



# KEY INSIGHTS FROM SMALL BUSINESS ADVICE

An inside look at the thoughtful advice and actionable strategies  
provided by nearly 18,000 small businesses



# TAPPING INTO **SMALL BUSINESS GRIT & WISDOM**

ADP® invited small businesses to share their strategies for success through the Grit & Wisdom Contest. Nearly 18,000 responses poured in, offering thoughtful advice aimed at empowering fellow entrepreneurs. These stories not only chronicled the journey of building businesses but also revealed the passion and perseverance fueling success at every stage.

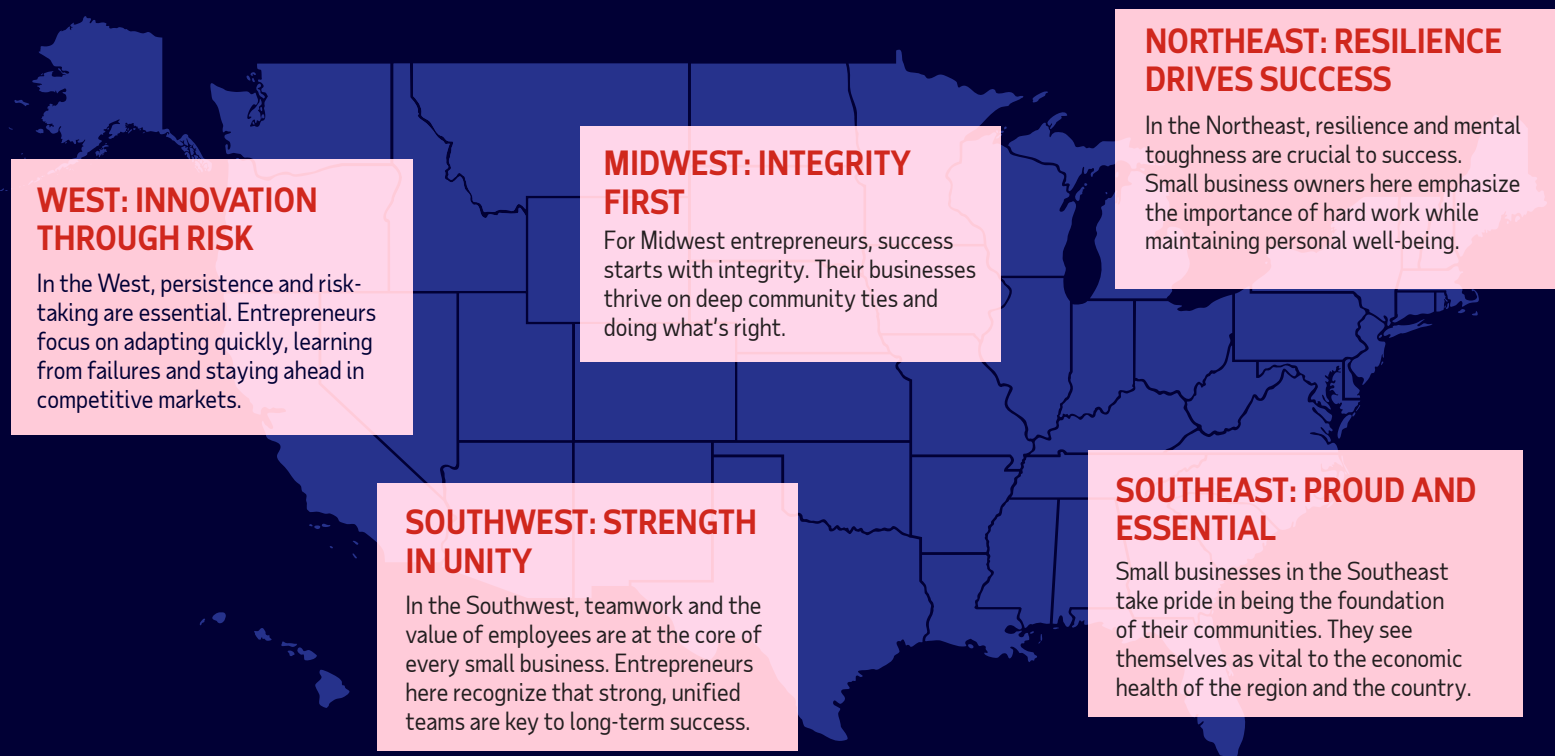
What stood out most was that success isn't just about profit. It's about laying strong foundations, planning with intention and remaining steadfast when challenges arise. The persistence of small business owners—turning setbacks into opportunities—is a powerful testament to their grit and determination. Just as vital is the passion and vision they bring to their work, which is at the core of every thriving business.

This report distills the core themes from their insights, offering actionable strategies to inspire and guide small business owners nationwide.

## **COAST TO COAST**

### **REGIONAL STRATEGIES FOR SMALL BUSINESS SUCCESS**

Overall, small business owners share a clear understanding of what it takes to achieve success. But when we dive deeper, we start to see unique insights and approaches that reflect the local character and challenges of each region.



## **STATE SPOTLIGHTS**

### **KEY TRENDS FROM TOP SMALL BUSINESS HUBS**

New York, Florida, California and Texas are home to some of the country's largest small business communities, each with its distinct perspective. Here are the key themes from local entrepreneurs' advice:

#### **New York:**

New York small businesses emphasize innovation and technology, encouraging digital transformation and staying open to new ideas.

