

Expert Advice

# Tips from Two Extraordinary Entrepreneurs



This Black History Month, we continue to honor past, present, and future Black entrepreneurs by sharing advice from two extraordinary women. Mary Webber is CEO of L & R Human Resource Consulting, which provides strategic guidance and training to businesses and HR professionals. Lindsey Holmes is CEO of Usable Tech, an online strategy and management firm specializing in Social Media Campaigns, Management and Mobile Application Development. We asked both women to share tips and lessons learned that could help future entrepreneurs find success as well.

## Q: What advice do you have about starting a business?

**Lindsey:** Just do it. Do it now and whether you have the means or not - do it 'lean.' But by all means, do it NOW. Many of us fall into the old business stereotypes that say that you need a fancy office with a secretary. That mindset can be defeating for most. And it's definitely not necessary. I think Covid has shown us that virtual offices can actually be much more productive as well as cost-effective. Starting your business for as little as possible now allows for a lean mindset from the start.

**Mary:** In speaking from my own experience, there are multiple steps I would give about starting a business. For starters, I would say make sure that your business involves your passion and that it solves a problem. If you are not doing what you love, how can others be enthused about it? Additionally, if it doesn't solve a problem, what steps or pivot moves can you make to ensure that the product or services you offer solves a problem? Once you have determined the "problem-solving idea," develop a roadmap or business plan. With all the free services and classes now available, I would advise you to either enroll virtually or make appointments with different agencies that provide guidance and information about securing funding to grow a business. Decide on a business structure (i.e., sole proprietorship, partnership corporation, or nonprofit). Be prepared to pay federal business taxes, income and employment taxes, plus state and local taxes for your business. Obtain any federal and state licenses and permits needed to run the business. If you have employees, be sure to seek an HR professional or consult with an employment representative who can assist with legal issues that arise.



# Tips from Two Extraordinary Entrepreneurs

## Q: What recommendations would you make for setting goals and achieving goals?

**Lindsey:** Be consistent. Do mind maps of your goals. Or simply write them down. Putting your goals on paper and looking at them often is a great way to manifest them. Also, find a workflow around goal setting that works only for you. I use Evernote and its integrations to take me from mind dumping to even creating and managing sales charts. A range of goals can be achieved with the right productivity tool. An added bonus is having all of my goals in the same system. This eliminates distractions as I can avoid moving from one tool to another.

**Mary:** My advice when setting goals is always to be true to yourself. Set realistic goals that are achievable and attainable. Your goals should be for short term and long term. Short terms goals should bring you closer to fulfilling your long-term goals. The best advice I have learned throughout my journey is that failure is inevitable. Just as we plan to achieve all the goals set, there will be a "bump in the road" along the way that will cause us to reroute or reanalyze the goal and determine what will be the next best step. When this happens, discuss the issue(s), the outcome, and how to avoid a reoccurrence, and readjust your goals for long-term success.

## Q: Do you have any suggestions regarding funding or overhead?

**Lindsey:** As I mentioned starting lean and staying lean will ensure your business stays around for the long haul. I knew that I couldn't afford expensive marketing and CRM tools in the early growth stages of my business, so I didn't try to. That was added pressure that I did not need to put on myself. Instead, I looked for free to low-cost solutions (believe there are some for your industry, just search) or even some that might have been slightly higher out of pocket but that had no monthly payments. These tools have grown with my 15-year-old business and kept me in a lean mindset. Tools don't have to have exorbitant price tags to work.



## Q: Are there any essential business communication or technology tools you find useful?

**Lindsey:** Evernote is my preferred hub. It keeps me productive and allows me to manage all of my thoughts and content easily. Find your hub --that's most essential. Where can you store but also share everything with ease? I also use different integrations -- tools that work well with Evernote that allow me to customize my workflow. Then there is my calendar. I put everything there, from actual calendar dates to To-Dos.

**Mary:** Pre-Covid, I would have recommended face-to-face connections and in-person training to build personable relationships. However, in the current COVID era, pivoting to a virtual platform has become the norm. Technology savvy knowledge and tools to communicate with companies have become the norm. Companies that are unable to compete in this new arena will be left behind. I would strongly recommend the knowledge and use of virtual tools (i.e., MS Teams, Zoom, WebEx, etc.) to connect with customers/clients, to stay afloat in the current business arena, and provide the same "in-person" service by virtual means.

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**Q: Do you any personal experience overcoming challenges and persevering you'd like to share?**

**Lindsey:** 'Go for what you know.' I infuse the same things into my business that go into my personal life. I try to be considerate of my loved ones, and my clients are, of course, no different. I think about them when I price, roll out new products, or am asked to take on a project that I might not be able to commit to fully. Spirituality is also a big part of my life. I often pray, meditate and visualize to get the most favorable outcome before a meeting. If business is slow, I ask for God to send me an idea or the patience to get through the drought. Even politically, I take a stand. Though I've always been told to separate business from politics. for example, there is just a certain customer profile that is not congruent to my values and beliefs. In my industry, which is a very personal one, it's important to work with those where there is synergy. Being my authentic self attracts the customers that I want as well.

**Mary:** On a personal note, I have had to overcome so many challenges that I decided to write a book, "Miracles Still Happen...Trust Me." Having been homeless and divorced with two young children, I have had to overcome many emotional and financial challenges. The greatest challenge was becoming paralyzed at the age of 40, and miraculously (with much perseverance) and determined will, I began to walk again. This paralysis taught me that I had a choice to either accept the condition (paralysis) as a permanent state or fight to walk again to show others that they too can overcome adversities in life if they are determined not to give up. Giving up should not be an option. Success is imminent with sacrifice and commitment. It has been 11 years since I was paralyzed. Since that time, I have completed an HR Certification to represent as an expert in the field of HR, opened an HR Consulting business, and currently have six months remaining for completion of a second Master's Degree in Employment Law from the Shepard Broad School of Law. My favorite quote that sums up overcoming challenges and persevering is, "If you can't fly then run, if you can't run then walk, if you can't walk then crawl, but whatever you do you have to keep moving forward." ~ Martin Luther King