A job for school is an educated risk

By Lindsey Novak Tribune Media

Q: I'm in my mid-30s and have Q: I'm in my mid-30s and have been in the work force for 18 years. I recently took the plunge and quit my job to go back to-school full-time for a master's degree in management informa-tion systems. I can complete my degree in one and a half years by going full-time, compared to the four years it would take me going part-time at night. I had bal-anced going to night school for part-time at night. I had bat-anced going to night school for my bachelor's degree in public accounting with my job, family life and social life for so long I couldn't continue living like that.

What are employers' likely per-ceptions of someone my age leav-ing the work force to complete a master's degree?

A: Furthering your education is never a waste of time if it's in your area of interest and it's what you want to do rather than what you want to do rather than what you think you should do. People leave jobs to return to school at all ages, as I'm sure you saw at night school. Your areas of interest are practical and very marketable. As for your nge, on your return to the work force, you will still be in your mid-30s.

#### POTENTIAL EMPLOYER EXPOSES WORKER'S JOB SEARCH

JOB SEARCH
Q. I've been selling commodities on a commission-vs.-draw arrangement for several years. Due to changes in the market-place, the majority of my business is gone and it has been difficult to complet from a cost position. ness is gone and it has been diffi-cult to compete from a cost posi-tion: Although the owner has tried to be optimistic, he stopped my draw and I have been put on commission only. I sent out many resumes, including one to a friendly competitor. That compa-ny contacted the sale manager and owner of my company with-out first calling or interviewing

me regarding the position. The owner of my company befame quite upset with me and I feel my position is in jeopardy. Isn't there a code of ethies that a company must follow regarding contacting current employers?

A: There are several issues here. First, your boss is naive to think you would not look for a job after stopping your draw in a slow market. Talk to him about your new financial arrangement

slow market. Yalk to him about your new financial arrangement and ask if he thinks the loss of sales are caused by your performance or by demand drying yup. He may have been faced with either stopping your draw or letting you go.

Second, a draw is not meant to be a saiary Commissions should equal and normally exceed a draw. Unless a product requires long-term developing of clients long-term developing of clients to complete sales, a company can only carry a salesparson for a short period of time when he stops bringing in business. It's likely that your company's competitors will want the same straight commission arrangement if your lost business is due salely to the industry alowing solely to the industry slowing

down.
Third, an employer calling Nuchrical selections your current employer without Chicago, Ill. 60611. your permission is unprofessional and unethical, regardless of AtWorkbyLN@AOL.com

whether the two owners knews each other, which may be the case in such a tight-circle indus-

try.
When you "shotgun" resumes. When you "shotgun" resumes to companies, state clearly my your cover letter that your job search is confidential. Unfortunately, this doesn't mean that all employers will respect your request, as there are always a few bad apples in every bushed. Hawing problems on the job? Write to Lindsey Novak in care of Tribute Media Services, Inc., 435 N. Michigan Ave., Suite 1500, Chicago, Ill. 60611. She contacted dit

# Potholes in the road to work-at-home success

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By Alice Bredin, Tribune Media

For years I have encouraged my husband to start a home-based business, and now he has. He finally found a great idea, quit his job and set up an office upstairs from mine.

upstairs from mine.

So far, so good. He likes the lifestyle change because even though he is working very hard, he has more time to exercise and we spend more time together than when he left the house for work at 2.70 cm and returned. than when he left the noise lor work at 7:30 a.m. and returned at 7 p.m. Also, for the first time in a long time, he is learning a lot from his work. The irony is, I am learning a lot in the process

I am learning by getting a reminder of the challenges of starting up a home-based busi-

with the start-up process, seeing him go through all of the stops demonstrates to me how many pitfalls exist in the start-up

pitfalls exist in the start-up phase.

Luckily, Stu has avoided making any fatal mistakes and has probably made less than his share of inevitable errors so far. Whenever he does stumble, I remind him that mistakes are part of running a business and he should get used to it.

To help you avoid some of the pottoles in the roud to catablishing a business, Stu has said it's OK to share his mistakes.

Spending money on an idea before it is formed. Most business ideas evolve significantly from their first incarnation. Stu's was no exception. He

Stu's was no exception. He devised an idea last spring, and

the business he runs today is an offshoot of that idea. His mistake was spending money on focus groups to investigate his original idea. A better approach would have been top first spend a few months investigating the market to ensure the idea was sound.

•A tendency to have too many

face-to-face meetings. Because of his extensive corporate work of his extensive corporate work experience, my husband has a tendency to want to schedule meetings. His natural instinct is to meet all vendors face-to-face and to set up other appointments. Gradually he has learned that when you work at home, most meetings require you to travel outside of the office. These meetings are extremely time consuming, and he has already become more ruthless

with his time.
Wanting to incorporate too
early. Luckily, we averted this
one. Stu incorporated only last
week now that his company
direction is established and focused. He wanted to incorporate in spring, which would most likely have been a waste of money because his idea and com-pany name have changed since

then.

\*Printing stationary before his incorporation was final. He was very through in his investigation of trademarks to determine if the name he wanted was available nationally. He also did some local searches to see if any other New York companies were concessing under the name he operating under the name he chose.

Having gotten the clear from several sources, Stu had his sta-

tionary printed while his incortionary printed with this most poration was still in process. Unfortunately, a small company in upstate New York is incorporated using the name he just spent \$2,000 printing on his stationary.

\*Spending too much time at the process of the process of the state of t

\*Spending too much time at his desk. Stu has already adopt-ed some classic work-at-home tendencies. After dinner he often heads for the office, and weekend days are often designated for

•Wanting to overuse an attor-•Wanting to overuse an attor-ney. Having come from an envi-ronment in which he had legal resources at his fingertips, Stu wants to use the services of his attorney frequently. I have told him stories of how legal bills add up quickly and have encouraged him to use the attorney's time sparingly and do so as much as

possible himself until his cash flow is positive. Like any other home-based

Like any other homo-based business owner, Stu's mindr foibles don't mean he won't be successful or that he is not cut or the a home-based entrepreneur. It just means that, like any other entrepreneur, he will make many mistakes, learn from some of them and hopefully have the plant the way. fun along the way.

Alice Bredin is author of the Virtual Office Survival hand-book (John Wiley & Sons) and host of The American Expréss Small Business Exchange Web site http://www.americanet-press.com/smallbusiness. You can write to her at Triburc Media Services, 435 N. Michigan Avc., Chicago, Ill. 60611, or email her at BredinA@aol.com

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