

SUMMARY

ESCAPE FROM CUBICLE NATION

PAMELA SLIM



Summary of “Escape from Cubicle Nation” by Pamela Slim

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Learn how to escape from your corporate job and begin building the life of your dreams through entrepreneurship.

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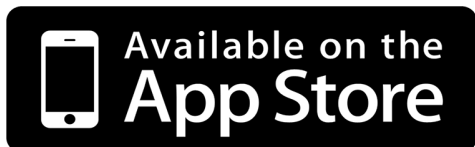


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Introduction

How many times have you seen marketing and advertising that makes entrepreneurship look exciting and extravagant? You hear success stories like, “I was an oppressed file clerk, bossed around by tyrannical managers until I spent \$399 on a 12-CD training program. Now in just two short weeks, I have one assistant just to paint my toes, and my former manager just called, begging to come work for me!” Or you see something along the lines of, “Here is my large car, parked in front of my large house with my large boat in the garage. None are as large as my bank account, which just keeps filling up, despite the fact that I only work three hours a week.” Unfortunately, entrepreneurship looks nothing like the ads. Instead, it’s waking up in the early hours of the morning, stressing about a presentation, making copies at three a.m., and suffering from a caffeine roller coaster while on the verge of tears. Despite these realities, becoming an entrepreneur can offer opportunities that you never believed possible and can lead to a life of freedom, independence, and happiness. According to Pamela Slim, breaking out of the corporate world is a dream that many people have; however, despite the endless resources about how to start your own business, corporate employees still don’t feel comfortable enough to make the change. She decided to take action and give those people the resources they need, so she connected with major names in entrepreneurship like Guy Kawasaki, Seth Godin, and John Jantsch.

After years of interviews and research, Slim put together everything she learned about the path from employee to entrepreneur. Many people have found success and you can too if you are willing to work hard and keep your eyes open. With the right business model and smart systems, you can learn how to escape the nine-to-five, live anywhere, and join the new rich. That’s the dream, right? Well, let’s get started.

Opening Up to Opportunities

When you think about working in the corporate world, what comes to mind? For many, corporate culture means working a steady nine-to-five job with benefits and a good salary. Many might even think that a corporate job means safety and stability. Unfortunately, corporate jobs are becoming more and more unstable in today's climate. The truth is that corporate jobs are expendable and the floor can be pulled out from underneath you at any time. Author Pamela Slim learned this difficult lesson the day her father revealed that his entire department had been let go and he was the only one left.

This moment revealed to Slim that the corporate world is far from solid and stable; instead, hundreds of jobs can be “wiped off the map in a matter of minutes.” Many of her father's coworkers were career employees and had been with the company for years, or even decades. “One woman had worked her entire career at the company, as had her father and grandfather until retirement. She came into work at 8:00 a.m., was given a cardboard box to pack her belongings, and was escorted to the exit door at 8:20,” proving that the corporate world can be callous and cold.

The truth is, human beings aren't meant to work in large corporations. According to software engineer and venture capitalist, Paul Graham humans are like animals in a zoo, particularly lions. He states that “Lions in the wild seem about ten times more alive. They're like different animals. I suspect that working for oneself feels better to humans in much the same way that living in the wild must feel better to a wide-ranging predator like a lion. Life in a zoo is easier, but it isn't the life they were designed for.” In other words, while you may have a stable job, good benefits and enough money to pay your bills, working in the corporate world is much like a lion living in a zoo.

I mean, if you were searching for a pair of size eight wide shoes, you wouldn't settle for a narrow size six simply because you couldn't find

anything better, would you? “So why in the world do we try to jam our foot into an unattractive, uncomfortable shoe, otherwise known as our day job?” The simple answer is that our social self which is shaped by our families, education, media, and religion makes us believe that working a “great job” with an amazing salary should make us happy. But what if that picture is a stark contrast to our ideal life?

So if you're feeling crazy for feeling unhappy despite your steady job, high salary, and great benefits, then you are not alone! Sure, you have a great opportunity that many others might envy, but if your personal values don't align with corporate values, then you're in the wrong place. It might be time to make a change.

The Fear of Leaving

What makes you so fearful of leaving your job? While many feel unhappy and critical of their corporate job, walking away isn't as easy as it sounds. Perhaps you enjoy your paychecks, benefits, occasional complimentary lunch, and paid vacations, that's great! But if you receive these benefits and still don't feel happy, you're not crazy. After years of research, Slim states, "I found a lot of despair hidden behind smiling faces of smart people in cubicles over the years. Gut-wrenching, tears, confusion, sadness, anger, you name, I heard it. So why don't people just leave?"

There are many reasons why we choose to stay in our soul-sucking, corporate jobs. The first is that we care too much about what others think about us. You see, humans have what is called a social self and an essential self. Unfortunately, our social selves tend to overpower our essential selves as we concern ourselves with how others perceive us and define ourselves based on our positions and status. On the other hand, the essential self deals with our emotions and our feelings. Therefore, even when we feel excited and inspired to start our own business, our social self tends to take over and instill a fear of failure.

