



**Harvard Business  
School Online**

# **So You Want to Be an Entrepreneur: How to Get Started**

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The world is filled with aspiring entrepreneurs who believe they have what it takes to launch and scale a company. While anyone can start a business, not everyone will succeed.

In the online course [Entrepreneurship Essentials](#), Harvard Business School Professor William Sahlman notes that 70 percent of businesses survive for at least two years, roughly 50 percent last five years, and just 25 percent make it 15 years.

With these figures in mind, there are questions you need to consider if you're thinking about becoming an entrepreneur: Do you have what it takes to excel? How can you prepare for the challenges you'll inevitably face?

In this guide, you'll learn about what characterizes a successful entrepreneur, how to decide if entrepreneurship is right for you, what skills you need to thrive, and why you should consider taking an entrepreneurship or innovation course to broaden your business knowledge.





# Characteristics of Successful Entrepreneurs

*There's no single personality profile that describes every successful entrepreneur, but certain qualities are important when starting and leading a venture. Here are 11 characteristics shared by successful entrepreneurs.*

## 1. Curiosity

Successful entrepreneurs have a sense of curiosity that leads them to continuously seek new opportunities. Rather than settling for what they think they know, curious entrepreneurs ask challenging questions and explore different avenues.

In Entrepreneurship Essentials, entrepreneurship is described as a “process of discovery.” Without a drive to consistently ask questions and challenge the status quo, valuable discoveries can be overlooked.

## 2. Structured Experimentation

With curiosity comes the need for structured experimentation. As new opportunities arise, an entrepreneur must conduct market research and run tests to determine whether they’re worth pursuing.



### ENTREPRENEURIAL LESSON

#### Savor Surprises

In Entrepreneurship Essentials, Scott Cook, co-founder and chairman of software company Intuit, highlights the power of structured experimentation when guiding your new venture.

Cook explains that experimentation enabled his company to capitalize on an opportunity when it discovered many customers were using its Quicken software for business purposes instead of personal finance, for which it was originally intended.

“There’s a giant market of businesses who need the kind of thing we built, but we just never built it for business,” Cook says. “That’s why we run experiments and run them early: So we can get those surprises and see the things you only can see when you run an experiment to learn.”

### 3. Adaptability

Business is ever-changing. It's nearly impossible for entrepreneurs to be prepared for every scenario they encounter. They need to know how to evaluate situations and adapt so their business can keep moving forward when unexpected changes occur.

