

# Chapter Two:

## It's Your First Day and *You're* the CEO?

One of the most interesting things about entrepreneurship is that it is one of the only jobs on earth where “no experience necessary” is considered a badge of honor. Literally, anybody can start a business. There's something really brave and maybe even brazen about the fact that you can start a business and call yourself the boss, even though you did nothing to earn that title. You just create a business, which costs very little money and takes very little effort. The physical act of “starting a business” requires only a simple registration, maybe some kind of payment, and the government says, “Yeah, okay, here's your registration number. Don't forget to pay your taxes, please.” They don't ask any questions about your ability to run a

business. There's no test. There's no assessment. They don't even care if you have money to invest in this business. And they know that you're likely going to fail. But they take your money anyway. **Ouch.**

In some places, you can start a business without notifying the government, especially if you are a photographer, freelancer, or consultant of some kind. You only need to be in touch with the government if you plan to register a business name. If you are running your business as "Jane Doe" the "photographer", then you don't need to tell a soul that you are doing this. If you want your business to be called, "Jane Doe's Photography" you need to tell some levels of government so they can register your business name. But even then the registration is just to ensure that nobody else has the same business name as you. They still don't care if you are going to be any good at this. It's all very fascinating that you can be nothing and nobody one minute and be a CEO the next. Super fascinating and it also explains why so many businesses fail.

Fortunately, we live in a world where this is possible: we *get* to dream. We *get* to try. And there's no real consequence to us, except a bruised ego if it doesn't

work out. And we've trained ourselves to self-preserve with the way we describe our businesses: "oh, it's just a thing I'm trying. If it doesn't work out, it doesn't work out." It's like we're expecting to fail, even though our dreams would want otherwise for us. Our brains are constantly in battle mode: *this is great! OMG this is so fucking terrible! What have I done? Yay, I got a new client! OMG I can't do this. Why is he leaving the dirty plate on the counter when the dishwasher is right there?* Okay, maybe that last one doesn't enter your brain...maybe that's just me. I leave dishes on the counter too. But when I'm pissed about something related to my business, those dishes might as well be on fire in a pile of shit in the middle of my living room because I can't see anything else. That's how my brain copes with stress: it looks for something else to get angry at instead of dealing with the problem at hand.

The amount of privilege we have as entrepreneurs is kind of unbelievable. And we complain about it every step of the way. *Why isn't this easier?* Not everyone and not every place allows this kind of free-for-all activity in the business world, but in North America, for the most part, it's not overly difficult to

build a corporate ladder and then position yourself smack dab at the top. That's the reward you get for having the idea for the business in the first place. Unfortunately, we live in a world where there are low barriers to entry for entrepreneurship and that means the waters get muddied... a lot. People don't take into consideration the magnitude of what it means to run a business. Notice I didn't say "start a business." Starting a business and running a business are two different things, and we'll get into that later. But for now, understand that when you sign up for entrepreneurship, you're signing up for something real. It's not a game. It's not just a thing you do when you have time. It requires a lot of commitment and dedication and risk. And if you are going to wear the CEO hat, you need to act, or at least, *try* to act like a CEO.

I resisted the urge to call myself a CEO for a long time. Basically the first four years of running my business, I referred to myself as whatever the product was I was selling at the time: freelance writing = freelancer writer. Business coaching = business coach. Course creation = course creator. But when I decided to hire employees and get an office and go bigger, a really

interesting thing happened: I *still* didn't call myself CEO. But other people sure did. I had the pleasure of being a guest on several podcasts immediately after I hired my third employee and people were tossing around the title of CEO and throwing it in my direction with such ease, I found it kind of alarming and kind of funny. At this point in my career, I identify as an instructional designer (and writer?), and my title in my company, even though I had employees and was at the time, planning to grow in a big way, was simply Lead Instructional Designer. It was other business owners who were knighting me as CEO. I didn't care either way, but I wasn't calling myself CEO. For no particular reason except I didn't like it. And by now, you'll recognize me as someone who tries to avoid doing things she doesn't like.

