

the

ESCAPE PLAN

6 Steps to Escaping The Job You Hate

By Creating A Business You Love



by

Meredith Eisenberg & Jasper Blake

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ENDORSEMENTS

“Meredith Eisenberg is one of the most creative people I know... Connect with Meredith and tell her how you are promoting your programs and products—I am sure she will have some ideas for you. I will be shocked if you don’t end up hiring her on the spot and then making sales because of her creative copy and ideas!”

~Janet Powers, Chief Executive Connector
connectionpowers.com

“A very heartfelt thank you for interviewing me last week. It was an incredibly pleasant experience and I am so very appreciative of having the opportunity to tell my story and to get to tell it to such lovely hosts was just the icing on the cake!!! As you can imagine I continue to go at warp speed but I continue to reflect back on my time with you both and it was really very rewarding. I just got my first glance of my Shark Tank video and I was told to be excited and upbeat and basically I look like a freak on steroids with my eyes wide open and my hands moving around wildly. I have not seen a rough draft for Kickstarter video but my guess is some of the same footage will be used. Oh how mortifying but I am willing to do anything so out it will go. I felt like a normal human being when I was talking to the two of you. So thank you, thank you!”

~Terri Kelly

“With Meredith and Jasper’s help, Paycheck to Passion helped my podcast to reach iTunes New and Noteworthy in a very short period of time. The opportunity exposed me to potentially hundreds of thousands of new listeners! Talk about visibility—BOOM!”

~Stephanie Dalfonzo
Your Power Breakthrough

KRISTEN BAKER'S STORY

“So I actually sang my entire life. At 15 years old I wanted to be a Broadway star. I followed that dream and I went to Northwestern and I studied opera and music theater. During my senior year, I realized I didn't really like watching opera, I say realized, but I knew that the whole time, it just occurred to me that maybe if I didn't like watching it, maybe I shouldn't be an opera singer or even a musical theater performer. There were these clues along the way, and I sort of ignored them. So senior year came around and I was like 'Oh God, I don't want to do this, I don't know what I do want to do but I know I don't want to do this.'”

I jumped into the practical responsible career and I went into commercial real estate and about 8 months in I was like 'Oh God, I hate this, and I don't want to do this either, but what do I want to do?' So I started that exploration process but the entire time I did that I really limited myself as to what I could do. I had this box of what I thought was possible, and what I thought was possible for me. I really only explored within that box, and because of that I just had all these fits and starts, like okay maybe I'll get an MBA, maybe I'll go into consulting. I never really followed through on anything because I think at some level I knew it was better but still not quite it, it was not quite my calling.

Eventually, fast forward seven years, still in this job where I felt really miserable, and I was still trying all these different things and I took this acting class. I had studied acting in college as well and there was something about it I loved but it wasn't really the acting. So it really hit me when I took this class, it is the personal transformation. I love watching people go from hiding behind the wall to really being authentic in their truth. With the help of my own career coach I really started to shape what that was and what the clues were that I had missed all along and what was the through-line for everything that I really had explored, which was that personal transformation. I just really love watching people be lit up and so that's how I came to be a career coach.”

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You can find them all on our podcast at paychecktopassion.com

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INTRODUCTION

HAVE you ever played that game where you want to go somewhere but are not quite sure where—so you close your eyes, hold on to a map and twirl your finger around and have your finger land on a city? That is more or less how my family and I ended up in Albuquerque, New Mexico. My daughter was three years old and we wanted to move closer to our respective families (both in the Western United States). My husband, an engineer, looked for jobs in each city starting in alphabetical order—we got the first job he applied for—in Albuquerque.

We moved from Washington, D.C. where I was a Public Information Officer for Fairfax County, Virginia for nearly 13 years. The job paid well, but I wasn't getting to spend enough time with my family. I saw moving as an opportunity to create a life where I could find both fulfilling work and spend time with my young daughter. The jobs available in Albuquerque were different to those in Washington, D.C. My choices boiled down to either getting a job which essentially paid for day care or becoming a stay-at-home mom. Needless to say, neither of those options appealed to me.

Luckily, the advances in computer technology and the internet had, by then, opened up a new option for me. I took a class from

AssistU on how to become a virtual assistant—I had my first client even before I finished the training and have been fortunate enough to have had clients ever since. My work has certainly morphed and changed over the past eight years. I am grateful everyday for the opportunity that the information technology revolution has provided me (and for my daughter).

