Self-Compassion Is an Essential Tool for all Entrepreneurs

September 20, 2020 5 min read

Opinions expressed by *Entrepreneur* contributors are their own.

The continued uncertainty around Covid-19 is wearing us all down. Many people are plagued by increased feelings of self-doubt and seemingly endless distractions. This is particularly difficult for entrepreneurs; whose businesses are often dependent on staying focused and making quick decisions. It's difficult to build and grow a business when your head is filled with what feels like an endless stream of bad news and related negative self-talk?

What's a usually happy ambitious businessperson to do during these demanding times? The answer can be found in a simple, yet powerful technique: self-compassion. The process is based on Buddhist teachings. It simply asks that you to feel compassion for yourself, regardless of who you are or how successful you may or may not be. Because we all deserve compassion and understanding.

Related: 22 Guaranteed Ways to Wake Up Early and Energized

This doesn't mean that you shouldn't take action to improve things. Hell, you're entrepreneurs, improving things is what you do. What it means, is that all those perceived failings should be acknowledged, but instead of negative self-talk, you substitute kindness. Basically it's a permission slip allowing you to stop being so incredibly hard on yourself.

Unlike self-esteem, self-compassion isn’t tied to external events. Yes, it may be upsetting not to land a client or have your story published online (just saying), but with a bit of self-compassion, you can minimize the previously negative self-talk and increase your emotional resilience. This leaves you better prepared and able to handle whatever the future brings.

These practices have proven effective across different groups and settings. In her research, Kristin Neff, renown in the field, compared self-compassion to self-esteem and found it was a source of resilience. While self-esteem and the inevitable comparisons that go with it can leave you feeling “less than”, self-compassion leads to increased inner strength.

This is particularly helpful, given the human propensity towards negativity. In a recent study, scientists found that the average person had about 6,200 thoughts in a single day (and, we all know that most entrepreneurs tend to be over-achievers) with some 80 percent of them skewing negative. Perhaps the most disturbing statistic cited was the fact that 95 percent of those thoughts were the same as the day before – that’s a whole lot of unpleasant thoughts.

Related: 5 Acts of Mental Discipline to Maintain the Positive Mindset Success Requires

These days, all you’d need to do is spend a few minutes online before your latent cavewoman brain is in charge and the negative thoughts take control. This eventually turns inward amplifying whatever mistakes you think you made during the day. These thoughts go around and round unless you can find the pause button.

Finding self-compassion

Self-compassion isn’t a “miracle cure”. It won’t make whatever pain you’re feeling or the reasons why you’re feeling it go away. What it does do is help you be more mindful of what you’re feeling and how you choose to respond. We’ve all been through difficult times and know that fighting against reality can often only make things worse.

With self-compassion, you mindfully accept that the moment is painful and choose to respond to yourself with the same kindness and care you would a good friend. Central to the practice is the acceptance and acknowledgment of our common humanity and shared human experience. Taken together, this allows you to be more present and connected, creating greater growth and transformation – critical components for developing and maintaining a business.

Self-compassion is composed of three main elements:

Self-kindness v. self-judgment

Instead of judging yourself or ignoring the pain when you feel inadequate, try treating yourself with kindness. We all know that we cannot always be or get exactly what we want, but the suffering in the form of stress, frustration, and self-criticism is optional.

Common humanity v. isolation

Entrepreneurship in and of itself can be an isolating experience. The suffering we often attach to perceived inadequacies can add to that feeling of isolation. Self-compassion connects us to the very real fact that we all have these feelings and that it is a shared human experience.

Mindfulness v. over-identification

When things feel difficult it’s easy to get caught in the negative emotions you’re feeling (that pesky negativity bias) and over-identify with them and become overwhelmed. Mindfulness encourages us to take a non-judgmental approach, one in which we observe our thoughts and feelings as they are, but not over-identify with them and get caught up and swept away by the negative reaction.

Related: Implementing This One Simple Strategy Every Day Can Help you Overcome Unsettling Emotions

Being just a little kinder to ourselves

Self-compassion can support your wellbeing during difficult times. It can improve how you manage the stress, fear, and frustration that may normally come with it, making you more effective in dealing with the growing list of tasks that will all need to get done. Most importantly, it is a trainable skill with the ability to not only help you survive life’s ups and downs of business but help you thrive.

Despite our best efforts, none of us will ever be perfect. It’s not always possible to avoid making mistakes, achieve your goals, or avoid the many challenges that can make life simultaneously more interesting and more difficult. However, what is possible is to just be a little kinder, gentler, and more forgiving of yourself, so you feel more resilient and better able to face whatever comes your way.

https://www.entrepreneur.com/article/355387