Whether I called myself the CEO or not is irrelevant. The truth is I was fulfilling the role of CEO in my company. *Someone* has to do it. So here's the first lesson from the CEO's office: you need experience to run a business, and it's perfectly okay to get that experience while *running* your business. But you need to be willing to *gain* that experience. Entitled entrepreneurs don't want to have to do hard things. They don't want to have

to work their way up in their own companies. They want to quit jobs working 40 hours a week for someone else so they can work 15 or 20 hours a week in their own businesses. But that's just not how the world works. And we'll talk more about that later. If you are going to start a business, you need to work *in* that business.

When I started my business back in 2017, I worked all the time. All. The. Time. I started at the lowest rung in my own company pumping out content as a freelance writer. My business cards read, "Hi, I'm a Content Writer." Actual. That's what my business card said. Not, "I just started this business and have no experience, but I'm the CEO." That's because a freelance business doesn't require a CEO. At the time, I needed a laptop, an internet connection, an email, and something to compose content. There's no place for a CEO in a business like that. So I didn't even think about it. I wasn't a founder either. I was a freelance writer. And years later when I had earned the right to be called a CEO because there was an actual company and actual CEO duties to perform, I still didn't use it. That's what was right for me. I'm not trying to convince you either way: I'm trying to show you that you get to decide. But

you better know *why* you're making those decisions. That's what makes it easy to feel good about what you're doing: when you know why something is important to you.

If you are a company of one, as so many entrepreneurs are in the beginning, you need to not only be the CEO and hold the vision for your business close to heart, but you need to wear a hard hat most days just to survive the falling sky as you attempt to build this business. Resilient entrepreneurs - who are made, by the way, and not born - know that just because they have the equivalent of the corner office in the penthouse doesn't mean they don't have to still clean that floor. In other words, resilient entrepreneurs see the importance of getting their hands dirty so they can gain experience in a business they are trying to develop. And I think if you're serious about creating impact, you're more focused on creating that impact than worrying about what goes on your business card. *Do people still have business cards?*

If you are reading this and feeling frustrated with how your business-building is going, or if you're getting pissed off at me for making you uncomfortable, stop and ask yourself this question: "what am I really angry

about?” Lucky for you, I like to bet, so I’m going to bet that you aren’t frustrated with your customers or your lack of sales. I’m willing to bet that you are frustrated and angry about how *hard* it is to get your customers to buy from you and make sales. A lot of entrepreneurs miss the mark on this and don’t see the difference. That’s what I’m here for: to help you see the difference so you can stop being entitled and start recognizing these things about yourself. Knowledge is power. I want you to be resilient and have the ability to recognize when enough really is enough. And I’m not talking about the kind of resilience that other people talk about: but the kind of resilience that is important to you. What’s your brand of resilience? If carrying on is what you want, you need to explore these ideas for yourself. If you find yourself feeling frustrated about the lack of interest from your customers or because of a dip in sales, take a breath. In this case, it’s not them, it’s you. *Your* expectations of the situation are way off. Way off. You wish this was easier, right? Of course you do! Everyone wants life to be easy. Did you leave a job to put up with this shit all day long? You’re fucking right you did. So



stop trying to run away from it and acknowledge that your frustrations are caused by your expectations.

I want to take a beat here and talk about the efforts that the marketing industry is undertaking as we speak about your frustrations. We all need to be selling online. It's just how the world is these days. But whether you sell make-up or coaching packages, or you sell tires direct to consumers or you sell psychic readings, your message is what is going to connect you to your customer. So even though you are feeling frustrated with your business and even though it *could* be your thoughts that are creating this problem for you, it's also important to look at the mechanics of business. Sometimes, it is logistics. Sometimes the problem is not your made-up expectations. Sometimes, it is your marketing. And sometimes, it's not. Sometimes, it's that we're selling the wrong thing. Not just to the wrong people, but the wrong thing entirely. When I set out to start my business, I focused on the work that would pay me. I didn't care what it was. The goal was to create a business that replaced my income. Like many new entrepreneurs, I set the bar low. Not only did I replace my income, but I surpassed it time and time again. But when the internet