Jasper (the co-author of this book), having spent twelve years as a professional bass player, went back to school at age thirty-five to become an archeologist. A few years later he moved from the United Kingdom to Phoenix, Arizona to marry his wife. Luckily for him, construction in Arizona was booming at that time and there was a requirement to have an archeological survey before construction could start on any new developments. Finding a job was easy.

Then, the economy crashed and his wife found a job in New Mexico. There was no more archeological work. Jasper decided to draw on some past web-design experience in order to find another source of income. Blogging was just becoming popular, quickly followed by social media, and new opportunities were opening up to help business owners use those tools in their marketing.

However, not everyone is so lucky. My friend Jeff is an economist. He was 50 years old when he lost his job. He struggled for years before finally finding some part time work at a bookstore. He is still looking for a full time position in his field. He has noticed how over the course of the five years he has been at the bookstore; his work has been increasingly controlled by computers. When I asked him why he didn't start his own business (he is fluent in French and Arabic), he replied that he had no idea where to start.

Another friend, Annie, had almost finished her master's degree in teaching and special education when she had her first child. She made the choice to stay at home with her kids until the first born child was well into college and the last one was in high school. She home-schooled one of her children because of a learning

disability, and through her experience with her son, learned to be a fierce advocate for smart kids who learn differently. When her last child was in high school, she wanted to go back to work to help pay for her children's college education. The only jobs available to her were educational assistant jobs that paid just over \$10 an hour. She was a signature away from teacher certification but her supervisor refused to sign because it would mean that he would have to raise her salary. Although Annie got a lot of satisfaction from the work she did, she was not working in her passion of helping smart kids who learn differently succeed in college. When I talked with Annie, it became clear to me that she had a lot to offer parents and kids who needed a *fierce* advocate. Annie just needed the first steps outlined for her in order to be confident enough to turn her knowledge, passion and skills into a business.

Julie worked her way through college as a package delivery person for a large shipping company. When she was first hired there were vague promises of a managerial job once she had graduated. She graduated—tens of thousands of dollars in debt—but there was no job. Instead, there was an offer for her to 'buy' a contract position with the company. Even though her work hours, uniform, and working practices were dictated by the company she worked for, she was considered an independent contractor. She was responsible for using her own car for deliveries (paying to fix the car if anything went wrong); she had no paid sick leave or vacation time and her pay rate was not that much more than she had made as an 'intern'. Sadly, when Julie's truck broke down, she didn't have money to fix it and she had to give up the route she had 'paid' for the privilege of servicing. In her spare time, Julie made amazing jewelry. Before, she didn't have time to work on her art because she was driving to meet delivery deadlines. Losing her route was a blessing to her because now she had the time to begin the business she had always wanted to start.

This book is written for people like Jeff, Annie and Julie—victims of the economy—smart, talented people who suddenly found what they were looking for meaningful work in a landscape that had completely changed. Do their stories sound familiar? Do you

feel drawn to something bigger in your life other than just getting by at a job that might not last? Then, *this book is for you!*

We Are in the Midst of a Revolution

Our society is going through an exciting seismic shift. Consider that this shift is as big (if not bigger) as the shift that happened during the Industrial Revolution. Before the Industrial Revolution, people lived in smaller towns, they had their own tools, grew their own food and generally traded their special skills for things that they needed but couldn't make themselves. There were two social classes: the nobility and pretty much everyone else. The Industrial Revolution certainly changed lives. Tools and factories allowed people to find work that paid well. There were finally alternatives to working on the farm. Unions and social guarantees curbed the early abuses—and the middle class was born.

Jobs outside the home became abundant and people could work a job that provided for them for their entire lives. Working from home wasn't an option because the assembly line and machinery certainly wasn't there. Workers were dependent on the tools, the space and the resources the company provided to get the work done and to have a job.

Now, technology has changed everything! Communicating instantly with anyone around the world is possible and easier than ever. You can buy a laptop for less than \$300 and have everything you need to reach potential customers everywhere. There are plenty of people from which to find an audience for almost anything you want to teach or sell or provide. The opportunities have never been greater due to the infinite audience and resources to succeed which are available to anyone who wants to work for themselves.

The flip side is that technology and globalization have made it easier for companies to shop for labor all over the world (which drives down wages for workers from first world countries) and also to monitor and control your every move. Companies can now extract maximum value out of each of your working hours.