Additionally, we associate following our passions as risky and unstable. Chris Farley said it best during a skit on Saturday Night Live when he stated, "My name is Matt Foley and I am a motivational speaker. I am 35, divorced and live in a van down by the river." In other words, we all have a fear of living in a van down by the river. We believe the reality that following our dreams means giving up stability and living a life of few luxuries. The reality is that this never ends up happening.

This fear is normal, so how do we overcome it and move forward? The first strategy is to examine the truth in fear. Approach your fear head-on, take it slow, and discover the lies among the truths in your fear. Once you expose those lies, you can forget about them and move forward with your dreams. Next, learn to become comfortable with being uncomfortable. You see, all

successful people have felt fear at some point. They too have experienced “digestive distress, sleepless nights, and trembling hands as you do when they try something very different in their life or business.” The difference is that successful people understand that discomfort is essential for growth and learning. So put yourself in some situations that push your limits and put you outside your comfort zone. As you practice, the better you’ll get at overcoming your fears.

Lastly, it’s essential that you develop a strong safety net. Surround yourself with people who encourage you and take smart risks themselves. You want that person who isn’t afraid to hold back so when you “are ready to make a scary leap into unknown territory, invite your globe-trotting, skydiving, and hair color-changing friends to hold your hand. They will enthusiastically encourage you to close your eyes and *jump*.”

Begin Your Detox From Corporate Life

Now that you've decided to take the leap and are serious about starting your business, it's time to detox from corporate life and get in touch with your mind and body. The key to success is following your passion, so if you're struggling to find your passion, you should begin by opening yourself up to new and creative ideas. Slim offers a few steps to begin your corporate detox.

First, you need to begin by listening to your body. Your body will tell you when it is not happy and when something is not right. These signs can be in the form of crippling headaches or even digestive issues. When you experience debilitating pain, your body is trying to tell you that you need to make a change. It could even be telling you that your job and lifestyle is not right for you! "Get back in touch with your body by exercising, meditating, and practicing deep breathing. This will reconnect you with your true voice that will tell you what you need to do to take care of yourself."

Additionally, if your creativity is being stifled, you may experience the need to drink a glass or two of wine when you get home from work to simply calm your nerves. Whatever your vice is, cigarettes, alcohol, or even chocolate, you'll find that when you remove these mood-altering substances from your diet, you can bring a new sense of clarity to your life. Next, it's time to agree to take action. You see, when you live an unfulfilled life, you might start to feel stuck and unmotivated. These feelings will only make your life stay stagnant in which no change will happen. Therefore, take action! Do anything to get your body moving and your creative juices flowing. Slim advises to "Take an art class. Take an afternoon off and paint a picture. Strike up an interesting conversation with a total stranger. Run through a field of flowers or jump in a pile of leaves. When you begin to feel a bit more like your two-year-old self and have your energy back, take concrete steps to improve your life."

Finally, own up to your lies and stop making excuses. Whenever you find yourself saying “I have to do this,” or “I am like this because...” stop and take a long hard look in the mirror. Remind yourself that you have chosen an unfulfilled life up until this point, and you are choosing to make a change and do something different. “Some of you know that your inner tiger is chained up, but are so tired, or stuck, or scared, that you need some extra help releasing him.” It’s time to find the creativity, energy, and motivation to start your business and “thaw out your soul” from corporate life.

Altering Your Schedule

Now that you've got your creative juices flowing, it's time to completely reorganize your schedule and create time to work on your ideas. If you're struggling to think of where you can trim the fat and add free time, Slim has a few areas where you can begin.

First, begin by looking at the meetings, committees, and task-forces in your corporate job. It's no secret that these meetings can take up at least 50 percent of your time, so look at them and ask yourself "Is this meeting, committee, or task force critical to get my job done effectively?" If the answer is no, then find a polite way to back out if. For instance, Slim suggests that you say something along the lines of "I would love to keep attending this meeting, but I am just swamped with _____ (fill in the blank) project right now that is critical to my (boss) (customer) (VP)."

Next, it's time to cut out your volunteer work. While it's important to give back to your community where you can, you will need to take a hiatus while you try to get your business up and running. You need to dedicate your extra time to planning and strategizing, so look at cutting back on your volunteer work. "Don't worry, your fast-track application for sainthood will not be revoked, and you can make your goodwill toward men (and women) once your business is successful. Finally, it's time to cut off the television. It's natural to turn to outlets like television to unwind and relax; however, the problem is that one hour of television can easily turn to three or even four. So turn it off and turn to creative outlets instead!

Trying to reawaken your creativity can be confusing, especially when you've been locking up your creativity inside your cubicle for too long. It's hard to know where to begin; there is not some linear five-step process with a neat timeline to help your creativity. Instead, it's "an organic, nonlinear, messy experience that needs time, space, and attention." The best way to start is by setting up a regular time to tap into that creativity. Perhaps begin with Julia Cameron's "Morning Pages." This activity involves writing three pages

of unedited free-flow writing that follows your stream-of-consciousness. Your writing can be ANYTHING from your thoughts of the day to plans for your business, nothing is off-limits.

