

Community Futures has achieved a major milestone, celebrating 30 years of service to entrepreneurs and communities across BC. As part of our 30-year celebration, we are publishing *The Future of Entrepreneurship Series*. Written by business leaders, this series of forward thinking articles will provide insights and opinions in regards to a number of key challenges and opportunities facing entrepreneurs in the future.

---

## Entrepreneurs' Perspective

### Overcoming Doubt and Difficulties

by Jeff Dawson

---

Thirty-seven years ago Alison Ludditt and Karen Miller were sitting together spending another wonderful day in kindergarten without a care in the world. Their biggest decision back then was deciding which crayons to colour with and which snack to nibble on first.

Today they remain best friends and share the vast majority of their working lives with each other as co-owners of Vernon's most inspiring home decor and furniture store, The Room Collection.

These two energetic entrepreneurs never dreamed in kindergarten that they would one day be successful business partners. But in the cozy confines of their bright downtown retail store, it's difficult to imagine them doing anything else with their lives.

Like 99% of their business brethren, their path to success hasn't always been smooth or easy; there's been considerable difficulties and even doubt along the way. 'When we moved from "you don't know what you don't know" to the terrifying "you know what you don't know" we doubted', says Alison. 'Every March when the numbers are low we doubt and at the end of a string of shipments of damaged goods and customer disappointments we doubt too.'

Karen is quick to smile and jump in to add that having moments of doubt in business isn't a license to give up; rather it's a real life incentive to persevere. 'When you doubt yourself as a

business person, put all your passion into building your rapport with your customers. Then work on knowing---and believing---in your product and service. Once you've done that you can tell "doubt" to sit down and be quiet.'

The wonderful sense of humour these small town home decor gurus share would resonate well with David Fenn at Squamish's Howe Sound Brewing company. The affable 55-year-old Fenn is the first to acknowledge that without a sense of humour he would have long since walked away and tried something else. But in the end, he persevered. 'When we began to doubt if this would ever fly, we took a step away and looked at the big picture and started to do small things to get there because the danger if it is not working out is to continue to repeat the past mistakes without having a bigger vision for future growth and profitability.'

Up in B.C.'s pristine northwest corner of the province, Jessica Laberge owns and operates Pacific Paramedics in Prince Rupert. Laberge's firm develops emergency response plans for companies while also developing specific programs that focus on marine safety.

She isn't shy about admitting that doubt has also visited with her on more than a few occasions since she put up her entrepreneurial shingle. 'Sure there have been moments of doubt, but doubt is an opportunity to make another choice' she insists---ironically without much doubt at all

---

in her voice as she says it. 'Doubt reminds you to recommit to the vision of the business and adapt if need be as well.'

So what is it that makes some entrepreneurs persevere when many others walk away and find another way to earn a living? Megan Lussier is the Business Analyst at the Community Futures office in Squamish and she believes that such a complex question has a pretty simple answer. 'I think it often comes down to fight or flight' she confides. 'Some of us are wired to run to safety at the first sign of difficulty while others take great pride in persevering and sticking with it until they can find a way to fix it and make it work.'

Talking with and listening to successful entrepreneurs is a fascinating endeavour. Often times you learn things that you would never find in any text book. More than 20 years after launching his brewery, Dave Fenn still talks about something that happened in their early days that he says many would-be entrepreneurs would never think of doing. 'The biggest under-utilized resource is other businesses in the same industry. Go talk to them. You'll be surprised how many industry advocates exist out there that will share information with you. The late Michael Williams from Swans Brewery in Victoria gave us access to his accountant and all his financials since opening his business! He wanted our business to be successful because it would be good for the industry.'

Alison and Karen at the Room Collection are firm believers that a reality pill is an under-rated commodity that many small business people should rely on more often when customers invariably are disappointed or upset. Their advice is pretty simple---and they maintain it is highly effective too. 'Occasionally, customers will be unhappy. You will make mistakes. And now and then, customers will misunderstand the best intentions, or hear what they want to hear. You will feel very ill over this for the first few times. Try to quickly teach yourselves that it is business, it is not personal. Do all that you can, in the most professional way to remedy the situation. And then let it go. And breathe.'

In a world where the 500+ channel cable universe, a 24/7 news cycle and the recent

explosion in social media has given virtually everyone a platform to dispense their wisdom and opinion on any subject that you can imagine, it is refreshing to see that today some of the best practices for small business success involve invoking a splash of common sense combined with a diligent work ethic---the same sort of advice that many of us were taught in kindergarten many years ago.

---

(Thanks to Jeff Dawson, General Manager Community Futures Howe Sound who conducted the interviews and wrote this article. Please note that the second part of our feature with these successful Community Futures entrepreneurs will focus on innovation) Community Futures is a non-profit community business financing organization created to support small and medium sized enterprises throughout rural BC, paving the way for diversified local economies and job creation. [Learn more](http://goo.gl/o5BAjl) (<http://goo.gl/o5BAjl>)