Pay and conditions are getting worse for people with traditional manufacturing and service jobs and the downward trend continues.

The economy is quickly dividing us into two camps—what we refer to as The Owners (people who can sell their specialized skills) and The Taken (people who feel they have no choice but to submit to harsher work environments and lower pay because they feel they have no choice).

Jasper and I believe that there is still time to land on the right side of this divide. We started our Paycheck to Passion Podcast to help tell the stories of those who have created businesses from their passions in order to inspire people who still haven't taken that first step. We've interviewed nearly a hundred entrepreneurs, and although each story is unique, we learned they all have common threads running through them. Those threads form the weave that makes passion-based businesses work. By reading this book, and applying what you learn, you can save months (or even years) of trial and error by discovering the pitfalls in advance and implementing tried and tested strategies that work for entrepreneurs of all kinds and types.

What to Expect From This Book

The chapters in this book contain your E.S.C.A.P.E. Plan—

- escaping from a job or work that is unfulfilling;
- escaping from an economy that gives you no opportunity to be creative or to succeed on your terms;
- creating a step-by-step system for creating a ***passion-based*** business that works for you and that you will love

Each chapter contains a story from one of our podcast guests, some practical action steps and tips from people who've been there, done that, and have not only got the tee-shirt, but are probably selling their own! If they've done it, so can you!

Start From the Beginning

Even if you have been in business for a while, we recommend that you start from the beginning when going through the processes in this book. You never know how a small tweak (especially at the foundations of your business) can manifest into some major growth or revenue improvements.

Be Part of the Community

In addition to the Paycheck to Passion Podcast, we created Solo Biz Hacker to provide the support you need on your journey. Not only will we guide you step-by-step through the process of building your business, and finding the help (mentoring, implementation, etc) you need, right when you need it.

Take a moment and check out Solo Biz Hacker at SoloBizHacker.com. Also, we would love to connect with you on Facebook.

Here's how to do that:

Facebook

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/solobizhackers/>



CHAPTER ONE

The World is Changing and it MIGHT be a GOOD Thing ...

THERE is little doubt that the economy has changed and is continuing to change. Change is not *always* a good thing—there can be a dark and scary side to what is happening. But there is also *always* a hopeful side.

Our goal for you, both through this book and through our E.S.C.A.P.E. Plan, is to help you land on the right side of the divide between The Owners and The Taken that we referred to in the Introduction. We are truly in a revolutionary phase. It is a phase very much akin to the Industrial Revolution, yet in many ways it is a reverse of the Industrial Revolution. During the Industrial Revolution there was a concentration of labor—there were factories where people went to do the work and everybody was allocated to a very specific little part of a process. This allowed people to get away from literally a soil-to-mouth existence. They could make good money by comparison and to some extent, move up from being peasants to being in the middle class.

The new technological revolution is undoing the strides made during the Industrial Revolution somewhat. Before the technical

revolution, factories had large labor requirements and a limited pool of people to draw from. There was an incentive to take good care of workers by paying them well and providing good benefits. Now factories are being relocated to other countries where labor costs are much cheaper. The clothes we buy are made in China and the fruit we eat is from Chile.

How Instant Communication Turned People into Things

The internet has opened up communication to people all over the world. With traditional manufacturing jobs relocating overseas, the technological revolution was supposed to replace those factory jobs. Mundane manufacturing and factory jobs were to be replaced by higher-skilled tech jobs that required additional education and training. The problem is that few people brought up in the old manufacturing paradigm had the skills needed, or the funds necessary to train to the level required.

At the same time, new technologies are being employed to make the manufacturing process more automated so that it requires fewer workers. Those that are left are ending up more closely supervised and overworked in an effort to squeeze as much value out of every person and every minute worked.

The middle class jobs created by a former manufacturing base are declining as manufacturing and service chase the lower wages of China and India and the promised new high-tech jobs have not appeared in great enough quantity to replace these jobs. More automation has led to more control and monitoring of employees creating less creativity and freedom for the worker. At Amazon, the people who pick the orders wear big computers on their arms that direct every move they make in the warehouse. People have become overworked commodities and things.

Even white-collar workers are not exempt. Companies can monitor your keystrokes and your online activities during work hours to ensure that you are not on Facebook or emailing friends during business hours. Yet workers are increasingly expected to be available to answer work related emails and phone calls

outside of normal office hours. If they complain then there are plenty of people only too willing to take their place.

