

Insights from Anything You Want by Derek Sivers

"Making a company is a great way to improve the world while improving yourself. When you make a company, you make a utopia. It's where you design your perfect world." – Derek Sivers

How to Start a Business

S1

Solve your own problem

In 1997, Derek wanted to sell his CD without having to land a huge record deal. PayPal hadn't been invented yet, so he had to set up his own online credit card merchant store with a 'BUY NOW' button in order to sell his CD. He formed partnerships with existing merchants and taught himself how to program. After months of work, he had a 'BUY NOW' button on his site and people could buy his CD.

S2

Share your solution

"When I told my musician friends about my BUY NOW button, one friend asked, 'Could you sell my CD, too?' I thought about it for a minute and said, 'Sure. No problem.' I just did it as a favour." – Derek Sivers

People have the same problems you do. Find people with the problem you've just solved for yourself and show them your solution. If providing this solution to others starts taking up too much of your time and it brings in more money than your day job, then turn it into a full-time business.

S3

If it's not a hit, switch

Our solutions might not be the best solution for others. Derek urges us to keep improving and inventing ideas until we get a hit: *"Don't waste your time persistently doing what's not working."* When you discover a hit, the product or service will promote itself.

How to Grow a Business

G1

Focus on a utopian customer experience (from the customers point of view)

Derek wrote down his utopian-dream-come-true experience for his customer: *"In a perfect world, my distributor would: Pay me every week. Show me the full name and address of everyone who bought my CD. (Because those are my fans, not the distributor's.) Never kick me out for not selling enough. (Even if I sell only one CD every five years, it'll be there for someone to buy.)"* – Derek Sivers

G2

Inject moments of unexpected generosity

At CD Baby this meant answering the phone after two rings between 7am - 10pm, no matter what. When shop floor employees would take the time to talk about a customer's CD for 30 minutes, the customer would rave about their experience at CD Baby. *"It's counterintuitive, but the way to grow your business is to focus entirely on your existing customers. Just thrill them, and they'll tell everyone."* – Derek Sivers

G3

Delegate or Die...

When asked a question regarding an operational decision, complete the following steps:

1. Gather everyone together
2. Explain your philosophy (why you would do what you would do)
3. Ensure that everyone understands (simulate an example and ask questions)
4. Get one person to write down the philosophy in the company manual
5. Let everyone know that they can make the decision next time without having to ask you for permission

When to Sell a Business

- If selling your business is what's best for the customer

"I asked Seth Godin's advice. All he said was, 'If you care, sell.' (I think his point was that my lack of enthusiastic vision was doing a disservice to my clients. It'd be better for everyone if I put the company in more motivated hands that could help them all grow.)" – Derek Sivers

- If staying in the business is stunting your personal growth

"I got excited about all the cool new projects I could do instead (of working on my company). I realized that the bigger learning and growing challenge for me was letting go, not staying on." – Derek Sivers