

“I’m here to tell you that, though you should not fear failure, you should do your very best to avoid it.”



In his urge to resist the abundant banal platitudes that are de rigueur with seasonal commencement addresses, Conan O’Brien took a more comic “tell-it-like-it-is” approach in his speech at Dartmouth College earlier this summer. As is so often the case with humor, what makes the joke work is its high content of truth.

Outwardly, we might say that we have learned to accept failure in order to grow, but deep down we know that we really want no part of the lessons such experiences might teach. We are afraid to fail. Why? Are the stakes really too high? Is our own fear of failure keeping us from being the best that we can be? This is what I often think about when I read about successful entrepreneurs.

Nearly all of modern culture’s iconic business achievers are self-made individuals. Whether it’s Mark Zuckerberg, Steve Jobs or Richard Branson, those individuals who have made their mark do so by bringing a passion and singular vision to introduce new ideas to the world. Yet, whenever I read a profile about a person who has achieved great business success, what fascinates me most isn’t the idea itself. Most business plans seem fairly straightforward in their mission, whether an entrepreneur is designing technology for the future or developing a social network. It’s what that idea meant to the entrepreneur that I find most fascinating. Where did the idea come from? What made them believe that this idea would work? Why was it so important to them? How did they make it happen? To answer the last question: courage.

Creating something new is certainly difficult. But taking that final step, keeping negative emotions in their proper perspective and acting on your own convictions, calls for even greater skill. Is this the right idea at the right time? Do the costs of introducing new ideas that reflect my beliefs outweigh the benefits of change? As managing editor Amanda Fretheim Gates shows in her

story about new thinking (“Niche Finders,” page 43), our own hospitality industry has its own professionals who weren’t afraid to introduce their own ideas into the business world. They never stop building on a set of skills they believe are important for hospitality success. And as the cliché goes, success usually occurs when preparation meets opportunity. It did for Amanda Lange. Another entrepreneur wanted to meet other seasoned professionals like herself. Little did she know that she would create a network of experienced meeting planners that would grow to national prominence in just a couple of short years. One couple’s dream of opening a lodge combined with a strong interest in sustainability led to cutting-edge green practices developed literally from the ground up.

In these challenging times for our industry, I hope these profiles of entrepreneurship in Minnesota’s hospitality industry offer a powerful message. Perhaps the themes running throughout this issue can offer their own commencement address of encouragement to every entrepreneur-in-waiting. Innovation can happen anywhere. If you’ve done your homework, honed your skills and set your course, maybe if you believe in something strongly enough you will find your way. And make failure a part of the process. It was Thomas Edison who believed that failure was not discouraging in the least; another discarded attempt is another step in the right direction. It reminds me of the oft-quoted passage from another piece of satire, Samuel Beckett’s *Worstward Ho*:

“Try again. Fail again. Fail better.”

— Joel Schettler, editor