The technological revolution is in actuality, taking away freedom rather than promoting freedom.

The Freelance Scam

In tandem, there has been a huge growth in what is called the 'freelance' economy. However, this 'freelance' economy often turns out to be nothing more than hard work and sometimes even goes as far as being an all out scam.

Some companies are not even hiring employees anymore because the overall costs to have an employee is higher. Costs such as health insurance, paid vacation and sick days are increasingly expensive to a company. An employee might also get the benefit of a company car and a computer to do their work, generating more expenses than an employer can afford.

Instead, a lot of companies are hiring contractors to do jobs formerly done by employees. I know a person who owns a delivery service. He hires delivery drivers as contractors. The contractor's business is being a driver for this company. They have to show up at work at a certain time and follow very specific procedures (like an employee), but they have to use their own car. If the car breaks down it is up to them to pay for repairs and while it is off the road, they are making no income. They don't get health insurance or benefits, they are responsible for their own car's upkeep and maintenance, but the fees they are paid don't reflect these costs. Not a great deal for the driver/contractor is it?

Waking Up and Finding the World has Changed

Imagine working hard and playing by the rules your whole life because you know that at the end of 30 years you will be taken care of. No worries. Now imagine working twenty-five of those years and then being laid off from your job five years before you qualify for your retirement—and everything you worked so hard for has vanished in an instant!

This is the story of far too many older workers. The retirement that they had planned for is either drastically reduced because they were laid off too soon or is gone completely along with the company they worked with for many, many years.

What does one do when the paradigm is shifting so quickly? The circumstances remind me of the time I lived in Warsaw, Poland in 1990. The Polish people dismantled their whole society as they broke away from the Soviet Union and the wall came down. Pensioners, who thought that their needs were taken care of were reduced to selling magazines at the train stations. As inflation hit, their 'living wage' pensions were decimated. They were getting \$20 a month which *would* have been enough for a modestly comfortable retirement. However, that rapidly became the equivalent of what \$20 a month would be in the U.S. They had worked their entire lives with the expectation that something would be there for them at the end and suddenly it was all gone.

When you look at places in the United States like Detroit the parallels are horribly close. Detroit was an entire city of municipal workers who were promised a pension, but when the city went bankrupt, their pensions were gone. Even government work is not a safe option anymore.

We know in this economy that our needs that are not going to be taken care of—we realize that it is no longer reasonable to think that we can devote our lives to a single company or a cause. It is time to devote your life to yourself—YOUR passion and YOUR brilliance. You need to make this new revolution work for YOU.

As we mentioned before, the whole way we work is changing. I clearly have a theory that our society is very quickly dividing into two camps. The Owners—the people who own their own businesses, own their own skills and provide products and services utilizing computers. And The Taken—everyone who ends up on the wrong side of the shift somehow—those who work jobs—those who work two or three minimum wage jobs just to make life work for them.

The Taken are increasingly becoming more and more controlled. They are being treated more like a commodity, more like one of the machines used to create efficiency and automation. The Taken are being taken advantage of!

And... people are not liking it! A Gallup Poll from 2014 shows that 70% of ‘Americans Hate Their Stupid Jobs’—link <http://bit.ly/1Ad24ds>

“Most of the discontent stemmed from ‘bosses from hell’ who didn’t foster talents, growth, or creativity. In the long run, Gallup has determined that between 450 and 550 billion dollars are wasted annually because of bad management.”

This Isn’t All Bad News...

The point of this book is not to discourage you, nor be all gloom and doom. Our aim is merely to show you that the old idea of ‘living the American dream’ is becoming increasingly irrelevant. ‘Going it alone’ used to be seen as the riskier option—but no longer!

We are here to encourage you to follow your passions and to create a business and a life around your brilliance, igniting what you want to do for all the reasons that you have to succeed. The silver lining is that you don’t need to work for a company or someone else anymore to make a good life for yourself and your family. All of those chains and shackles that used to bind us to corporate employment—the health insurance, the ability to find clients, the ability to talk to people, the infrastructure, all of that is now virtual, and accessible to anyone who has a little help and a little know how.

One of the most obvious benefits of the technological revolution is that you are no longer limited to selling or providing a service to people who live in your geographic area. You can attract customers from all over the country or even all over the world. I owned my virtual assistant business for over 4 years before I signed a local client!