#### **California:**

Californians often highlight resilience and positivity as key traits of an entrepreneurial mindset.

#### **Texas:**

Texans focus on growth and learning, often stressing the importance of a growth mindset and continuous self-improvement.

#### **Florida:**

Floridians emphasize embracing technology and fresh ideas, encouraging business owners to keep evolving to stay ahead.



# 7 KEY THEMES FROM SMALL BUSINESS OWNERS' ADVICE

Small business owners emphasize the importance of a **strong foundation**, **consistent follow-ups**, **effective communication** and **embracing failure** as a stepping stone to success. **Passion**, **dedication** and **efficiency** are highlighted as crucial for growth, while **teamwork**, **customer service** and **treating employees well** are seen as key factors in building a successful business. A common sentiment is that **success is a journey that requires patience, persistence and learning from mistakes**.

In our analysis of the advice, we identified seven recurring themes for powering small business success. Here are the takeaways from small business owners—in their own words.

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## HEART OF THE HUSTLE

Never give up, view failures as steps towards success and be open to new ideas. Consistency and determination are key.

"Keep pushing, keep innovating and remember: the only limits are the ones you place on yourself. With determination and heart, your small business can achieve anything you set your mind to."

**Guldeste T** | North Carolina

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## YOUR TEAM, YOUR DREAM

The strength of a good team drives small business success. Nurture your people and they will nurture your dream.

"Take your time with the hiring process. You want longevity in an employee because knowledge is expensive and takes time to acquire. Turnover is a killer to a small business. Make sure the candidate fits in and has the same goals as the position and the company."

**Denise M** | California

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## LISTEN, LEARN, LEAD

Leading by example and creating a positive company culture are influential for success. Lead with empathy, inspire with vision and elevate those around you.

"Curiosity killed the cat, but it bettered the business! Encourage your staff to be curious. To question existing protocols. To inquire why the office operates the way it does. Every question asked opens the door to fresh ideas and improved practices."

**Kayla B** | New Jersey

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## YOUR CUSTOMERS, YOUR CHAMPIONS

Prioritize customer service and build strong relationships with clients. Treat customers well and ensure their satisfaction to achieve business growth.

"Word-of-mouth is king. My best advice is always to treat people how you would want your grandmother treated. No, the customer's not always right, but their experience can make or break you. Even if they're wrong, make them feel right."

**Joseph B** | Tennessee

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## KNOW YOUR NUMBERS

When you master your finances, you pave the way for growth with clarity and confidence. Efficient operation and sound financial management are keys to small business success.

"Unit economics are the lifeblood of your company. What are your costs to produce your product or service? How much does it cost you to acquire a customer? What is the lifetime value of your customer? Your ability to successfully grow or scale is entirely dependent on these metrics."

**Omar S** | Hawaii

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## WELLNESS TO WEALTH

Embrace challenges and view obstacles as opportunities for personal and business growth. Nurture your well-being and success will flow from a foundation of inner strength.

"Use your energy wisely. When it's high, maximize your bandwidth. When it's low, only do the one next thing. Recharge as needed, whether that's rest, meditation, a walk, talking to an accountability partner or coach, family time, etc. That recharge can keep you moving forward to achieve your goals."

**Joyce F** | Florida

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## READY FOR TOMORROW

Passion for one's work and a clear vision are driving forces behind successful businesses. To stay ahead, embrace change, be adaptable and continuously innovate.

"Every six months, take a step back to assess your strategy and think about the future. Is there anything new you can do? Key investments you need to make? New initiatives to drive business? It is vital to look 12 to 18 months down the road to see where you may be headed."

**Stephen W** | Virginia



## RIGHT-SIZED STRATEGIES AT EVERY SMALL BUSINESS STAGE

Success looks different at each stage of a small business's growth. Whether you're just starting on your own or managing a growing team, adopting the right strategies for your business size can make all the difference.

Here's what we discovered about how advice varies by business size:

### FOR TEAMS WITH 5 OR FEWER PEOPLE

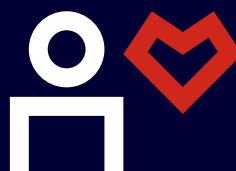
- ✓ **Be persistent** about your passion
- ✓ A **positive mindset** is everything
- ✓ To grow, be **willing to adapt**

### FOR TEAMS WITH 5 OR MORE PEOPLE

- ✓ Drive efficiency with **smart investments**
- ✓ Lead with **vision and integrity**
- ✓ Make **bold, calculated** moves

## THE EMOTIONAL DRIVERS OF SMALL BUSINESSES

Small business owners know the journey comes with long hours and unexpected setbacks. Despite these realities, sentiment analysis revealed that love and enjoyment were the top emotions expressed by small business owners. These emotions sustain owners during challenging times and translate into stronger customer relationships and team morale, driving long-term business success.



Find more Grit & Wisdom at [www.adp.com/gritandwisdom](http://www.adp.com/gritandwisdom)

### About ADP

For over 75 years, ADP has been a trusted partner to small businesses, delivering innovative payroll and HR solutions that simplify operations and drive growth. From automating payroll and taxes to streamlining hiring and compliance, ADP provides the tools small businesses need to lead with resilience, foster strong teams and grow with confidence.



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