### 4. Decisiveness

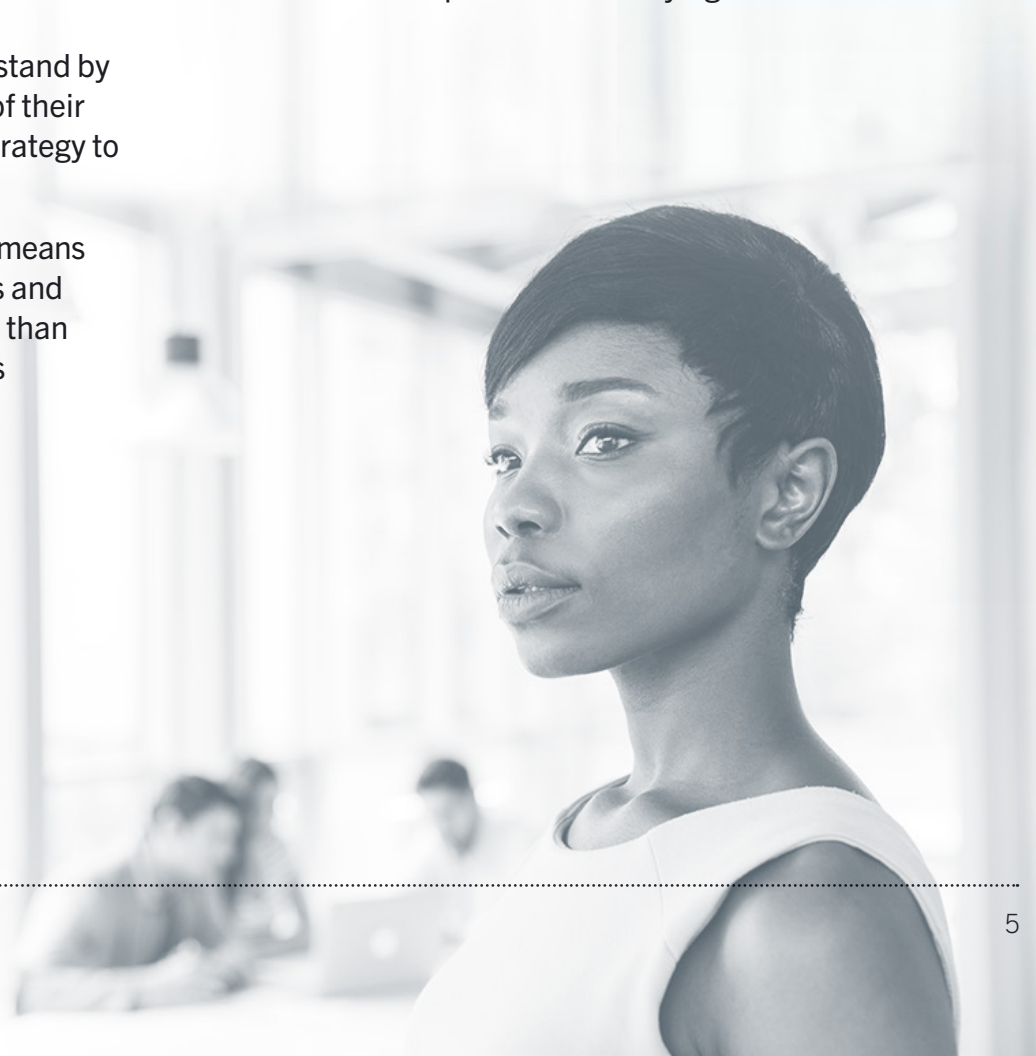
An entrepreneur has to make difficult decisions and stand by them. They're responsible for guiding the trajectory of their business, including every aspect from funding and strategy to resource allocation.

Being decisive doesn't mean having all the answers; it means having the confidence to make challenging decisions and see them through. If the outcome turns out to be less than favorable, deciding to take corrective action is just as important.

### 5. Confidence

Accomplished entrepreneurs exude confidence and are their business's biggest advocates.

Whether pitching to investors, communicating with clients, or making conversation at an event, the way they talk about their business and its potential can influence how others see it, too. Showing a lack of confidence can deter investors or lead customers to question their buying decisions.





## 6. Team Building

A great entrepreneur is aware of their strengths and weaknesses. Rather than allow shortcomings to 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 venture toward success.

## 7. Risk Tolerance

Many things can go wrong when launching a venture, but many things can also go right. The key, noted in *Entrepreneurship Essentials*, is for entrepreneurs to actively manage the relationship between risk and reward and position their companies to “benefit from the upside.”

Effective entrepreneurs are comfortable with encountering some level of risk to reap the rewards of their efforts, but they also take steps to minimize their chance of failure.



### ENTREPRENEURIAL LESSON

#### Challenge Yourself to Be Challenged

Jennifer Fonstad, founding partner of venture capital firm Aspect Ventures, encourages you to seek out diverse viewpoints when assembling your team.

“Those who embrace being challenged and different perspectives tend to be more successful and make better decisions over time,” Fonstad says in *Entrepreneurship Essentials*. “We encourage teams to think about how to bring in those different voices—whether it be through your employees and co-founders, your finance partners, or other board members.”

## 8. Comfort with Failure

A startup can fail for various reasons, such as a flawed business model or lack of focus. While many obstacles can be avoided, some are inevitable.