got to me, when I started listening to what was important to *other* people or started to allow the thoughts others had about what is important in business to get into *my* brain, my goals changed. It's not that I wanted to do those things, but I felt like I had to: grow a company, get an office, hire employees. These are the makings of a successful business, no? Except I already had a wildly successful business according to my first bar: replace my income. This new bar was not even clear. I was not even sure what I was chasing, although it was clear what I was creating: something for other people. And when I think about the journey I've been on over the last number of years, most of it focused on trying to fit my skills into the market. I was told I can have a business that lights me up *and* provides an income. But if there's one thing I've taken from the world of entrepreneurship it's this: the most successful among us focus on solving a problem. We fill a need. It might not be glamorous. It might not be what you thought it was going to be. But it can be just as amazing as whatever you thought your business was going to look like if you let go of the idea that your business needs to look a certain way for it to be successful. As the CEO,

you can change your mind about what's important to you. Or, if you're like me, you might just be finding out for the first time ever what's important to you, and not just the people around you.

So why do you get frustrated with your customers? Where does that come into play? For starters, every victim needs a villain. And while you would never consciously think of your customers as the villain, you don't see yourself as one either (obviously, although you might be starting to realize that you do see yourself as a villain now that you're hanging around with me). We need someone else to blame. As an entrepreneur, you love your products and services and have a hard time finding faults with them. So if your products and services are awesome, and you're awesome (you're the CEO after all!) then it must be that something is wrong with your customers.

See how that works?

***That's*** entitlement.

We came up with these ideas. It can't be our fault if this isn't working. It's gotta be something else. Except, it's probably not. One minute we think we can't do this

and we're not good enough and the next minute we're defending our decisions to the death. Of our company.

A resilient entrepreneur would look at the same situation, ask the same questions, and come to the conclusion that they need to change something about the way *they* are doing business. Customers don't have to change. The situation doesn't have to change. The approach to the situation has to change. And in order to change the approach, an entrepreneur must be willing to admit that there is something wrong with it in the first place. An entitled entrepreneur would never say that something is wrong with *them*. A resilient one is always looking for how *they* shit the bed on a particular day so they can clean up the mess and get on with doing their work in the world.

How can you bridge the gap here? How do you go from being someone who blames customers for a lack of interest in your products to someone who looks at yourself first to change the outcome? It takes a great deal of self-awareness, but you can start the process at any time by deciding that you *want* to be more self-aware. It doesn't happen overnight, not like knighting yourself the CEO of a company, but it can

happen over time, with patience, compassion for yourself, and a dedication to being better than you were before. Small, incremental steps will help you see the biggest changes in the long run. Trying to change everything about yourself right now will almost always fail. So don't start out by undermining your efforts. Start with the decision to pay more attention. Ask better questions. Just start by asking *more* questions. And don't worry about whether or not they are the right questions. The questions I offer to you at the end of each chapter in this book can be a springboard to help you develop your questioning strategy. Be willing to just start.

Part of the frustration you feel when starting a business has to do with the title you gave yourself. If you are the CEO, *shouldn't you have all the answers? Shouldn't you already know how to do all these things? Don't other CEOs know how to run their businesses with a boatload of confidence?* Ummm, no. No, that's not actually how that works. And if you'll take a minute to indulge me, I'll show you why that's not how that works.

Something funny happens when you become the owner of a business: you are in charge. You're the boss. And because this was all your idea and you brought it to life, somewhere along the way you decided that it also meant you needed to have all the answers. When you don't have *all* the answers (and friend, you never will), you get frustrated that things aren't going as you planned. Because you spend so much time planning for the outcome you want, you might not have considered that it was going to take you much longer than you hoped, look completely different than you could have imagined, and cause your brown hair to turn gray long before it should. These are things all entrepreneurs face. We all get frustrated from time to time that things aren't working out the way we want. But the difference between an entitled entrepreneur and a resilient one is that entitled entrepreneurs believe there's only one way forward.

My business has taken on many forms since 2017 and looking back, I often feel frustrated that I didn't know then what I know now. I think we all do that from time to time, reminisce and wonder about how much faster we could have gotten to where we are if only we

had had more information. And this is where coaches and consultants come in: we spend buckets of money trying to get someone to show us how to do it faster, but all we're really doing is trying to replicate what that person did. Even if it worked for 400 of their clients, there's no guarantee their secret formula for success will work for you. You're different. Your variables are different. Your life is different.

