

INSPIRATION STATION



This Entrepreneur Shows How to Paint a Picture of Success



BY ANDREA HUSPENI

January 28, 2014



Share 8 Send to Kindle 115

When entrepreneurs embark on their journey, they start with a blank canvas: There is no manual for building their dream. Along the way, they're bound to hit some bumps -- and when they do, it's important they visualize the picture of success. For [Erik Wahl](#), he takes it one step further and actually paints his success.

As a business strategist and an [artist](#), Wahl combines his two passions to demonstrate the journey for his entrepreneurship endeavor, while also providing motivation to others.

Taking the stage at [Entrepreneur's 2014 Growth Conference](#) in New Orleans, he left the crowd captivated painting iconic pieces like the Statue of Liberty and Einstein in a matter of minutes. Wahl not only takes people on his journey, while his paint strokes create a vibrant image but also inspires businesspeople to think about innovation, taking success to the next level and living the dream.

Here are a few of the takeaways:

Related: [Franchising for Entrepreneurs: An Entrepreneur Growth Conference Panel Preview](#)

Don't follow the breadcrumbs of others. Sometimes it pays to take a risk and take ownership of an action. "Look for ways to de-familiarize the ordinary," says Wahl.

Wahl encompasses this belief with his own personal tale. Seven years ago, Wahl decided to go against the grain and get creative in marketing his artwork: He stopped displaying his work at galleries and selling his items. Instead, in an effort to raise demand and money, he focused on charity events and corporate conferences. It paid off. Last year, singer Pink ended up paying \$10,000 for one of his Marilyn Monroe paintings, leading the media to take notice.

Focus, commit and most importantly adapt. While being focused and committed helps a business stay afloat in the day-to-day activities, the ability to adapt in a creative manner can take a business to the next level.

Wahl recalls a famous quote by iconic entrepreneur Einstein, "Imagination is even more important than knowledge." And when it comes to long-term vision, Wahl believes this statement can help entrepreneurs stay in front of their competitors.

But often founders don't believe they have that "outside-of-the-box" mindset. Not the case, Wahl explains. Innovation, differentiation and creativity has been wrongly diagnosed as being a genetic trait: That we are either born with or without," he says. "It is practice, a discipline skill that everyone has access to tap into."

By ditching a paint-by-number mentality and instead thinking of your endeavor as one that is a blank canvas, unlimited possibilities will arise.

Related: [Why Companies Are Hiring Artists for Their Meetings](#)

Fear kills performance. Wahl explains that we were raised and trained to be logical: taught to always think of one answer, have one response. This mentality transcends to leadership positions, causing stagnation for innovation. Instead of jumping at the change to be creative, leaders freeze with fear and revert back to what they have always been done, always been taught.

This kind of mindset is no longer sufficient, as the global competitive landscape is rapidly changing, says Wahl. Entrepreneurs need to "unthink" this mentality. They need creativity, not rigidity. Founders can do this by building an emotional connection to the audience.

Amplify to scale: To grow your company, humanize your brand and get the audience engaged by making them an active participant. By building a tribe of loyal followers, you gain the best and most affordable source of marketing, Wahl says.

For instance, at the Entrepreneur Growth Conference, Wahl is not selling or auctioning off any of the paintings he created during the presentation. Instead, he has created a gamification strategy, one that has a

virility and social component. Wahl decided to hide all the pictures in the New Orleans area and had geo-tagging, allowing conference participants to go on a sort of treasure hunt searching for these art pieces while also providing a word-of-mouth strategy.