Successful entrepreneurs prepare themselves for, and are comfortable with, failure. Rather than let fear hold them back, they allow the possibility of success to propel them forward.

## 9. Persistence

While successful entrepreneurs are comfortable with the possibility of failure, it doesn't mean they give up easily. Rather, they see missteps as opportunities 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, continue to ask questions, and persist until they reach their goal.



*Now that you know what characterizes a successful entrepreneur, the question becomes: Are you ready to pursue entrepreneurship?*

*The next section can help determine your answer.*

## 10. Innovation

Many ascribe to the idea that innovation goes hand-in-hand with entrepreneurship. This is often true—some of the most successful startups have taken existing products or services and drastically improved them to meet changing market needs. Innovation is a characteristic some, but not all, entrepreneurs possess. Fortunately, it's one that can be cultivated.

## 11. Long-Term Focus

Most people think of entrepreneurship as the process of starting a business. While the early stages of launching a venture are critical to its success, the process doesn't end once it's operational. In *Entrepreneurship Essentials*, it's stated that "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 achieve long-term success.



# Deciding to Pursue Entrepreneurship

*Entrepreneurship comes with many perks, such as setting your own hours, work location flexibility, and the satisfaction of building something from the ground up. There are, however, some drawbacks.*

*Is starting a business the right choice for you? Consider the following questions before deciding.*



# 1. Is Now the Right Time to Start a Business?

Your idea may never take off if you try to start your business at an inopportune time. Are you currently in a position to pursue entrepreneurship? Consider your relationships, financial well-being, and physical health. For instance, if you recently welcomed a baby into your family, you may not have enough time and energy to dedicate to your business.

On the flip side, perhaps you've recently been laid off from your role in corporate finance. This turn of events could spark an ambition that can be poured into starting your new venture, backed by your professional experience.

Also, consider if the timing is right in the broader economy and the specific market you want to enter. You should ensure your offering meets a current need.



## BUSINESS INSIGHT

### Using the Jobs to Be Done Framework to Identify Customer Needs

An effective way to identify underserved customer needs is by using HBS Professor Clayton Christensen's **jobs to be done** framework, which centers on the idea that customers don't purchase products based solely on their attributes, but rather, "hire" products to do "jobs" they need to get done.

One example of a job to be done that Christensen presents in the online course [Disruptive Strategy](#) features a fast-food chain selling milkshakes. It was found that most of the chain's milkshakes were sold before 8:30 a.m., and customers typically didn't purchase any other items. Rather than looking at the customers' attributes to explain their buying behaviors, the chain focused on the job its milkshakes were being hired to do.

After interviewing several milkshake customers, the job became clear: They needed something to keep them full and occupied during their morning commutes and were hiring milkshakes to fulfill that purpose.

When evaluating market needs, try not to dwell on what products people want. Instead, focus on jobs that need to be done.

## 2. Do You Have a Business Idea, and Is That Idea an Opportunity?

When starting your business, you need to know what you plan to sell. If you haven't fleshed out those details yet, brainstorm using the following prompts:

- Why does it take so long to \_\_\_\_\_?
- Why does \_\_\_\_\_ cost so much?
- Can I deliver \_\_\_\_\_ with a new business model?
- What can I change about \_\_\_\_\_ to improve it?

Your idea doesn't need to be a new invention—it simply needs to fill an unmet need. If you have an idea for an original product, that's great, but an improvement to an existing product's cost, production, functionality, or accessibility can go a long way.

You should also determine whether your business idea is a viable opportunity. In *Entrepreneurship Essentials*, opportunity is defined 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.”

To find out if your idea is an opportunity, first come up with a hypothesis. Next, test your hypothesis by conducting market research. Sahlman recommends reaching out to strangers from your target market segment, rather than friends, family, and colleagues, who may sing false praises. The feedback you receive can inform if your hypothesis was correct or whether you need to test other ideas.



### BUSINESS INSIGHT

#### Validating Your Idea by Assessing Market Size and Share

Before moving forward with your venture, estimate the size of your target market and the share of it you could potentially capture.