Because you can now reach an unlimited global audience there is an endless opportunity to do work that truly matters to you. No matter what you offer, somebody in the world needs your product or service—plenty of people for you to make a good living for yourself and your family. It's just a matter of learning how to reach and connect with the right people and let them know that you are the one who can solve their particular problem. This is part of what we will teach you in this book.

The process of selling and doing business on the internet has become so easy and inexpensive that it is accessible to almost anyone. New platforms and services have made the 'mechanical' part of starting an online business very easy to do. The major stumbling block for most people isn't the technology but rather finding the sweet spot where their passion and their market's needs intersect.

Fortunately, there's more support and information available on how to do this than there ever has been before. Not only can you find out how to start a business, you can find others who are doing what you are doing and learn from them. Anything is possible.

Before you get too excited, we want to share some of the myths that have grown up around starting an online business:

Don't Fall for These Eight Online Business Myths

Myth 1: You Can Make Money in Your Underwear

The first myth is the dude in his early twenties, in his underwear, beer in one hand, telling everyone how he makes money while he sleeps. Even if you have the most amazing product or service that 'sold itself', there is still customer service that needs to happen, in order to keep that business.

And, you need to continue to market the product or service. I also believe that you cannot really make money completely virtually. There is some advantage to getting out and meeting people in your area who are doing things similar to what you want to do.

If not in your local area then at least in your particular field—at conventions, etc. Interactions with other like-minded individuals are inspiring and motivating.

Another version of this myth is the ATM or Automatic Cash Machine. Just send out an email and money will magically appear in your bank account. Often promoters of this type of system will show you an image of their latest bank statement (which is illegal by the way). However, what they don't tell you is that most of the internet marketers who have this sort of 'cash machine' have spent years perfecting it and have probably soaked up most of the best market. Many have a full-time staff to help with technology and marketing... *which brings us to Myth #2...*

Myth #2: Making Six Figures All By Yourself

The first online marketers you come across are people who are already pretty successful. They are 'visible' precisely because they are successful. These people are making at least six figures—and some are making seven. Some of my clients are making half a million dollars a year in this model of business. You see their marketing, you see their emails and you see their face all over everything. Perception may lead you to believe that they are, by themselves, behind their computer, making all of this stuff happen. Everybody has the same 24 hours and I can tell you that those people are not making everything happen in their businesses. They have a team! They have a team of probably a minimum eight to ten people who are working almost full time to make this happen for them. *This brings us to Myth #3...*

Myth #3: Making Six Figures Means You Are Doing REALLY Well

When the 'gurus' talk about their revenue—they are giving you their overall gross revenue numbers. This number is what they made before they paid out any expenses in their business. In actuality, they could be making hundreds of thousands in income but pocketing less than minimum wage. Don't let this scare you off from starting a passion-based business because it doesn't have to be like this.

The nice thing about virtual and online businesses is that your expenses should be on scale with your revenue if you manage it correctly. In the beginning there may not be a lot of expenses, but because you are not putting a lot of money into your business you are not making as much revenue. As more income starts coming in you can plow more money back into your business, which in turn helps you to make even more revenue.

Our E.S.C.A.P.E. Plan shows you how to scale up and expand your business when you reach the point where you are ready to do so (and before you reach the boiling-over point).

Myth #4: The Overnight Success

I have been in business for over eight years, and I have yet to meet a true overnight success.

As an example, it is a myth that you can put out an e-book and people will start buying it and you will make a \$1000 dollars a day on sales from your \$27 e-book. In order to achieve that level you would need to sell 500 e-books a day. That's a lot of e-books! You will be doing very well if you sell a couple hundred a month!

We've interviewed almost 100 entrepreneurs on our Paycheck to Passion Podcast. We asked them how long it took them to start seeing success. Want to guess how long they said? The answer is 18 months to 3 years. And that is not even how long it takes to reach a six-figure revenue. Eighteen months to 3 years to where they could comfortably quit their day job and feel like they were not going to be homeless in a box on the street. This isn't a quick and easy thing. Your business, just like any other business, is going to take time to build.

Take the case of Garrett Robinson. Garrett is an author who sells fantasy fiction books. He expects to make about \$200 a month from selling one of his titles on Amazon. Obviously, \$200 a month is certainly not enough to make a living. However, when you have 30 book titles each bringing in \$200 a month then making a living as a writer suddenly becomes a lot more viable. You can't write

30 books overnight but possibly you could write 30 books in a year which could generate enough income to make a living.

