

Recruitment Entrepreneurs: The First 100 Days by Graeme Read

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Getting your business on the right trajectory is essential and the first 100 days are critical for any new enterprise.

Day Zero: Benjamin Franklin once said, "If you **fail to plan**, you are **planning to fail**."

Without a viable business plan, it's like piloting a 747 with no windows, a cockpit with no dials and no co-pilot. No way of knowing which way is up or down, or right or left, or what your altitude, speed or fuel levels are. The business plan doesn't need to be a *War and Peace* style tome but it does need to cover the key mile-markers that you set yourself.

Many plans are rarely read again and are just gathering dust. The best plans cover the first two years, with a focus on getting past month one, Q1, year one and then year two. A business plan should be a living organism, continuously developing scoring segments as "On track", "Just satisfactory" or "Needs urgent attention".

90% of start-ups fail in the early years, with 50% failing by year five. Your early decisions make the difference between succeeding, merely existing or worse.

Days 1 to 30: Make Money Before You Spend It

Be aware of restrictive covenants or notice periods, but there's still a lot you can do in the time before you launch.

Time is money and cash is king. Stick that maxim on post-it notes, windows, kitchens, screen-savers, anywhere it is visible, to avoid day dreaming.

Sales people are often easy buyers (from other sales people). Never be sold to; take your time, evaluate the options and ask if it is essential in month one, Q1 or later. Relishing in the newfound freedom of making their own decisions, owners often invest in services that are either not business critical in the early days or not suitable or a mere 'nice to have'. Knowing the difference is key to your ongoing cash flow and viability.

The recruitment marketplace does contain many value-adding service providers who understand the commercial pressures new enterprises face. To get the best value, consider joining a network or trade body: not only do you join a community of fellow

entrepreneurs, but you can also get advice and counsel from seasoned industry experts.

For example, APSCo offers, in addition to training, compliance and legal helplines, templates for client, candidate and employee agreements and more. Backed up by a cohort of tried-and-tested industry suppliers, many associations offer significant discounts for SMEs across a range of services, covering software, technology, factoring and finance, job data and sector analysis, marketing, job boards, bulk buying, accounting, legal, insurance and other business services, which outweigh the membership fee.

Use the early days to investigate the services you will need, because as soon as you press the 'GO' button, the hard work starts.

Days 31 to 60: D-Day - Going Live

The first month will have flown past and you now need to get real and actually start making money. It is tempting to jump on any new role rather than focussing on your specific niche; but the wider you go, the more distracted you will become. Stay niche or micro-niche and find a non-competing firm with whom you can share opportunities that are outside of your focus area.

The next two months are all about staying single-minded: it is easy to fall back into old ways of doing things, to allow sloppy habits to emerge. Alternately you will be the CEO, HR and Finance Manager, Internal Recruiter, Trainer, Credit Collector, Admin Manager and more, sometimes all in a single day! First and foremost, you need to be the Top Salesperson.

Be the first in the office and the last to leave. Starting earlier than your competitors and staying later allows you to capture more opportunities, and easily sets a precedent – it's just the norm. Segment non-sales tasks outside 'client time' and use scheduling technology to help; the more time you spend surfing, the less time you spend with clients. Average recruiter sales have dropped by more than 30% over the past 20 years. Don't be a slave to technology: turn it on its axis and harness it.

Early wins are key, both for proof of concept and for overall morale. They keep you motivated, hungry for more, chasing more opportunities. In the movie *Glengarry Glen Ross*, Alec Baldwin's character delivers a monologue on the importance of three letters ABC: "Always Be Closing". Motivation is important, be it after a bad call, day or week. Get over your failures: get back in the saddle and always keep peddling. How many times did Sir Chris Hoy fall off his bike as a child before turning it into an art that culminated in seven Olympic medals? He got back on his bike and got better at riding it.

Track success and predict the future. Key Performance Indicators are often discarded by new owners due to past experiences when dumb KPIs and targets were used by old-school firms. Don't be a dinosaur: evolve and develop your own that suit your business and market.

As liberating as it may be to dispense with them, when applied correctly, the benefits are significant. That said, KPIs should never be a stick with which to hit yourself or your team. They offer an opportunity to explore what is working, who is good and at what, who may need more development and who may not be suited to their current role but could work in a different part of the business.

On day 60 you need to look at your progress and results, not spreadsheets but business-critical wins and losses, before you take the next step.

Days 61 to 90: Listen, Refine and Repeat

Trim Tabbing: recruiters are not robots. The definition of insanity is to keep doing the same thing looking for a different outcome.

World-class round-the-world sailors such as Ellen MacArthur continuously "trim tab" their sails to take advantage of the prevailing winds or to get out of the doldrums. By day 61 you will need to be making imperceptible corrections and continuous improvements to not just keep you afloat but to ensure you take full advantage of the conditions ahead.

As you grow and pick up momentum, the business will develop its own culture. Building a culture takes time and it is an inexact science. It may take a few goes to hit the winning formula and the key to that is to involve the team and invest in them.

Hiring: this adds energy and keeps the culture developing. Some of the best ideas I ever heard came from complete rookies who looked at things anew, questioning as a novice would.

Bunched hiring: the odds when hiring people are that one in every three new consultants will be a superstar or a good steady performer, a third may be slower growers or need more development and, regrettably, the rest will fall out of love with the profession, with you or the converse. Hiring should therefore be made in manageable groups; make quick but reasoned decisions.

Business is all about decisions. Some are great, some are not and there is no fool-proof guide – it's a mix of you, the culture, the advancement opportunities you offer, the rewards, and other intangibles. The more you find out what 'good' looks like, the better your chances of hiring more of the "right stuff". The opposite is equally true: hiring only one person markedly increasing the odds of finding the wrong person, after three months of trying and hoping for the best.

Whether with people, businesses or operations, it is better to regret one decision than to hang on to one that disrupts the equilibrium. Be agile and be decisive: the more you do that, the more you will come out winning.

Day 90 and Beyond: Keep Innovating; Fail Early and Often

Everything and every person evolves. Whilst the innovation of driverless cars may limit the taxi community, see change and possible opportunities. I've heard that RPOs, internal recruiters and job boards will kill recruiters: the opposite is true. They are enablers of recruiters.

If you cannot add value to clients and candidates, then innovate and stay ahead or prepare to step out, as you will be liable to disintermediation.

This is particularly apt in an early-stage business, where the mistakes learnt in the first year can be rectified and adjusted. Sir Winston Churchill is credited with another, oft repeated, saying: "Those who fail to learn from the past are doomed to repeat it."

Don't lose heart, recruitment is the most fun you can have outside of family life. You spend a similar amount of time in your business as you do with your family and at social events.

No, there won't always be clear skies, but having the right dials, clear vision and the right amount of fuel you can fly higher than you have ever imagined.

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