In *Entrepreneurship Essentials*, Sahlman uses mattress retailer Casper to illustrate this idea. In 2014, Casper's founders assessed the market size for their product by comparing its differentiating factors against the larger market. For Casper, these differentiating factors included its online business model, 100-day return window, and the viscoelastic foam material used in its mattresses.

Based on statistics for the mattress market at the time, Casper's founders narrowed down which segments they should target and determined they could own a few percentage points of the total mattress market share.

Do this exercise for your target market to determine where your product fits and how much of it your business could own.

### **3. Are You Prepared to Pivot and Adapt?**

Entrepreneurship is an iterative process. If you know that absorbing new information and pivoting when ideas fall flat aren't your strengths, develop those abilities before becoming an entrepreneur.

Say you produce pull-up bars, and 75 percent of the people you interview aren't willing to pay \$80 for your product. Given this information, you need to adapt.

You test further hypotheses and discover the majority of your target segment is willing to pay the original \$80 if the equipment is both high-quality and easy to install. This leads you to develop a new prototype, reassess manufacturing costs, and conduct another round of testing.

Your ability to frequently adapt—especially in the early stages of your business—is essential.

### **4. Do You Have a Strong Team, or the Ability to Form One?**

No successful entrepreneur got to where they are by themselves.

“All great companies, even those with iconic entrepreneurs, had many other people who were involved and, without whom, the company might not have made it so big,” Sahlman says.

In *Entrepreneurship Essentials*, Apple is used to illustrate the power a team can have when growing a business. Co-founder Steve Wozniak was the mind behind the company's early products and, shortly after its incorporation, Mike Markkula and Mike Scott joined as seasoned executives who proved themselves essential to the company's growth. Co-founder Steve Jobs, who had previously been forced out of the company, returned when it was on the verge of failure and revitalized its products. Without each of them, and countless others, Apple wouldn't be where it is today.

Keep in mind that successful business owners know when to ask for help and delegate tasks. Whether that means starting your business with a partner or two, building a strong team as you grow, or simply accepting any help and advice you can, know that your potential success relies on the strength of the people around you.



## ENTREPRENEURIAL LESSON

### **Hire Builders, Not Joiners**

Abe Ankumah, co-founder and CEO of information technology firm Nyansa, highlights the importance of a builder mentality when assembling your startup team.

In *Entrepreneurship Essentials*, Ankumah explains that you need to look for a certain type of personality: those who roll up their sleeves ready to build, versus those who want to join an established company.

“You want to find people who want to build the next Google to make it Google, versus people who want to join Google because it’s already Google,” he says.

## **5. Do You Have Access to Funding?**

To launch your business, you’ll need funding to purchase equipment and materials, develop your product or service, iterate on your offerings, and refine your processes. Exactly what funding will look like depends on the type of business you’re launching and your industry. Your options include:

- Self-funding
- Securing an SBA loan from the Small Business Administration
- Raising capital from investors
- Applying for grants (this may be especially suitable for nonprofit organizations)
- Crowdfunding from the public
- Relying on a line of credit

Every form of funding comes with benefits and risks. Self-funding, for example, allows you to retain complete control over your business and potential profits but requires you to carry the risk of failure.

Raising capital from investors, on the other hand, allows you to spread your risk and, potentially, launch your business quicker—but it forces you to give up a portion of your control. Ultimately, you must decide what makes the most sense for your business.

## 6. Are You Prepared for the Possibility of Failure?

Entrepreneurs must be prepared for the possibility of failure when starting a business.

“Though every entrepreneur imagines success, they must act with the full knowledge that the odds are against them,” Sahlman says in *Entrepreneurship Essentials*.

The very real possibility that your business may not survive is something you need to come to terms with before pursuing entrepreneurship, and you should have a plan for that scenario.

## 7. Why Do You Want to Start a Business?

As you consider becoming an entrepreneur, continually return to the most basic question: Why?

