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10 CHARACTERISTICS OF SUCCESSFUL ENTREPRENEURS



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 Business Essentials, Entrepreneurship & Innovation, Entrepreneurship Essentials

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Multiple factors go into starting a successful business venture, including a strong concept and initial funding. But, perhaps the most important ingredient is the entrepreneur. These are individuals who must transform their ideas into a fully operational business.

If you're thinking about launching your own venture, you might be wondering if you have what it takes to be an entrepreneur. But first, what's an entrepreneur, and what do they do?

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WHAT IS ENTREPRENEURSHIP?

While entrepreneurship is commonly thought of as the process of starting a business, there are several nuances to consider.

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In the HBS Online course [Entrepreneurship Essentials](#), **entrepreneurship** is defined as “the pursuit of opportunity beyond the resources currently controlled.” An opportunity can be a myriad of things, but the course describes it as “a proposed venture to sell a product or service for which customers are willing to pay more than the required investments and operating costs.”

Entrepreneurs—either as individuals or in teams—discover opportunities throughout their personal and professional lives. They form hypotheses on ways to deliver value to customers and perform structured tests to validate their ideas. This often involves recruiting teammates through [networking](#) and investing funds to determine how they'll deliver a product or service at an acceptable cost.

Great entrepreneurs come from all walks of life. In [Entrepreneurship Essentials](#), it's noted that “there's no single personality profile, and it's important to pay attention to the entrepreneurial team, rather than focus on the individual.” And while that's true, there are certain [characteristics and skills](#) that are particularly important for entrepreneurs to have when starting and leading a venture.

Here are 10 characteristics shared by successful entrepreneurs.

10 CHARACTERISTICS OF SUCCESSFUL ENTREPRENEURS

10 Characteristics of Successful Entrepreneurs



1. Curiosity

Successful entrepreneurs have a distinct personality trait that sets them apart from other organizational leaders: a sense of curiosity. An entrepreneur's ability to remain curious allows them to continuously seek new opportunities. Rather than settling for what they think they know, entrepreneurs ask challenging questions and explore different avenues.

This is validated in the online course [Entrepreneurship Essentials](#), where entrepreneurship is described as a “process of discovery.” Without curiosity, entrepreneurs can’t achieve their main objective: discovering new opportunities.

The drive they have to continuously ask questions and challenge the status quo can lead them to valuable discoveries easily overlooked by other business professionals.

2. Willingness to Experiment

Along with curiosity, entrepreneurs require an understanding of structured experimentation, such as design thinking. With each new opportunity, an entrepreneur must run tests to determine if it's worthwhile to pursue.

For example, if you have an idea for a new product or service that fulfills an underserved demand, you'll have to ensure customers are willing to pay for it and it meets their needs. To do so, you'll need to conduct thorough market research and run meaningful tests to validate your idea and determine its potential.

3. Adaptability

Entrepreneurship is an iterative process, and new challenges and opportunities present themselves at every turn. It's nearly impossible to be prepared for every scenario, but successful business leaders must be adaptable.

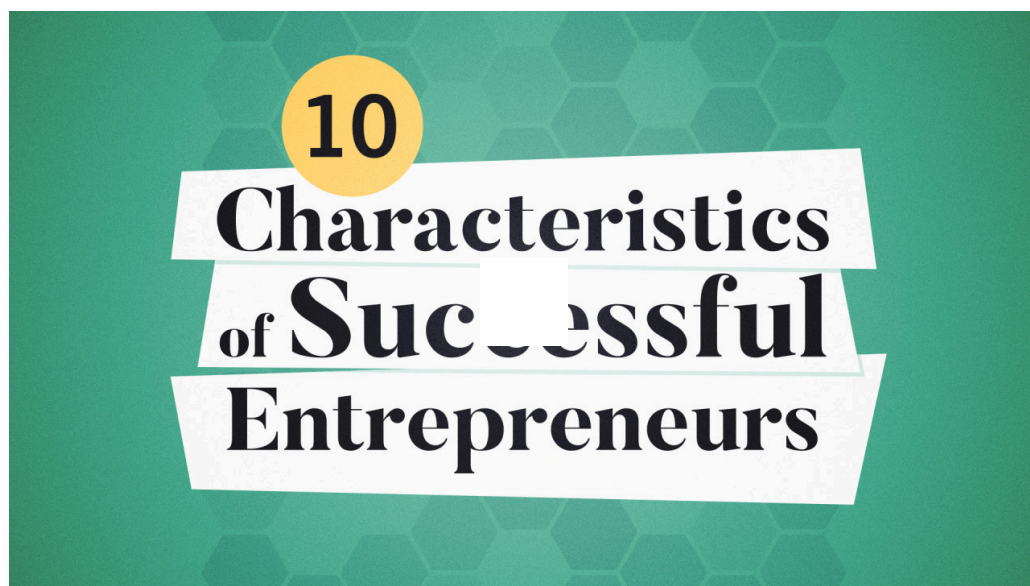
This is especially true for entrepreneurs who need to evaluate situations and remain flexible to ensure their business keeps moving forward, no matter what unexpected changes occur.

