emerge with an inspiring theme and be presented to the world as one masterpiece.

If a web-developer was a bottom-up thinker, he would draft wireframes and site maps, and then bring those together into broader pages, and eventually synthesis the pieces into one cohesive whole.

The challenge for bottom-up thinkers is that they can get buried in the details of their work and forget to organize those details into frameworks and connect them to a bigger picture. Without that bigger picture, they can get lost. The danger for these entrepreneurs is that their business can become overwhelming and too much to manage, and may eventually come grinding to a halt.

How does this apply to you? Whether you are a top down or a bottom-up thinker, you need to develop at least three layers of your business:

- The vision
- The framework or structure
- The details.

It doesn't matter if you start at the top or the bottom; eventually you need to challenge yourself to move out of your comfort zone and make sure the whole business is complete.

Knowing which type of thinker you are can help you decide where your strengths are, what you might be missing, and how to fill in the gaps to move your business forward.

Bottom-down best practice tip: Give yourself time to experiment, but don't forget to stop and extrapolate. Take a step back and see what you're creating. Do you see the patterns? Can you see the long term vision that wants to emerge?

Top-down best practice tip: Discipline yourself to take your ideas all the way to completion. Choose one and think it through. Can you see how the idea can be divided into a framework or structure that makes it more concrete? Can you see in detail what it would take to make it happen?.

Remember, you can always supplement your own thinking with other people on your team. Bottom-up thinkers will need to look for a strategist. Top-down thinker will need to engage a detail-oriented team to do the work. Either way, by making sure your thinking is complete, you're making sure your business is a success.

<http://www.inc.com/joelle-k-jay/the-2-types-of-entrepreneurs-which-one-are-you.html>

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