

Your Personal Coach

Kathleen Brehony, Ph.D.

Dear Kathleen,

Three years ago I started a small business, and I've been struggling ever since. I've routinely worked fourteen-hour days, mortgaged my house, and did everything I could to make it a success, but it just didn't work out. The truth is there in cold hard numbers, and my accountant and business manager say it's time to shut the doors. Luckily, my wife and children have stuck by me through all of this, even though they got little attention from me as I focused on making my business a success. I have decent job skills and I've no doubt that I can find some kind of position that will pay the bills. But I just can't shake this feeling that I'm the greatest failure the world has ever known.

-- Stewart

Dear Stewart,

You are anything but a failure. You are an entrepreneur and risk-taker. You had a vision, and put it into action as you followed your dreams. Regardless of the ultimate outcome, you are a world-class winner. Teddy Roosevelt was talking about someone like you when, in 1899, he said, "Far better it is to dare mighty things, to win glorious triumphs, even though checkered by failure, than to take rank with those poor spirits who neither enjoy much nor suffer much, because they live in the gray twilight that knows not victory nor defeat."

You chose a high-risk path by starting a new small business. Conventional wisdom says that four out of five new businesses will "fail" within the first five years of opening. Shortage of capital, cash flow problems, lack of experience, and the awesome competition of huge corporations ravage many small business start-ups.

You are richly blessed to have a family that has stood by you, and continues to do so. You are richer than most of the rest of the world if you have good health, a warm house, food to eat, and job skills that will allow you to earn a living. I'm not trying to talk you out of your sadness – that needs to be honored and experienced – but simply to help you put your loss in perspective. The experience you have had--starting and running a business—will be of value to you in many unforeseen ways, and is a great asset to future job opportunities. Keep in mind that there is success inherent in trying, in not being the kind of person content to "live in the gray twilight."

This is a time to lick your wounds and grieve for your loss, of course. But it is also a time to reflect on your worldview. What does it mean to succeed? What does it mean to fail? Can these be measured in the context of the rest of your life? Every person must determine the answers to these questions for him/herself but I rather like the conclusion that Ralph Waldo Emerson came to when he examined them. He wrote: "To laugh often and much; to win the respect of intelligent people and the affection of children; to earn the appreciation of honest critics and endure the betrayal of false friends; to appreciate beauty, to find the best in others; to leave the world a little better; whether by a healthy child, a garden patch or a redeemed social condition; to know even one life has breathed easier because you have lived. This is the meaning of success."

You're a winner, Stewart.

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Send your personal coaching questions to kathleen@fullpotentialliving.com or call 473-4004. Kathleen is a personal and executive coach, clinical psychologist, and writer. (©2004 Kathleen Brehony. All Rights Reserved.) Columns are archived at www.fullpotentialliving.com.