4. Decisiveness

To be successful, an entrepreneur has to make difficult decisions and stand by them. As a leader, they're responsible for guiding the trajectory of their business, including every aspect from funding and strategy to resource allocation.

Being decisive doesn't always mean being correct. Entrepreneurs need the confidence to make challenging decisions and see them through to the end. If the outcome turns out to be less than favorable, the decision to take corrective action is just as important.

Check out our video on the characteristics of successful entrepreneurs below, and subscribe to our YouTube channel for more explainer content!



5. Self-Awareness

A great entrepreneur is aware of their strengths and weaknesses. Rather than letting shortcomings hold them back, they build well-rounded teams that complement their abilities.

In many cases, it's the entrepreneurial team, rather than an individual, that drives a business venture toward success. When starting your own business, it's critical to surround yourself with teammates who have complementary talents and contribute to a common goal.

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6. Risk Tolerance

Entrepreneurship is often associated with risk. While it's true that launching a venture requires an entrepreneur to take risks, they also need to take steps to minimize it.

While many things can go wrong when launching a new venture, many things can go right. According to [Entrepreneurship Essentials](#), entrepreneurs who actively manage the relationship between risk and reward position their companies to “benefit from the upside.”

Successful entrepreneurs are comfortable with encountering some level of risk to reap the rewards of their efforts; however, their risk tolerance is tightly related to their efforts to mitigate it.

7. Comfort with Failure

In addition to risk-management and [calculated decision-making](#), entrepreneurship requires a certain level of comfort with failure.

“Of startups that have more than one employee, 70 percent survive at least two years, half last at least five years, and a quarter last 15 years,” says Harvard Business School Professor William Sahlman in [Entrepreneurship Essentials](#). “Even then, only a small fraction of the survivors get to be significant employers.”

The reasons for failure are vast and encompass everything from a [lack of business scalability](#) to low [product-market fit](#). While many of these risks can be avoided, some are inevitable.

Despite this, entrepreneurs must prepare themselves for, and be comfortable with, failure. Rather than let fear hold them back, they maintain a positive attitude to allow the possibility of success to propel them forward.

8. Persistence

While many successful entrepreneurs are comfortable with the possibility of failing, it doesn't mean they give up easily. Rather, they see failure as an opportunity to learn and grow.

Throughout the entrepreneurial process, many hypotheses turn out to be wrong, and some ventures fail altogether. Part of what makes an entrepreneur successful is their willingness to learn from mistakes, ask questions, and persist until they reach their goal.

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9. Innovative Thinking

[Innovation](#) often goes hand-in-hand with entrepreneurship. While [innovation in business](#) can be defined as an idea that's both novel and useful, it doesn't always involve creating an entirely new product or service. Some of the most successful startups have taken existing products or services and drastically improved them to meet the changing needs of the market.

Although innovation doesn't come naturally to every entrepreneur, it's a type of strategic mindset that can be cultivated. By developing your [problem-solving skills](#), you'll be well-equipped to spot innovative opportunities and position your venture for success.

10. Long-Term Focus

Most people associate entrepreneurship with starting a business. While the early stages of launching a venture, such as securing funding, are critical to its success, the process doesn't end once the business is operational.

According to Entrepreneurship Essentials, "it's easy to start a business, but hard to grow a sustainable and substantial one. Some of the greatest opportunities in history were discovered well after a venture launched."

Entrepreneurship is a long-term endeavor, and entrepreneurs must focus on the process from beginning to end to ensure long-term success.

HOW TO DEVELOP THE QUALITIES OF AN ENTREPRENEUR

There's no right or wrong way to be an entrepreneur. Characteristics and behaviors like experimentation, persistence, and innovation can be developed with time, experience, and training. As long as you possess the entrepreneurial spirit, you'll be able to seize opportunities and overcome challenges throughout your journey.

Are you interested in learning the ins and outs of entrepreneurship? Explore our four-week online course Entrepreneurship Essentials and our other entrepreneurship and innovation courses to learn to speak the language of the startup world. If you aren't sure which course is the right fit, download our free course flowchart to determine which best aligns with your goals.

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About the Author

Kelsey Miller is a marketing specialist and contributing writer for Harvard Business School Online.