Myth #5: All the Good Niche Markets are Gone

The next myth is that every good niche market is taken and that it's too difficult to break through all the noise of people vying for those niches. The reason this particular myth just is not true comes down to the sheer size of the internet market base. There are billions of people on the internet from all over the world. We have a very big international client base in Solo Biz Hacker. We have people from everywhere—the United States, Canada, Great Britain, France, Bahrain—taking our classes and being a part of what we are creating and offering.

The people who participate in our programs could choose from hundreds of others who teach the same information but others won't be teaching in quite the same way. Our clients choose to work with us because there is something about *the way that we teach* that resonates with them.

No matter what your niche market is, even if it is something really competitive like weight-loss, if you are authentic and true to yourself then there is no competition because *nobody* can be YOU but you.

We find this is especially true for artists, because your art is completely personal. You are selling yourself, *your* process, *your* story—it is not just art you are selling. Finding and connecting with people that 'dig' what you are doing is what will create your success.

Myth #6: You Need to be a Tech Wizard to Have a Business Online

The next myth is that you have to know how to do everything technical yourself. You may believe that it is your job to create your website; to set up an auto-responder; to set up selling with an e-commerce storefront; to figure out how to hook PayPal in with your auto-responder; to figure out what kind of merchant account to get; to figure out how to put Facebook pixels on your page in

order to retarget your ads and even how to run the Facebook ads in the first place!

Fact: you don't have to know how to do *anything* online to be successful. There are people skilled in each of the tasks above who provide services and who specialize in every area of technical support you may need. If you're not technically adept, you can easily hire someone who is.

I spent the first seven years in my business doing precisely those technical kinds of things for people. It was something I enjoyed doing. To expect that you, personally, as an online business owner, have to know every little in and out, is like saying that you have to know how every little bit of your car works in order to drive the car. This is simply not true and a lot of people feel discouraged because they feel intimidated by the technological aspects of running a business.

The sheer volume of 'stuff' that there is to learn can be overwhelming. One of the best insights we had was from an interview with British entrepreneur, Andrew Gunn. As a film director he found that he was no longer getting enough work to sustain his family and he was forced to find a new way of making a living. That's when he discovered internet marketing. Andrew had to learn everything from scratch.

Andrew's interview really shows you that it can be done. Listen to Andrew's interview at <http://bit.ly/1F00Miy>

Myth #7: You Need to Spend Most of your Time Working ON your Business not IN your Business

This is the belief that you need to be spending 100% of your time ON marketing your business and making sales. Our problem with this statement relates to the issue of making sure you are doing the work that you want to do. If you didn't like your business and if it were not your passion you would not be doing what you are doing in the first place.

The key is to find a balance between being the ‘artist’ of your business, and being the ‘business person’. It doesn’t really matter what you are making or what you are creating. You can be making products, or creating coaching programs, it’s all the same. That core creative work HAS to come from you. It is the stuff that makes your business YOUR business. You can hire support staff to do all the necessary tasks that you totally hate doing. Think of an artist who has an apprentice—the apprentice prepares the canvas and palettes, the apprentice rinses out the paint brushes; the artist might also have a marketing person who does all his marketing for him, but what it does is allows the artist to create the art that makes the money.

One of the first things many business owners outsource is bookkeeping. It is a task that is very easy to delegate to someone who specializes in finances and keeping everything financial straight. It is important though to at least understand the basics of what you are hiring a bookkeeper to do—so you don’t get ripped off. Take some time to understand which tasks related to bookkeeping you may not want to do yourself. Once you know, then you can keep an eye on what is going on even as you delegate it to somebody else to actually do.

Myth #8: You Need to Spend a Lot of Money to Succeed

It is very easy to spend money in a business. People talk a lot about ‘investing in your business and the money will come to you—take out that second mortgage on your house—spend that money and things will start to happen’. To some extent this may be true. Having spent the money you may certainly be motivated to get your investment back!

But you really don’t need to spend a fortune (and you shouldn’t be taking out second mortgages on your home), to get the support and knowledge you need to get your business started—especially in the beginning. Try to keep your business in the black and refrain from spending money that you don’t have. Be sure that you can see the path for quickly recouping your investments. Another place where people spend too much money in the

beginning is on their website. People spend \$5,000 for a brand-name, handcrafted website—when what they really need is a simple WordPress site that can be created for less than \$1,000.