I took a 6-week long solo road trip in the summer of 2022. I expected that a break from work and time away from my family, my day-to-day responsibilities, and creating endless mountains of content would change me. I did expect that I would be changed. But I didn't expect that I would be changed in such a way that I would come home, and break down a business that was on its way to even more success. My advice to others has always been, *don't quit. Find a way to keep going. No matter what. Do the work of working on your brain, and manage your mind and use the systems and frameworks and processes to make life easier.* But when I returned home from my cross-country road trip, something had changed. I wanted to keep being in business. I wanted to keep succeeding. I wanted to keep

building something. I just didn't want to keep building what I had left behind. A burning thought crept in: *what if I was building a business that didn't need me to manage my mind? What if I was building a business that didn't need 14 pieces of software and what if I didn't need three people to do the work?* And the most amazing thing happened: as soon as I asked myself those questions and had those thoughts, it became clear that I needed to walk away from what I had built. Even though it was already in the world. Even though it was making money. Even though it was something I loved and even though I had spent close to \$100,000 of my own money, the results I was getting weren't helping me create the life *I* actually wanted. And until I spent 6 weeks driving across Canada and getting to know myself better, I wouldn't have known what I loved. What I *really* loved. And so I made changes. And to the outside world, I'm sure it looked like I was quitting again. And I was. But this was a different kind of quit. This was me saying I am going to do this thing for real, my own way. For real. Not in the mold of someone else. I didn't want to be a CEO or have to CEO as a set of activities. And that was okay in my books.



Entrepreneurs are people first. People with needs. And I want you to consider how your business is meeting your needs. Don't worry about your customers. Don't worry about the business itself. Don't worry about your title. How is your business meeting *your* needs? Considering all the variables alone are enough to make you want to throw in the towel, so instead, focus on the things you can see and control.

When I'm feeling stuck on a decision, or I'm feeling overwhelmed by choice, I employ a little strategy I like to call "What I *don't* want." All of the business advice I've gotten over the years has included some version of "imagine what you want your life to look like 5, 10, 15 years from now..." and then I'm supposed to somehow map out the goals or potential action steps that could help me create that life 5, 10 or 15 years from now. But you know what no coach or course or business advisor has ever asked me? "What *don't* you want?" And whether I'm a pessimist or a person who leans into the negative to find meaning, I don't know, but what I do know is that I've been able to carve out some pretty spectacular things in my life by deciding what I don't want.

I bought a brand new Saturn Ion in 2005. When I was pregnant with my son in 2008, the car was just shy of three years old, but the payments were hefty for the amount of money I was making. Even back then, I was spending a lot of money on cars. Because, well, *cars*. I love cars. My Saturn was so shiny and black, I loved it. I realized that while Canada has great maternity benefits for new moms, 55% of my income wasn't going to allow me to keep that car for very long. So I made the heartbreaking decision to sell the car. And I was resentful of a lot of things after getting rid of the car, but mostly, I felt stuck. Literally. I owned my first car when I was 18 years old. It was a 1997 Chevy Cavalier. Also shiny and also black. Owning my own car meant freedom. Literally and figuratively. So as a grown-ass woman with a baby on the way, mortgage in tow, and a husband working day and night who needed the other car to go to work, I felt stuck without a car. After my son was born, I had taken a job in another part of the city, which was over 30 minutes from my house. I had to get a car to get back and forth to work or I'd spend two hours in the morning and two hours in the evening just trying to get to work on the bus. And believe me, I didn't

like work nearly enough to be spending that kind of time on public transit. When it was finally time for me to get my own car again, I decide ahead of time that I was going to get a cheap car. *I'm getting the smallest, best-on-gas car I can find.* And I find myself at the Hyundai dealership 10 minutes from my house, staring down at this Accent hatchback that was the ugliest grey color I'd ever seen.

“Got it in black?” I ask, fingers crossed.

“Nope,” the salesman tells me.

