

## Knowing Your Entrepreneurial Style

### Business tips for the small operator

If you're a small bus operator, you already know that for many day-to-day tasks associated with running your business, you don't have the luxury of delegating duties to staff. You might not even get to ask the question of who should help. As the owner, you are the help.

But the good news is there are proven ways you can make your lean operation run even more efficiently, whether you are the staff or your staff size is limited.

Small bus operators—those who own 10 or fewer motorcoaches—make up 75 percent of ABA's operator membership. So, we are keenly aware of the value ABA has the potential to provide by offering tools to aid you in this area.

With small bus operators, it's all about the personality and skills of the owner. Since your resources for staffing are limited, the critical question is: What's your entrepreneurial style? In other words, what kind of owner-operator are you? As a small business owner, you are by definition an entrepreneur. But what type of entrepreneur are you? The question is crucial because the answer will help you allocate scarce resources.

Much as you want to, you know you can't do everything yourself. So you need to select specific instances where you can identify someone else on staff—a family member or other trusted employee—to do those tasks that complement your unique entrepreneurial style.

Some entrepreneurs are born salespeople. They need to task someone else with service and maintenance, bookkeeping and other details.

Other entrepreneurs are detail-oriented first. They may be more low-key and even dislike sales (which doesn't make them any less entrepreneurial—just a different type of entrepreneur).

These owner-operators may be technicians first, and their first love may be servicing their coaches. For them, it

makes sense to delegate the selling and marketing functions to someone else.

Each entrepreneurial bus operator needs to focus on where his or her particular expertise best serves the business. The sales expert would no more try to clean the particulate filter on the motorcoach diesel engine than the nuts-and-bolts technician would attempt to book passengers.

In too many small businesses, people tend to make the mistake of hiring people “just like me.” They think, “Anyone who's just like me will be great.” Who can blame them? It's human nature. But it's a recipe for disaster in a small business operating on narrow margins where every dollar counts. In a small bus operation, it makes sense from a business standpoint to hire someone who adds additional value to your unique entrepreneurial style. In other words, hire your opposite personality type.

It may be uncomfortable to think in this mindset, but it's critical to your business. Yes, you need employees with integrity and honesty. But they should specialize in something you don't. As long as you believe in what you're doing (and belonging to ABA shows you do), you can be an extrovert who hires an introvert to handle bookkeeping and shop maintenance. And you can be a quiet techie who hires a dynamo as a salesperson to book your customers.

Business experts often refer to employees as your “internal customers.” If they're sold on the greatness of your product and service, they'll make your business grow and prosper, even if they have different work styles than you do. It's those qualities that make you different from the competition.

And finally, hiring drivers is a category onto itself. Yes, people with CDLs and immaculate records are critical components of your operation. But remember that the driver is most often going to be the first and last person your customers see on a trip. Their experience on your coach will be judged by the customer-friendly demeanor of who brought them there. Not on the salesperson. Not on the service technician. But on the driver.

The slogan here might be “train to retain.” A driver who puts as much emphasis on cordial service to passengers is as important as one who focuses on safe operation of the bus. Retain the driver and retain the customer. And if all goes according to plan, your business will grow.



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