While only you can answer that, understanding the relationship between risk and reward can help illuminate your motivations. Ask yourself what you hope to gain from starting a business, and list the risks you anticipate. If the pull of potential rewards outweighs your fear of risks, it's a good sign you're ready to be an entrepreneur.



“Successful entrepreneurs are real people and not superhuman. They pursued their passion, followed the principles, and continued pushing forward despite the challenges they encountered. It was something I could relate to, and it helped me understand and know that fear can be good because it fuels your passion to keep moving forward.”

**Anita Umoh**  
Entrepreneurship Essentials  
Participant



## BUSINESS INSIGHT

### How an Entrepreneurial Mindset Can Benefit You

If now isn't the ideal time to launch your own venture, there are still benefits you can reap from cultivating an entrepreneurial mindset.

At any organization, conscious effort is required to fight off stagnation. As markets shift and customer needs change, an entrepreneurial mindset can help you assess customers' jobs to be done and develop ways to fulfill them—either by creating new products or adapting your current offerings.

Understanding entrepreneurship and innovation theories can also enable you to craft informed strategies for your organization.

For instance, the theory of **disruptive innovation**, another concept coined by Christensen and discussed in *Disruptive Strategy*, is the process by which a smaller company—usually with fewer resources—moves upmarket and challenges larger, established businesses.

By mastering theories like this one, you can help your organization strategize how to disrupt incumbent companies or prepare for emerging competitors.



*Asking yourself the questions in this section can shed light on whether you want to start a business. If you've decided that you're ready to become an entrepreneur, there are certain skills you need to start your journey on the right path. Those are covered next.*





# Skills You Need to Be an Innovative Entrepreneur

*Unlike personality traits and demographic details, entrepreneurship and innovation skills can be learned and practiced. As you embark on your entrepreneurial journey, focus your efforts on developing these seven essential skills.*

# 1. Basic Financial Skills

Financial skills, such as budgeting and financial statement analysis, are necessary for running a business. Creating a reasonable budget and sticking to it can be the difference between your venture's success and failure. By learning this skill, you can avoid overspending and appropriately allocate your company's resources.

It's also imperative to know how to read and prepare financial statements. Aside from being required for reporting and tax purposes, these documents help you track performance, make future projections, and manage expenses. They can also be useful to investors and banks considering funding your startup because they show your business's financial progress.



## BUSINESS INSIGHT

### Types of Financial Statements

Companies produce several financial statements, each of which is tailored to the needs of a particular audience. The most common types of financial statements include:

- The **balance sheet**, which communicates the “book value” of a company and offers a quick snapshot of how it's performing. It's a simple accounting of all of its assets, liabilities, and owners' equity.
- The **income statement**, which conveys how much money a company has earned over a period.
- The **cash flow statement**, which details how a company receives and spends its cash.
- The **statement of owners' equity**, which details changes in the equity held by shareholders, whether they're public or private investors.

These documents help entrepreneurs track performance, make future projections, and manage expenses. They can also be useful to investors because they show a business's financial progress.

## 2. Networking

Your network is one of your greatest assets. Networking can enable you to not only meet like-minded professionals but build your future team and keep a finger on the pulse of your industry. Your professional network can consist of:

- Co-workers
- Alumni from educational institutions
- Professors and teachers
- Industry leaders and speakers
- Clients
- Friends and family members
- Business professionals in your geographic area
- Others in your industry with similar interests, responsibilities, and goals

Identify and reach out to people who can guide you in your entrepreneurial journey and inform your decision-making. Ask them about their business, how long they've been in their industry, and lessons they've learned from successes and failures. Perhaps they've started several companies and can offer valuable advice about raising funds, developing products, and building a client base. They may even be able to connect you to professionals in their networks whose work aligns with yours.

In addition to leveraging your network, expand it. You can do so by signing up for networking events or using LinkedIn to find professionals with whom you have shared connections, similar interests, and job titles.