The same thing applies with coaching support. You can spend \$100,000 a year on a business coach very easily. You WILL get results, for sure, because you will be very motivated to recoup your investment. In addition, your coach will hold your feet to the fire to make sure that you do!

Alternatively, you could join our Solo Biz Hacker or similar type mastermind group and get some good beginning support for less than \$100 a month. Lean on the club to get the basics and spend the money later on for coaching when you are ready for the more advanced strategies and tactics of your business.

This first chapter has laid the groundwork for your E.S.C.A.P.E. Plan. *Are you ready to start building?*

Great! We are going to initiate the actual E.S.C.A.P.E. Plan in the next chapter.

Before we get started check out the following article just to make sure none of these reasons apply to you. We don't want you to put in a lot of effort into 'ESCAPING' if you are not ready to go for it!

Action Item: 10 Reasons

Are any of the following things holding you back from success? If so, how are you going to tackle them head-on today so you can ultimately be successful?

“10 Reasons Why Most People Are Major Failures”

by Jared Kleinert
<http://bit.ly/1EVjGpJ>

Tips and Inspiration:

Welcome to our first Tips and Inspiration section. After each chapter, we'll have tips and inspiration for you from entrepreneurs who have been there.... here are a few examples of what to expect:

“Don’t be scared to tell your story—stories are more compelling than data. Stories will be remembered. Your story is what will set you apart.”

— Madeleine Eno

“Have fun—otherwise you may as well have a job.”

— Kirk Muncrief

“Have clear boundaries—evenings are for family—I don’t work then. Boundaries are crucial to avoiding the burnout that will come if you don’t have boundaries. Pray for wisdom—it will come to you—all you have to do is ask!”

— Zechariah Newman

“Be the best you can be—even if you are in a corporate job you don’t like and want to get out of. Accept what is happening now and open up to the possibilities of opening doors around you. If you hate what you do, recognize that which is holding you back from those opportunities as well.”

— Kimberley Simon

“Don’t give up unless you have absolutely tried everything. Most people give up too easily.”

— Brian Bagnall

Rae Majors-Wildman

On the Importance of Environment and Community

“Most of us, when we are on this path, share with our family—and most of our family are supportive and say ‘go for it’—but a lot of families might not be so supportive.

If they are not, it is because they are afraid of what their life is going to look like if you become successful—are you going to leave them? So there may be a lot of fear.

And what you find is that all people conform to their environment. What I learned is that your environment will always trump your willpower. Your environment is your people, places and things. If you are hanging around with a lot of people who are not supportive, who are not in alignment with your vision, who are constantly negative, you are not going to succeed.

The same way if you are in a geographic location where you are not supposed to be, you are not going to succeed.

And it’s the same thing with your physical spaces. If you are in a physical space which is junky and it is cluttered—guess what, your mind is junky and cluttered.

Knowing that your environment will always trump your will power, it becomes all the more important that you surround yourself with the community of individuals who are like-minded, or even who have a greater goal or mind set than you.

When I first started I would tell my friends at that time what I wanted to do, they would say to me, ‘Oh you just think you can do it all, don’t you!’

Whereas now the people in my life say, ‘Oh you are playing small—put a zero on it!’



CHAPTER TWO

Your E.S.C.A.P.E. Plan To A Passion Based Business

Story—Jeannie Spiro

SOMETIMES it takes a very strong signal to let you know it is time to do something else. For Jeannie Spiro, the 'hint' was having her boss pass away at work in the middle of the day. Nobody knew until quitting time. This experience made Jeannie realize that life was too short to be doing something she couldn't stand.

Jeannie started working for a new company and began to work on her own business part time. Along the way she kept struggling because she couldn't figure out what the right formula was and how to make that final leap from employee to entrepreneur. For her, it all came back to learning how to get clients, learning how to fill her practice, and getting that first couple of thousand dollars in the door.

Ultimately, even when she was ready to make the leap to an entrepreneur, it was still scary because she was giving up a 25-year career of stability and benefits and leaving behind something

that had been her whole identity. She was putting all that aside and moving into something totally new and unfamiliar. Jeannie says, ‘I’ll tell you it’s been crazy emotions for me over the last couple of years, but going through this process was the best thing, and the hardest thing, I’ve ever gone through in my life.’”

E.S.C.A.P.E.

Are you fed up with working for someone else and getting nowhere? Have you been working on your business for a long time but you still aren’t making any money? Does it feel like you traded your job for another job, one that requires more work and pays less?

