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THE LESSONS OF SMALL BUSINESS BEGINNINGS

An EVP's Years in Small Business and the Tips That Could Make a Difference for a Team of Any Size

Evan reflects on his personal experiences with small businesses and shares his best advice for entrepreneurial teams.



EVAN KONWISER
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What is your role at GBT and what attracted you to a career in travel?

I look after our global product team, corporate strategy, and global communications. I've been in the travel business for a long time because I love travel. I love the sector. I feel passionately about the business of travel. My career has taken me through many different places in travel, but the area where I think I've always felt there's more innovation and capacity for change and growth is in product and technology. So that's where I've spent a lot of my time, building teams, and building products to help travel. That's what's always been most important to me but looking after the strategic direction of GBT and helping with our communications team and our leadership in the marketplace is aligned with my product experience as well. So, it's been a lot of fun.



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What exposure have you had with small businesses either personally or in a working environment?

Well, I have started several companies. So, my startups are small businesses. I wish some of them would have made it beyond small businesses. I sold one as a small business and one is still going. I'm an advisor to it. I know what it's like to take a company from zero employees and get a company off the ground by building systems, building product, building your first customer base, raising capital, and manage capital in a business where you're still burning cash. I've been in the hot seat running small businesses. I did that for about six years before I joined GBT. So, I know the space very, very well.

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In your view, what is the importance of emerging businesses to the economy and everyday life?

Emerging businesses are the lifeblood of innovation and progress for a lot of industries. They often push larger companies to be smarter and more efficient, so they drive growth across the whole economy.

At GBT, if we're able to look at emerging businesses, see what they're doing, and understand the trends, that's a win for us. We come up with our own ideas, for sure. Don't get me wrong. But there are thousands of entrepreneurs out there thinking about our business every day and coming up with concepts. Those concepts are often early signs of where the industry needs to go.

Learn More

For more information about the Neo1 platform that helps manage employee spend for small to medium businesses, American Express Global Business Travel (GBT), and the services we offer, visit www.amexglobalbusinesstravel.com/neo1/

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If you could give a business five tips, what would they be?

1. **Focus on your customers.** Deliver a product that your customers want. That's where business owners should spend 90% of their time because that's where all the value is created. You should spend as much of your day as possible making customers happy and building something customers want.
2. **Outsource everything you can.** Find ways to delegate work, especially administrative work to contractors, services, vendors, etc. Take anything that's not differentiated for you and have somebody else do it. Business owners cannot afford to spend time doing things that somebody else can do. They must focus on the customer.
3. **Find the solutions that everyone else in your sector is using and use them.** Don't recreate the wheel. Don't spend weeks and months trying to find something off the beaten path. Find something that already works and deploy it. You don't want to spend time, energy, and money trying to make something work that doesn't.
4. **Find shortcuts.** I don't mean shortcuts around things you need to do but find shortcuts that allow you to test and learn quickly. Whether it's a customer item or an operational item, find shortcuts that allow you to do things more quickly. For example, when you're looking to market your product or service, there are different traditional pathways to get ad marketing. Think about things that might have the potential of delivering much bigger results with smaller investment. It might not be fully scalable but could get you some distance quick. Instead of building the most robust thing first, build something quick to test and learn if it works. You always have to be on the lookout for shortcuts that give you the most benefit, meaning the biggest potential outcome from the smallest potential input.
5. **Always do what's right by your people.** Before, I mentioned focusing on customers, but your people are the ones that are serving your customers ultimately. So, one of the ways that you focus on customers, aside from doing it personally, is you encourage your people to focus on customers. The ways you encourage your people to focus on customers is you give them the tools to do it and you always take care of them. After all, they're the people that are going to show up and make your customers happy.



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