### 3. The Ability to Accept and Act on Feedback

To succeed as an entrepreneur, you need to be eager to receive and act on feedback. This skill requires you to stay humble and accept that your idea of the perfect version of your product may not resonate with potential customers.

One way to gather feedback is by conducting interviews with potential customers from your target market segment. These interviews can validate your business idea and provide constructive criticism regarding your product, proposed business model, or assumptions you've made about users.

You may also receive feedback from investors, more experienced entrepreneurs, and friends and family. Some of it may be unsolicited. You're not required to implement all of their advice, but it's beneficial to consider it. Would their suggestion increase the quality, value, or user experience of your product? If the answer is yes, take steps to make those improvements.



#### ENTREPRENEURIAL LESSON

##### Don't Fool Yourself

John Osher, a serial entrepreneur behind the SpinBrush toothbrush and other successful consumer products, asserts that the most important thing you can do is find and listen to the truth, no matter how hard it may be.

In *Entrepreneurship Essentials*, he points out that willful blindness to customers' negative feedback can lead to costly mistakes.

"If an entrepreneur puts truth first, they'll always find a way to solve the problem," Osher says. "Putting your personal feelings and passion for the product ahead of the truth is a recipe for failure."

## 4. Pattern Recognition

Pattern recognition—in data, market trends, and user behavior—is an often overlooked skill for entrepreneurs. Identifying patterns in cash flow statements, for example, can enable you to make predictions about future cash flows. When observing market sales data, you can identify seasonality or other time-related trends that inform your long-term goals.

When observing how users interact with your product, pay attention to how they react to specific elements and what questions arise during use. Patterns will begin emerging.

If your product is an app, perhaps you notice a pattern among teenage male users who download it and immediately open the chat function. You can use this kind of user behavior trend to learn more about your customers' motivations and improve your product to fit their needs better.



### ENTREPRENEURIAL LESSON

#### Testing Your Product or Service

Testing your product with real users can prove invaluable when assessing market validity, and there are two types you should know: alpha and beta testing.

- **Alpha testing** is when internal employees test a product in a staged setting. The purpose of alpha testing is to eliminate any bugs, issues, or idiosyncrasies in the product before it's available to outside users.
- **Beta testing** is when a product is tested by a limited group of real, external users who are specifically told to identify problems. In the case of a software or app, beta testing might be open to the public with a notice letting users know the version they're testing is unfinished.

If there's a need in the market, but your product is faulty, complex, or difficult to use, customers may opt for a competitor's offering. The feedback you get from beta testers can help you leverage and meet customer needs.



## 5. Strategic Thinking

Strategic thinking encompasses any skills that enable you to use critical thinking to solve complex problems and plan for the future. These skills are essential to accomplish business objectives, overcome obstacles, and address challenges—particularly if they’re projected to take weeks, months, or even years to achieve. Strategic thinking skills include:

- **Analytical skills:** To ideate a strategy that helps your organization reach its objectives, you must be capable of analyzing a variety of inputs—from financial statements and KPIs, to market conditions, emerging business trends, and internal resource allocation.
- **Communication skills:** Putting a strategy into place for your company, regardless of its size, requires solid communication skills. The ability to communicate complex ideas, collaborate with internal and external stakeholders, build consensus, and ensure everyone is aligned and working toward shared goals are all central to strategic thinking.
- **Problem-solving skills:** Strategic planning is often used to solve problems or address challenges, such as missed financial targets, inefficient workflows, or an emerging competitor. Implementing a strategy that addresses the central challenge you face requires you to first understand its scope and potential solutions. From there, you can craft a strategy that solves it.
- **Planning and management skills:** Strategy isn’t just about thinking of a solution—it involves implementation, too. Once data has been analyzed, the problem is understood, and a solution has been identified, you need strong planning and management skills to bring everything together.

