

The Call to Entrepreneurship and Our Excuses

Think starting up your dream business is a daunting task?

Imagine going straight from being on vacation to starting up a complex refugee rescue mission under the nose of the Nazis – with no prior experience and no preparation.

That was 29 year-old stock broker Nicholas Winton's entrepreneurial story.

From 1938 to 1939, Winton successfully organized the evacuation and foster care assignment of 667 Czech Jewish children – without special skills, with funds he raised, and without more than a few staff. He dropped everything, “cut all kinds of corners,” and worked furiously against time and the Nazis and the restrictive immigration policies of the Western democracies.

As he explains drily in a documentary made (much) later (rough quote):

“We even had (fake) passports made because the Home office was moving a bit slow. . . We didn't bring anyone in illegally – we just sped up the process.”

This man had every reasonable excuse in the book to not take action. We certainly wouldn't have blamed him if he had deferred action until he had returned from vacation and set up a nonprofit first.

But Winton was not that kind of human. And neither should we be.

I have lots of excuses for why I haven't started a business yet: I'm looking for the right idea. I'm building skills. Im building capital.

My excuses will allow me to feel OK about delaying this challenge until I look examples like Winton in the eye. They saw clearly that their call to entrepreneurship was a matter of life and death for some people – and they acted accordingly, without the slightest preparation.

Oh, and Winton? At the age of 89 he was working on (not staying in) a home for the elderly. If you let yourself start as well as Winton did, it will be pretty hard for you to stop.

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