



## Want to Be the Boss? Better Know Exactly What That Means



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*In this series, professionals share how they embrace the entrepreneurial mindset. See the stories [here](#), then [write your own](#) (use [#BetheBoss](#) in the post).*

Say the word “boss” and most people imagine a well-heeled executive, jetting between meetings and bellowing directives that a faithful group of employees dutifully carry out. Not exactly.

To me, being the boss more often than not has meant solitary hours contemplating challenges. It’s meant sleepless nights weighing options before making hard decisions

that no one else wants to make and knowing that their success or failure is ultimately my responsibility. It's meant sweating the details and spending more time working the counter in an apron to truly understand what our associates and customers experience than delivering investor presentations in a suit.

Don't get me wrong – I wouldn't trade being the boss for a minute. Even as I was working toward my MBA, I recognized that I had more in common with the guy who owned the nearby gas station than the peers who were nabbing jobs in consulting firms. But it's important to be realistic as you set out to build a business. Here are some of the harder truths about calling the shots:

- Usually, the business owns you; you don't own it. Forget 9 to 6, or even 6 to 9. Building a business is all-consuming — as in, it consumes all of your waking hours and many of the ones you should be sleeping. It's with you in the car, the shower and on vacation. Most people who build businesses can neither turn off nor throttle down their commitment to their pursuit. For me, it's an addiction, of sorts. I thrive on solving problems no one else can — and often those solutions begin to unfold while I'm running or sitting on the beach with my business challenges right by my side.
- The top truly is lonely — not only because you have to make the hard decisions, but because no one can spare you the self-questioning that inevitably accompanies them. You'd think that after building two restaurant brands, I'd worry less about the unforeseen unforeseens of my decisions. But that's not the case. I can honestly say that every decision that moved our business forward in a material way had consequences that kept me in doubt. One example is the decision to divest Au Bon Pain and put all of my energy and resources into Panera. It was a decision I labored over endlessly. Over time, people would call it brilliant. But making it was excruciating. My decisions today are no easier. Even now, some decisions play out

better than others. What's important, though, is that you end up being right more often than you are wrong. On that note....

- You'll have many opportunities to make decisions because a boss's challenges are never-ending. Building a business is an ongoing labor of love. As long as that business is your responsibility, you will need to think long term. You will need to innovate, iterate and improve. You will need to stay on the lookout for new opportunities. You will need to anticipate where the world is going and be positioned to meet it when it arrives in the future. The burden does not lessen over time; it grows with the business. Ironically, if you are successful, you will not be beholden to fewer constituencies; you will be beholden to more.

But while being the boss can feel at times like a long and lonely journey, there is a payoff — and it's not power or money. For me, it's the joy of solving problems no one else can. It's seeing opportunities others miss and developing strategies others can't imagine.

It's building a venture from the ground up and creating a profitable enterprise that not only provides others a livelihood, but gives them a community where they can flourish. And finally, it's making a difference. I never set out to build a restaurant brand; I set out to impact the world by changing the way America eats. Being the boss is infinitely rewarding when you truly understand what you are working toward.