The advantage of having a strategic mindset is learning how to think rather than what to think. Although you might not always have the right answers, strategic thinking skills can enable you to spot new opportunities, address emerging challenges, and plan for success.



“Within five days of finishing the course, I had a plan of action for a major part of our business and presented it to our corporate executive. It applied the jobs to be done theory and caused us to rethink our strategy to get the customer to ‘hire’ us over the competition.”

**Robbee Minicola**  
Disruptive Strategy Participant



## 6. Negotiation

Building a company requires engaging in negotiation with potential investors, early employees, and prospective partners. As you work to get your business off the ground, it's vital to know how to create value and overcome differences to form lasting partnerships.

In the online course [Negotiation Mastery](#), the entrepreneurs behind Unshrinkit, a product that unshrinks wool garments, recount how they used negotiation skills to close a deal with their supplier Sourcentra. After reaching an oral agreement, Sourcentra sent Unshrinkit a written contract with modified terms because its CEO felt his company was assuming too much risk.

Instead of taking a contentious approach and bargaining over contractual obligations, Unshrinkit's founders focused on the CEO's motivations to salvage the deal. They emphasized how the partnership would allow them to grow their company, which spoke to the CEO's entrepreneurial background and desire to help small business owners. By appealing to the CEO's emotions, the team was able to convince him to proceed with the partnership and reach a favorable agreement.

This example provides a key takeaway: In addition to pursuing your own objectives, you need to consider the other side's perspective at the bargaining table. Doing so can enable you to maximize value in your negotiations and forge lasting relationships.



### BUSINESS INSIGHT

#### How to Create Value in a Negotiation

##### 1. Build Trust

Trust is a foundational component of any effective negotiation strategy. Deal-making comes with an inherent level of risk, making it vital to build a rapport with the other party.

##### 2. Find Uncommon Ground

Value creation requires focusing on areas where you and the other party have different interests and perceptions, rather than commonalities.

"It's not a matter necessarily of finding things you agree on but things that you disagree about," says HBS Professor Mike Wheeler, who teaches Negotiation Mastery, in an [HBS Online video](#). "That could be the value of something. You might treasure something you own, but somebody else is just nuts about it. You ought to be able to make a swap there."

##### 3. Be Agile

Being a successful negotiator involves knowing how to think on your feet and be agile.

"That means flexing yourself so that you deploy different skills depending on the situation and whom you're dealing with," Wheeler says in an article for the [Business Insights blog](#).

## 7. A Growth Mindset

A growth mindset views intelligence, abilities, and talents as learnable and capable of improvement, as opposed to a fixed mindset, which views those same traits as inherently stable and unchangeable over time.

Your skills aren't static—they're the result of your effort, practice, and persistence. By maintaining a growth mindset, you can avoid taking your skills for granted and capitalize on opportunities to grow and improve throughout your career.



“While I had a deep business background, I wasn’t well versed in several important aspects of entrepreneurship, like investment structure, fundraising, and valuation. Entrepreneurship Essentials covered these topics well, and I was surprised at some of the additional takeaways I had.”

**Maggie Robb**

Entrepreneurship Essentials  
Participant



*While there are many ways to acquire and hone these skills, one of the most effective means of doing so is by taking an entrepreneurship or innovation course. In the next section, you'll learn about factors to keep in mind when exploring your options.*



# How to Find the Right Entrepreneurship or Innovation Course for You

*Furthering your education is an investment in yourself and your business, so it's critical to find a course that fits your needs. Here are five questions to consider when making your selection.*

## 1. Where Am I in My Career?

Have you decided you've got what it takes to be an entrepreneur but haven't thought of your business idea yet? Maybe you have a validated idea but aren't sure how to make it a reality. Determining where you are in your entrepreneurial journey can help you decide what type of course to take.

Entrepreneurship and innovation courses can be:

- Broad introductions to the startup world
- Deep dives on specific skills, such as financing a business or market validation
- Hands-on workshops that prompt learners to apply entrepreneurial concepts and techniques to real-world situations

Depending on the knowledge and experience you bring to the table, one of these course types may be a better fit than the others.

