

Ex-entrepreneurs can thrive in the right employee roles, finds new study

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In the study, researchers examined the identity conflict levels of former entrepreneurs who went on to work for an organization. Image credit: Antoine Hart. Credit: Antoine Hart/University of Central Florida

Once an entrepreneur always an entrepreneur? Not necessarily, says a

new study by researchers at the University of Central Florida and Purdue University. Former entrepreneurs can transition from being their own boss into successful employees within an organization, especially in roles that harness their entrepreneurial spirit, according to a recent study published in [*Personnel Psychology*](#).

"With today's career paths typically spanning multiple roles across a variety of organizations, understanding the transition between someone's old work self and new work self may be critical to not only the employee's success but also the company's" says Jeff Gish, assistant professor of management and entrepreneurship in UCF's College of Business and the study's co-author.

Gish and co-author Jordan Nielsen, an assistant professor of management [organizational behavior](#)/human resources at Purdue, examined the identity conflict levels of former entrepreneurs who went on to work for an organization.

Research has shown that former entrepreneurs frequently experience a "founder penalty" when applying for jobs, losing out to applicants who have never been self-employed. Employers assume former entrepreneurs may be more difficult to manage or will jump ship to start another company and be their own boss again. This new research suggests that this need not be the case for all jobs or for all ex-entrepreneurs.

They surveyed ex-entrepreneurs about their current work identity and whether they felt they could act like an [entrepreneur](#) in their current work role or if they had to suppress their entrepreneurial spirit. They also surveyed the ex-entrepreneurs' romantic partners about whether the employee spoke highly of their current organization, engaged in boosterism, or experienced burnout in the role.

Gish and Nielsen found that identity conflict between the old

entrepreneurial self and the new employee self was associated with higher levels of burnout and lower levels of boosterism.

"Ex-entrepreneurs who felt a strong nostalgia for being their own boss tended to be the ones who were the most negatively affected, with the highest levels of burnout and lowest levels of boosterism," Nielsen says. "To mitigate this, organizations could use interview questions to help identify those who may be more likely to suffer [negative consequences](#) or develop positions and onboarding practices that minimize this source of conflict and lay a stronger foundation for success."

More information: Jordan D. Nielsen et al, When old and new selves collide: Identity conflict and entrepreneurial nostalgia among ex-entrepreneurs, *Personnel Psychology* (2023). [DOI: 10.1111/peps.12626](#)

Provided by University of Central Florida

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