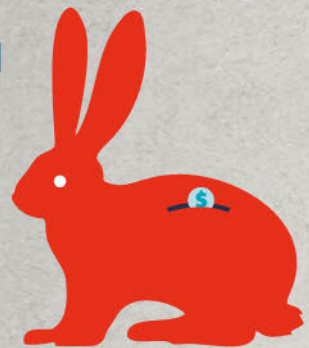


SO YOU WANT TO START A BUSINESS?

How do you know what business suits you? And what do you need to consider before launching? Transition coach **Lucas Marang'a** reflects on the internal process you need to go through before registering that business

We all desire freedom, being in control of our time and earning more money to maximise the freedom we seek. Sounds like the ideal life, yes? Being your own boss by starting a business is a popular ticket towards attaining that freedom and eventually a more satisfying life. Sadly, many leave their jobs with excitement to start their own thing, but the dream soon becomes a nightmare. They discover it's mostly a bed of thorns with an occasional rose here and there. We stumble and fumble in our attempt to be entrepreneurs, losing time, money and even sleep.

I have been in business all my life. My first venture was in primary school. I bred rabbits and sold them to my mates in class. My dad killed that business when one day, as he dropped us at school, a rabbit hidden in my school bag urinated on his Peugeot 504 velvet car seat through my canvas school bag. He was furious and ordered the slaughter of all my rabbits and the subsequent closure of my first business. Up to this day, I cannot eat rabbit meat. Maybe I'm still traumatised and in need of therapy!





Fortunately, my entrepreneurial spirit wasn't killed and I have started and run other ventures since then. By the way, are entrepreneurs born or made? The jury is still out on that. Either way, it's been a rollercoaster journey of a few decades.

Over time I have been approached by folks who desire to try their hand at business. They often ask me what, where and how to start. It is clear that most lack clarity. Others feel it's the natural thing to do after leaving employment. Some went right into the first idea that came to mind. Others did the Kenyan thing of copying other businesses. Sadly, many have burnt their fingers – and savings too – as a result. Yes, we are a country of entrepreneurs, but I feel we are also a country of entrepreneur copycats. I remember a neighbour starting a tent business years back because I had started one. Another took it a step further and copied my logo as their own. Like really??

This strange behaviour drew me to interrogate why so many don't transition well into business. Most businesses die at the start-up stage. And here I don't mean the admin and registration part of it (the hardware). It's the alignment of who we are and the business we want to undertake (the software). You and your business have to be compatible. It is like a good marriage where the partners get each other.

We are all made for something and spend most of our lives finding and pursuing our true north. Here are five road signs to finding your entrepreneurial true north.



1 **RECOGNISE PASSION**

Many of us have a clue of what we are good at but are not very clear on our strengths. It's important to find out what your strengths and passions are. These are what will keep your lights on when in the muddy trenches of entrepreneurship. There are several exercises out there that can help you get clear on this, such as the StrengthFinders from Gallup, MBTI and others.

Passion is the fuel for life, but unfortunately many people have very little awareness of their inner drives and motivations. Your passions, strengths and experiences should be the solution to the problem you want to address in the form of a business. Most of our passions are buried under life's demands, responsibilities and expectations. We need to first dig out this unique version of ourselves before registering that business. Be clear on your passions and you and your business will be a marriage made in heaven because what your business will need you will naturally have.

POSSIBLE

2 THE RIGHT BUSINESS AND MODEL

Once we have recognised our passions then we can ask what is the business that best fits our making. Remember to resist the temptation to copy others, however attractive their hustles are. My coaching business goes well with my personality. For instance, one of my strengths is connectedness. I like to believe I'm easily relatable and that makes me a good coach (if I may say so myself!).

Also, choose a business that fits your station in life. For instance, if you have left employment as a result of retirement then maybe consider what you could offer from the broad experience gathered from your working years. Sometimes we go in search of business ideas that are far off, yet what we have in our hands could be a viable enterprise just waiting to get started. Also, don't blow your savings or retirement benefits on a business that looks like it will multiply your fortunes in a short time. Seek some trusted advice, be as practical as possible then narrow down your options. I have a retired friend who's a great coach. He works from home and does most of his coaching virtually. He's an introvert so doesn't mind being indoors all day. His business and the model he has chosen fit his personality well. Maybe the only trip he makes is to the bank to confirm his actual and available balance! Your business takes your personality.

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3 BELIEVE IN MIRACLES

At the risk of sounding like an evangelist, being an entrepreneur will require some faith to get by. Things get so thick at times that the only place left to look is up. In 2000 Kenya was in the middle of a deep recession. I had just returned from the US and all I wanted was to start a business. But I was broke and had no clue which one. I remember sitting in my small, dark room and hoping to hear a voice. I started scribbling the business names that came to mind and, voilà, HAPPENING VENTURES just landed. It felt right and that was the name of my events and tent business for 20 years.

When we sense we are going in the right direction then we don't have to move all the pieces. Some the universe will move for us. Start weaving and the thread will appear. Such God-incidences, as I call them, have helped me fall in love with my business both deliberately and consciously. That's the kind of connection you need with your biashara. Business is a full love affair. The good vibes will tide you over tough times. →

4 REDUCE EXTERNAL VOLUME

I started my business soon after I returned from the US against my family's wishes. Everyone whose opinion mattered was convinced I should remain in America. Things were tough back home so I stood better chances of success abroad. Plus, I had a five-year visa and a master's degree from USIU Africa which was affiliated with a university in San Diego, California. My brother even offered to get me a job. I look back and wonder how I withstood all that pressure. It was coming from a good place, but that picture-perfect situation wasn't appealing to me. My desire to return home and find my calling refused to be muted.

Sometimes in the pursuit of our entrepreneurial true north, we have to mute the voices of others to hear ourselves. And it's harder when it's coming from our near and dear ones. But there comes a time when we have to love them and leave them, at least in our minds, until things get clear. Purpose is individual. This is a difficult thing to do, but we have to be silent to hear ourselves. I'm all for seeking counsel before we start that business, but be careful not to replace your forming thoughts with others' opinions.

Business is often a lonely journey and we must be sure that we are doing this for ourselves and the right reasons. That assurance is what will keep you grounded when quitting is an option. Are you willing to sit with yourself before putting that business idea to the test? That confirmation will most likely come in a whisper. Lower the outside volume.

It's important to analyse as much as possible but don't overdo it. Analysis can lead to paralysis

5 JUST DO IT

Of course, you will need to crunch your numbers and do a business plan. And there are experts to help you with that (the hardware). But some power can only be unleashed when we start. It's important to analyse as much as possible but don't overdo it. Analysis can lead to paralysis. I remember after I had gone through the above internal steps, I launched out with what I had. I spoke to a few close friends who surprised me by giving me my first start-up capital. I couldn't guarantee when or if I would pay them back. What if my business attempt failed? I was freaked out. They were confident that I would succeed and return their investment. That was another sign that I had made the right decision. Thankfully I did. Lesson there: make friends before you need them. They could be your best investors. Folks, it is better to start and fail than fail to start. But in a calculated manner so you don't self-destruct.

I hope this helps you prepare the internal entrepreneur for the business world. Go forth, for the world awaits you. A word of caution, though. Remember not to be stuck in that business for the rest of your life. The comfort zone is good, but nothing grows there. Past success is the biggest threat to future success. This season too will end and you will be back here again stocktaking in preparation for the next season of life. 🌱