“What about that green apple color?”

“Nope, just this one.”

“Alright fine, I'll take it.”

I didn't even test-drive it first. It fit the budget.

From the moment I picked up that car and drove it home a few days later - because for some reason we have figured out how to put men on the moon and send instant messages from magical devices in our pockets, but we don't yet know how to sell a car to someone in less than one business day - I hated the car. I hated it because it wasn't my Ion. I hated it because it wasn't what I really wanted. It was what I thought I could afford. And sure, I should have been grateful that I could

even afford a new car, but this is a book about entitlement, so stay with me.

Who buys a Goddamn hatchback with a toddler? Apparently me. And that was the last time I ever compromised on a car. Ever again. I realized in the 3 years I drove that shitstain of a car that I would never, ever, *not* drive the car I really wanted to drive again.

Finally, I couldn't take it anymore. I decided it was time to upgrade the Hyundai. I didn't care that it was good on gas. It was the worst car I'd ever owned. And it was a compromise in a moment when I had to make a compromise, but never again. I landed at the dealership near my hometown, having already moved home and built a new house, with a new job and a new lease on life. I pull into the dealership and start sizing up the options. I had clearly forgotten about my promise to myself to never buy a small car again when I landed at the Kia dealership and was about to put a deposit on a Kia Rio. Nice car. But not the car I wanted. I had also made my way to the Jeep dealership where I had the absolute pleasure of taking a Jeep Patriot for a spin around town. Just to see what it was like. To imagine for

a minute that I had a different car. A different version of the life I wanted.

I left the city that day ready to buy the Kia. The *economical* choice. The smart “upgrade” option. And then I remembered my promise: *I don’t want a small car.*

And I said to my husband, “if I buy this Kia, and I keep it for four or five years, then by the time I get to own a vehicle like the Patriot, I’ll have waited almost ten years to drive the vehicle I actually want.”

And the next day I made an offer on the Patriot. Also shiny. Also black. It seems like such an insignificant thing: what car do you drive? But when you know what you don’t want to drive, it makes it easier to say yes to the things you do want. Sure, it felt uncomfortable to stretch myself to afford the Patriot, but I trusted that I’d figure it out. And I did. And I’ve upgraded that sucker two more times since, going bigger and going better each time.

Oh, and I also bought a Mustang. Because, well, *Mustangs*. Not on the same day of course. Several years later when I realized I could have my Jeep life and also another car. Because, again, *cars*. And to be fair, a

Mustang is a small car. But it's different. Eight cylinders go a lot faster than four. I checked. Plus, it is my dream car.

I couldn't have known that I would, in fact, be able to pay for these vehicles. I mean, they'll sell any idiot a car these days. But I focused on what I didn't want to create: I didn't want to keep hating my car. Cars are important to me. A process of elimination helps me sometimes to make an informed choice when I can't see an answer clearly. Entitled entrepreneurs sometimes think that if they don't already have that information and don't already have the answers, then perhaps there's no way for them to get that information. So they quit. They pick up their toys and go home. They buy the cheaper, more economical car. Resilient entrepreneurs might put down the toys for the day but come back to clean them up later and see a new way of looking at the toys (customers, products, services, problems, solutions) than they did before. And I literally mean toys. As in cars. So many cars.

High levels of frustration come into play when you look at your business card that proudly reads, CEO or President or Boss Lady or whatever, and you feel like

you've let yourself down because you don't have all the answers. But guess what: **nobody** has all the answers. We've all had to come up with ways to navigate this life and do the best we can with what we have. And sometimes we need help to see that. I like to say, "take a step to the left and you'll get a different perspective." When we think thoughts such as, "I can't afford the bigger car," we don't get the bigger car. We all need a little help making decisions sometimes and the information we need to make those decisions can come from unexpected places if we let it. Even the leaders of the free world have hundreds of aids and professionals who are way smarter than they are to help them do their jobs. Why would you think you could and should do *all* of this on your own? And then, of course, that thought just makes you feel even worse about yourself, so you have another reason to quit. See how this cycle of thinking goes? It creates a lot of unnecessary disdain in your life.