## 2. What Format and Schedule Do I Need?

Your time is a valuable and often scarce resource. Whatever course you choose needs to work for your schedule.

Many professionals opt for online courses because of the flexible timing and ability to take them from anywhere. Consider your current schedule, and block out the time you can dedicate to your learning.

Whether you're working around children's schedules, client meetings, or simply need to give yourself time to sleep at night, catering your education to your needs can help you stay dedicated.



"I wanted to understand the emerging technology space and how it's changing the world of business; particularly, how it's changing the consumer space in which I operate."

**David Lanre Messan**  
Disruptive Strategy Participant

### 3. What Is the Background of the Course Instructor?

When researching courses, look into the instructor's background. Did they start a business you admire? Perhaps they founded several failed companies before finding success or worked in a different field before teaching.

Ensure the instructor has a background that inspires you and evokes questions. What might they have learned during their entrepreneurial journey that could impact you?

For instance, Professor Sahlman has been a director, advisor, and investor at over 200 companies, venture capital funds, and nonprofits. The experiences he's had in business inform the content he presents in Entrepreneurship Essentials.

### 4. Will I Learn Concepts Through Case Studies?

Another factor to consider when selecting a course is whether the curriculum contains case studies. By reading about and hearing from other entrepreneurs, you can apply the advice of those who've been in your position and learned along the way.



"We are so fortunate to learn directly from the companies themselves. This way of presenting the material makes the concepts resonate so much more, and then they can be easily applied and layered into the specifics of what we're experiencing in our daily lives out in the working world."

**Paige Peterson**  
Disruptive Strategy Participant

## 5. Does the Course Offer Networking Opportunities?

Try to find a course that enables you to grow your professional network and foster lasting relationships with like-minded peers.

If the course is taught in person, networking may happen naturally before or after class. But if you're considering an online course, look for programs with a networking component built in, like [HBS Online's Community](#).



"I became the owner of my own company in a foreign country, and the few negotiating experiences I had were in the United States. I signed up for Negotiation Mastery to practice negotiation with people from all different backgrounds, learn new techniques, and gain confidence for my 'high-stakes' negotiations with people of different cultures."

**Sara Simon Pioger**  
Negotiation Mastery  
Participant



*With these questions in mind, you can find a course that meets you where you are in your career, fits your lifestyle, provides meaningful wisdom from instructors and case studies, and helps you expand your network.*

*No matter what type of course you decide to take, broadening your knowledge is an investment in yourself and your business's future.*



# Beginning Your Entrepreneurial Journey

Countless aspiring entrepreneurs have an innovative and compelling business idea but don't have the skills or qualities to carry it to fruition. Others have entrepreneurial skills and qualities but lack an idea to pursue. Even those with a brilliant idea and robust skill set can fail to get their project off the ground if they don't have access to funding. Successful entrepreneurship requires all of these components.

The good news is: Successful entrepreneurs aren't born—they're made. With the right training and development, you can make it as an entrepreneur. As you determine the next step in your career, consider how HBS Online's entrepreneurship and innovation courses can benefit you, which include:

## **Disruptive Strategy**

This course can equip you with the skills and techniques to develop executive-level strategy, organize for innovation, and discover customer jobs to be done.



## **Entrepreneurship Essentials**

This course can enable you to turn an idea into a viable venture through learning how entrepreneurs validate concepts with structured experiments, refine their business strategy, and raise the capital necessary to create value and grow their business.

## **Negotiation Mastery**

This course can help you learn how to close deals that might otherwise be deadlocked, maximize value in the agreements you reach, and resolve differences before they escalate into costly conflicts.



By broadening your business knowledge through real-world, case-based learning, you can ensure you're prepared for any entrepreneurial challenges that come your way.

To learn more about what **HBS Online**  
can do for you, visit **[online.hbs.edu](https://online.hbs.edu)**.



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