Additionally, you can write down lists of everything that interests you to determine which direction you should go in with your business. Include topics that interest you like cars, knitting, or martial arts. Activities like writing, coaching, or selling. What industries are you interested in? Perhaps it's construction, home organization, or high-end luxury resorts. Next, what problems are you eager to solve? Teenage pregnancy? Sales letters that plague online marketing? Finally, include the products you love, including your iPhone, Cold Stone Creamery ice cream, Moleskine notebooks, or Sony PlayStations. Write out a list and you'll soon learn how to use it to find your "Sweet Spot."

Find Your Sweet Spot

Once you have a list of the areas that interest you, it's time to figure out which is the right one to pursue. Luckily, Jim Collins has a great strategy for organizing the information to find what he calls the "Sweet Spot."

The sweet spot allows you to identify three areas of interest that will help you create a foundation for your business. The first area involves considering what people will pay you to do. What are the skills you have that are natural strengths? What about you is enjoyable and marketable? Next, find what you love to do. These don't have to be activities that are work-related but those that make you really excited. In other words, what are you passionate about? The final area is determining what you are genetically encoded to do. What activities and/or skills do you have that you can do effortlessly? What makes you energized and what do you feel deeply competent in? This is the circle in which you think "I was meant to do this work."

If you're a bit confused, don't worry. We are going to dig a little deeper to help you figure out what your sweet spot is. To help you figure out a marketable idea, begin to think of problems that can be solved. To get you in this mindset, begin to see business opportunities in everyday situations. For example, say you are stuck in line at the DMV for three hours behind two screaming babies, a member of a punk rock band who hasn't showered for a week, and a loud and frustrated corporate executive.

As you are in line, you can begin to ask questions like, "Why do I have to stand in line?" "Does my transaction require a human being?" "What would be a better way of doing this?" And even, "Would it kill him to wear deodorant?" Questions like this can lead to a real business idea, such as creating an online platform to make going to the DMV more convenient and less of a hassle. For instance, many DMVs in the United States now have created websites to make online transactions available.

Take the Leap

Now that you've got a sweet spot and have learned how to solve a problem or two, it's time to put your business idea into action. Of course, simply starting your business is both terrifying and risky. How can you know that your business idea will succeed? How can you test your idea without dying from humiliation? Luckily, the physical act of testing your business idea is not a big deal.

For example, "If you want to sell cookies, make some, put out a table on your sidewalk, grab a piece of paper and a Sharpie and write 'Delicious, hot and fresh cookies, 50 cents,' and watch what happens." More realistically, however, if you are wanting to pursue writing a series of self-help books, perhaps begin with creating a blog and writing something as simple as three badly written sentences. Your journey must start somewhere, so you might as well start with the smallest step.

Testing and prototyping your business is an integral part of how you grow your business. It won't just help you in getting your business off the ground, but it will also help your business continually grow and thrive. So when you jump right in and take the leap in your business, the quicker you'll be able to improve upon your ideas. This will create a domino effect considering the quicker you improve, the quicker you will find success! A great example of a company that succeeded simply by jumping in is that of PBwiki co-founded by Ramit Sethi.

After an initial meeting called "Super Happy Dev House," where several hackers came together to work on something all night long, the next morning they quickly launched their project to receive feedback. Just forty-eight hours after launching, 1,000 wikis were created on their service. Due to the publicity and the "invite your friends" strategy, word spread quickly about the new service. Today, PBwikis hosts up to 555,000 wikis. Ramit says: "The key was putting out something really simple. In fact, if you look at the internet archive, you can see how simple the Web page was. All you

could do was sign up. It turned out people just wanted a really simple Web page that they can collaborate on.”

While immediately putting out a product sounds great in theory, you may be worried about testing the waters if you are completely brand new to your field. How can you get started? How can you get potential clients to trust you? Well, if you are brand new, perhaps you can “test drive” your service as a volunteer. Begin by choosing an individual or organization that would be a great case study to provide you with clear results. For instance, if you want to become a professional organizer, choose a client with a terribly messy office or closet. Once you’ve created a portfolio, your client can provide a small testimonial and give you content for your website and marketing materials.

Whatever your niche, find a way to get started and simply take the leap!

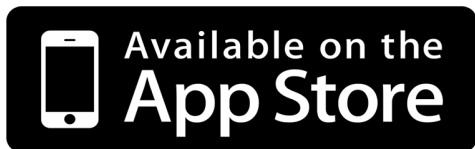


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Final Summary

If you're working in an office cubicle where you are well paid, have stability, and enjoy your paid vacations but still find yourself unhappy, it's time to make a change! The truth is that humans are not meant for working in an uninspiring, boring, and suffocating cubicle. In fact, as humans, we crave creativity and when we aren't expressing it, our bodies begin to let us know. We may begin to suffer from anxiety, lack of sleep, or even debilitating headaches and digestive issues. Therefore, it's important to listen to your body and begin to do something different. Begin by letting your creativity flow through activities like writing, yoga, or even taking a class. Next, list out all of the things that you enjoy and inspire you. Build a business that aligns with your personal values, overcome fear, and finally, take the leap to create a life of your dreams!