



“Don’t underestimate the personal development that happens very quickly during the establishment.”

Karin Schnappauf

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self-employed advisor for positioning and online marketing, pre-
founding coach**

1. How did you get the idea to start your own business?

That’s a long story, I originally come from the pedagogical field. I studied social education, because I was very interested in the different subjects from politics, psychology to medicine over law to sociology and back. But the jobs that you can normally work in with this qualification were not really my objectives. For this I always tried to get somewhere where I develop my skills constantly. So I established a consulting and placement service for families for Audi in Ingolstadt and after that I was the federal states manageress of a youth organization. In both jobs I worked with voluntary bosses and was used to organize myself (and my colleagues) and to do most of the public relations stuff. After that I needed a pause from working for social organizations and was reflecting on “What skills do I have?” and “What do I like to do and for whom?”. I realised that it would be very difficult to find a salaried employment, so I decided to become self-employed and to work for people which I really want to support.

2. What was the first step to reach that goal?

The VHS offered a special entrepreneur day for women. There I went first and met Regina Stosch who took me under her wings. Without her support I wouldn’t have the courage to start my own business in 2005. To work with her was definitely a good idea, because you underestimate how much work it takes to establish your own business and how you need to grow. It’s about work itself and formalities but also the question of “How well-engineered does the idea have to be until I can actually start with it?” when it comes to the product and the service as well as the marketing.

3. Was it difficult to get the attention for your own business and reach out to people?

Yes, it was. Especially because I was not keen on taking centre stage. Also, I first chose a target group that is difficult to motivate to invest money to improve their business.

4. Are you planning to expand your business?

What do you mean by expand? To take the world domination or dethrone Google? Not the world domination nor 3 employees but something that I always think about is to develop myself and the business and to ask myself if I still want to work the way I worked three years ago or how I can improve my impact. So in the last years I took a different way: I’m working part-time as an employee in Berlin where I can work with a different impact in comparison to being a single-entrepreneur and on top get inspiration for my work as a founder coach. First I was responsible for the whole communication in the nationwide project “Equal Pay day” and now I am responsible for a project which is focusing on values and mindsets for leadership and corporate culture. Topics like “How do companies have to develop themselves to shape their future?”, “How do the companies have to develop their management and their employees?” are some I’m working on. For example, I was supporting a book published in July with the topic “How to form management and business culture sustainably.” I think it’s really exciting to work in a company with creative ideas and much experience which are both needed nowadays. In one sense it’s an expansion to my work as a founder coach, as I

often work with people who quitted their jobs because the corporate culture was so bad. In another sense, my pedagogic basis is not bad for supporting managers to develop themselves and lead their teams in a more self-organized way.

5. What was your motivation to become an entrepreneur?

Actually to work with my strengths for people who offer valuable services. So, in the beginning I worked a lot for people in health care who had problems with self-marketing. I started with PR and marketing topics and grew into launching consulting. Guided by my founder coach who wanted to hand over her customers to me, I learned a lot of things, especially how to write a business plan that convinced even a banker, which was really kind of funny.

6. Did anyone inspire you? If so, who?

A difficult question. I'd say Prof. Faltin from the FU Berlin. His perspective on entrepreneurship strengthens my approach to support founders in a different way than many other consultants.

7. Do you have any advice for students who want to establish their own business?

Yes: Don't underestimate the personal development that happens very quickly during the process. I remember a woman who founded Triaz, a publishing house focused on travel literature. She said: "If you want to find out what challenges you, become self-employed and you will find out." So that's what it's really good for.

There are three important parameters which you should consider: 1. "Is the product or business ready for the market?", 2. "When is the right time for me?", 3. "Should I start working full-time or part-time?". I think both opportunities have their advantages. If you get a founding grant you have the opportunity to work on the topic full-time, so of course more intensely. As a student, you should ask yourself if it's better to first get more experience while you're employed and then to either found your business alone or with a partner. Always be aware of your point of view and think about the following aspects carefully: Which task will I do myself and which part will I delegate? This is important to plan a budget which is down to earth.

It's also important to get advice not only from people working at institutions but from people who are actually self-employed. I highly recommend the program "Vorgründungscoaching Bayern" for that. Another important aspect is to pay attention to approaches like Design thinking and to also attend events outside of Regensburg, for example Service Design Drinks in Nuremberg. While developing your idea don't just think about your local area. Networking is also important – from the very beginning and not just when you realize you really would need a good network immediately.

8. Do you think it makes a difference to be a female entrepreneur instead of a male?

That's hard to answer without getting into stereotypes. In the past the following stereotypes were quite common: Men write the business plan, get an Audi A6 and see how it goes after that. Women think about if they spend 100 euros on this or 50 euros on that. So, it's really stereotypical and I guess that's changing nowadays. I wrote my offers especially for women who made men come to me and ask "Would you advise men as well?". But those are actually the "men 2.0" who are used to self-reflection, can admit their insecurities and put emphasis on balancing work and family life. Statistically women tend to have more problems getting financial support and they are in general more cautious and more successful in the long run. I know many women who built their own business because they didn't want to work in their former company anymore. That's something which seems not to happen with men that much.

9. What do you like most about being an entrepreneur?

Having the freedom to work where and when I want. There are always many things to do so I can decide to which task my daily condition fits best. I need time for my family, I can quickly adapt my daily schedule. Being able to decide if I still want to do things I did ten years ago and if not to change that.

10. Name three words that describe you the best.

Curiosity, the capacity to think out of the box and being able to support others to find their way.

11. Do you have characteristics that make it hard to be an entrepreneur?

Stubbornness! One example: I love social media, especially Twitter and LinkedIn, but I don't like Facebook even though I think my target group is still there. I have to supervise our BPW page and my employer's profile and I don't like it, because I dislike the business practices of Facebook and the nature of discourse on this platform.

12. What kind of characteristics do you need as an entrepreneur?

Resilience, not getting frustrated easily, the willingness and ability to develop further and to be aware of what you want to do and what you can do. Especially being able to empathize with your clients, their needs and problems. Realise what you can offer and how to communicate this in a way they can get the essence. Definitely optimism and self-reflection is important too.

13. What does success mean to you?

To have the courage to start something new or to improve your skills. To connect different ideas and observations to a meaningful concept. What I find very fascinating is to observe the development of a founder from our first talk to the end of our collaboration. Watching people grow, going through the ups and downs and support them all the way is what I like. Or to see that my customers reached another level and get different assignments in comparison to their previous work.

14. Which one is your favourite social media tool?

Twitter definitely. It's great to learn, to get connected and to monitor events. Instagram is cool but belongs to Facebook and as someone who works a lot with language, my problem is to produce good visual content. But I'm improving through practising.

15. How would you describe your products and benefits for your clients?

What makes me special: When I decide to work with someone, I'm one hundred percent supportive which includes asking uncomfortable questions that are very helpful to develop the business idea – in a way the person can deal with. For this, we need a basis of trust and understanding. I don't have a standard way to work with people, because I'm looking at the individual – strengths and experiences and the steps the person took already. I'm very good at helping people to get out of their comfort zone in a gentle way, so they can grow and find their own way to success.

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