You started this business. It's your company. You can call yourself whatever you want. If you want to let go of some of the problems you face around entitlement, you need to first let go of the idea that as CEO or

President or Boss Lady or whatever, you have all the answers. Instead of heading out into the world holding your head high because you are the CEO and you don't need anyone's help, hold out your hand at every opportunity and ask people to give you advice, offer insight, and point you in the right direction. Don't for a second think that you'll build this business on your own. And don't for a second think you don't need anyone's help to get through this shitstorm that is entrepreneurship. Entitled entrepreneurs fail because they don't see how they are holding themselves back. We end up disappointed because we bought the Hyundai Accent instead of the Jeep Patriot. For reference, the Patriot isn't in production anymore so if you've got one, enjoy the shit out of it. They aren't making any more of those puppies.

Resilient entrepreneurs are poster children for declaring, "I don't know what I'm doing" and "I'll try this out for a little while", owning the ignorance that comes along with throwing spaghetti at the wall long enough to go out and find the answers - any answer - to move them forward. And as you seek this advice from others,



remember to ask yourself if what they are saying is true for you and true to you.

While asking for help is important, it's also important to recognize when your expectations of others go beyond simple advice. When you find yourself getting frustrated that nobody will help you bake the bread after they've helped you find the recipe, check yourself. That's also entitlement rearing its ugly head. Nobody has to help you build this company. You get to do that. As CEO, that's your job. Congratulations! But sometimes entrepreneurs get frustrated with industry partners or others in the community who won't get on board and help push things along. That's not what is supposed to happen. People don't owe you anything. *Hi, I'm Tough Love, and I'm here to help.* So if you catch yourself thinking that you can't do this because so and so won't help, take a pause and ask why you need them in the first place. Be brave enough to look elsewhere for the same or new information that could move you forward. Better yet, ask yourself what *you* would do: you've got lots of knowledge to tap into and you can use your own experience to measure someone else's opinions and decide if it aligns with your thoughts, ideas, beliefs or

goals. And change all of it as needed. Entitled entrepreneurs give up when nobody will help them bake the bread. Resilient business owners find other ways to get *fed*.

A lack of understanding about what it takes to really persevere in business is one of the major reasons why businesses fail so early on. It's not just about a poor operations plan or a lack of marketing. In fact, I think far too many new business owners dive into business trying to perfect messages for customers they don't even understand yet, to sell products they haven't even built yet. But that's a conversation for another day. Poorly managed logistics are at fault in many ways, but they aren't the only side of the story. It's just not worth it for so many people to push harder and give more when the reward is so far away. Or, at least, it seems so far away.

I spend time in a lot of entrepreneurial circles and I've heard some doozy of excuses for why entrepreneurs and business owners up and quit. And I've heard some incredible confessions about why things feel hard. For every person who says they are working their asses off, there are five more people declaring with intense conviction about how they don't work hard and

they won't work hard. A lot of people talk about the importance of self-care and "putting the oxygen mask" on yourself first, but the truth is the same people who preach about caring for themselves are starving their businesses and choking off the lifeblood of the very thing they are trying to grow. And don't even get me started on how taking a bath is self-care. It's **basic** hygiene. *Jesus*. Can we get a better definition of self-care, people? The bar is set really low in this area.

For those who choose to keep pushing and are learning to be resilient, you can recognize the moments that matter and learn from your own experiences as you go. You don't need to know it all to start, and a title is never going to afford you that, even if you have spent 25 years working your way up a traditional corporate ladder. But if you settle in and acknowledge that you can't know it all, and you're willing to work with what you've got, learn what you need as you need it, and not be afraid to fuck up, you can move away from a sense of entitlement and "poor me" when things go wrong and move into a place of ownership and empowerment. And maybe a brand new car. I especially encourage that last benefit of figuring your shit out.

## Questions for Consideration

Before moving on to the next chapter, ask yourself these questions. And answer them. It will help you see how you might be holding yourself back right now.

1. What do you think should be easy for you as the CEO or owner of your business?
2. What thoughts do you have about hard things in business that you could work to change?
3. Why would it be helpful to you to change those thoughts at this time?