

Creating and Building Your Physical Therapy Practice



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Hello, Confidence Boost: Redefining “Entrepreneur” to Change the PT Business Landscape

Talk to any business owner about his or her journey, and you’ll likely hear a tale of challenges met, lessons learned, and obstacles conquered on the path to success. As a woman in business—specifically healthcare IT—I not only learned many lessons and enjoyed some great successes, but also encountered hurdles my male counterparts didn’t. That first hurdle, though, could have nothing—or everything—to do with gender: I didn’t really consider myself an entrepreneur. And as a private practice PT, you might not either, but maybe you should. Here’s why.

For me, the word “entrepreneur” always conjured up images of Silicon Valley, massive upfront funding, and hurtling straight toward IPO with tunnel-vision focus. I thought “entrepreneur” was synonymous with Mark Zuckerberg (Facebook), Jeff Bezos (Amazon), Tony Hsieh (Zappos), or Larry Benz (PT development). Essentially, I thought entrepreneurship meant global success, heavy-hitting technology, and one person (ahem: a dude) at the helm.

On the flipside, I also often encountered people who defined themselves as “entrepreneurs” despite having no business—or even a business plan. They were simply toying with a “next best thing” kind of idea. I would look at some of these folks and think, “Entrepreneur? Pshh, you’re unemployed, plain and simple.” These people give the term “entrepreneur” a bad rep, and unfortunately, they distorted my definition of the word even further.

I’ve served as the founder and COO of my business for eight years now. And in that time, I’ve revised my original definition of “entrepreneur” to something I feel is more realistic: someone who identifies a problem and develops an innovative solution to fix it. Let me attach a caveat to that: you can’t simply reinvent the wheel and label yourself an entrepreneur. Rather,

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you must recognize an as-yet unidentified market of people experiencing the problem your solution addresses—and then you have to sell it to them. Essentially, a true entrepreneur sees a problem through a different lens, creates a solution people are willing to buy, *and then* builds a business out of it. (Sounds familiar to what we as physical therapists do every day, eh?)

It's not just about the Facebooks or the Instagrams (or even reaching IPO status). It's about *all* businesses—from the independent private practice clinics with one owner/operator (like so many of WebPT's members) to the Amazons. Entrepreneurs define their goals and work their butts off to achieve them. Of course, success is relative. If you're making a nice profit and not looking to massively expand—but you're happy—then you're doing it right, for you. And even owners of these so-called "lifestyle businesses" should call themselves entrepreneurs. On the other end of the spectrum, perhaps you've dipped your toe into the pool of entrepreneurship without success. Well, even if you failed miserably in your first entrepreneurial endeavor, as long as you tried, learned from your failure, and are willing to take the risk again, then you have entrepreneurial spirit. As I've learned, there's no single "right" way to be an entrepreneur. Whether you have the guts to strike out on your own—or you and your partner, group of friends, or family have a great problem-solving idea and want to go in together—you absolutely can call yourself an entrepreneur. At the end of the day, it doesn't matter if your goal is to build a family business or an IPO-ready empire; having a specific end-goal for your business is the key to achieving whatever success means to you.

But while entrepreneurs may come in all shapes and sizes, it's important to note that a good idea alone doesn't necessarily earn you a spot in the entrepreneur club. To truly fit that bill, you must be wildly passionate about your idea. More than that, you must be willing to take the necessary risk to see that idea through. To be honest, I'm not typically a risk-taker. However, with WebPT, I took the risk because I was that passionate, that confident, that dedicated to this solution, and fortunately, our customers loved what we brought to the industry, too. So in the end, my risk-taking was absolutely worth it.

Under this definition, I am—without a doubt—an entrepreneur. And that means something—because with this new understanding, I have a different, revitalized sense of self. So why am I writing a revised dictionary entry here? Because I believe everyone—but especially women—should reconsider their personal definitions of business and entrepreneurship. Don't think you have what it takes to be an entrepreneur? You might already be one. (Hello,

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confidence boost!) So get out there and represent or support women entrepreneurs, because it's not always easy to be a woman in a jungle of Zuckerbergs, Bezos, Hsiehs, or Benzes. From a more personal perspective, it's certainly not easy opening your own private practice in a field overwhelmingly dominated by men. Whether it's navigating the labyrinth of small business ownership or the marsh of tech startups, no woman should endeavor alone. In fact, it shouldn't be so disproportionate. It's about time the entrepreneurial jungle included the other half of the population.