Are you ready to E.S.C.A.P.E. to a life where you are making money doing what you love? Let’s create *your* E.S.C.A.P.E. Plan!

As AWeber for the Paycheck to Passion Podcast, we have listened as dozens of entrepreneurs shared their stories on how they make money through their passions. We noticed that many common themes run through all their success stories. Although their businesses are vastly different, they all followed similar steps on the path to success.

We created our E.S.C.A.P.E. Plan system based on those proven, repeatable, successful steps.

Get ready to save yourself a lot of trial, error and time by following our plan. We’ll summarize the plan in this chapter and then go more in depth into the individual steps later in the book.

Ready?

Let’s go!

The E.S.C.A.P.E. Plan

E = Explore

The very first step in our process is to Explore. You need to decide (in general) what you would like to do as a business. At this point, you can be as impractical as you like. Just think about and write down EVERYTHING you think you would like to do. From Aerobic Hula Hooping Coach to Zoo Animal Therapist—anything is fair game. In the Explore chapter we'll show you how to create (and winnow down) that list so that you end up with something you are excited to start building.

S = Serve

The next step in the E.S.C.A.P.E. Plan is to pay attention to what customers are actually willing to pay for. (Note: You may need to re-think that Aerobic Hula Hooping Coaching idea).

Imagine a diagram with two circles that slightly overlap—on one side is your zone of brilliance—on the other side is what the market really wants. Where the two zones intersect is where you need to focus your service or product. So how do you find that?

You find your area to focus on through market research. In the Serve chapter, we'll show you exactly how to find out what your ideal customer is craving.

We'll also talk about the second part of serving, which is to find a community to help you create your products and services. By seeking other people's input early and often, not only will you create a better product or service, you will have a built-in group of raving fans to become your early adopters.

C = Create

The next part of the plan is the actual creation of your product(s) or service. This is the first phase in the construction of your platform. This includes the writing of what's called a manifesto—a declaration of the things you and your business believes in and how you can help others. At first you might not even have a product or service to sell. You might just have an opt-in process to build your mailing list for your future potential customers. You might have a free e-book or free video or something that people can sign up to get—something that will help people get to know you better while you are creating your product(s) or service.

Whether you are offering a product or a service you need to create a Signature System that is totally yours—a step-by-step process that people will go through to get the offering you provide. For example, our Signature System is called The E.S.C.A.P.E. Plan. Even if you own a restaurant you still have your own way or system to serve your customers—you have a vibe or a particular atmosphere or ambiance that you want your restaurant to be known for. Finding out what these elements are for your Signature System is all part of the creation phase.

The creation phase is also getting the infrastructure in place to start making money. This may include creating your website, hooking up to PayPal or a merchant account so you can receive money, setting up your e-mail autoresponders, etc. This phase is the equivalent of opening up a brick and mortar store but virtually and for a lot less money!

A = Amplify

The Amplify phase starts just as soon as you start letting the world know about you and the product(s) and/or service(s) you offer. You may have the most beautiful website in the world, but unless people can find you, you won't have any clients or customers or make any money.

The Amplify chapter is all about using that megaphone (we call it a platform). The good news is that if you follow the advice we give you in the chapter, you can reduce the time you spend on marketing by reusing and recycling any content that you have already created. We outline our entire time-saving system.

P = Perfect

A lot of businesses achieve early success only to find that they can't handle any more than three clients. Seriously think about perfecting your processes and systems from the very beginning as it will make it easier for you to move your business up to the next level as you grow and succeed.

In order to perfect your processes and systems you need to know what and how to measure in terms of the success of your marketing and amplification efforts; how to measure what kind of results you are getting for your clients; and how to tell whether or not your Signature System is working.

Questions may be:

- How much money am I currently making?
- Am I making money with this particular system?
- And if you scale it, will it make more money as a percentage or less?
- What are my margins?

In order to create, monitor and improve your Signature Systems you'll want to use project management tools. Project management tools will help create processes so that when you add people to your team they don't have to read your mind to know what to do—it's all laid out for them which will leverage your time and effort.

The other part of Perfect is in getting feedback and referrals from your clients and customers. From the very beginning, we highly suggest building into your system a method for customer evaluations of your offerings, and a way to encourage referrals. Every time your client takes a class, send out an evaluation

questionnaire—How was it? What can we change? What was it worth? What would you have liked us to cover that we didn't cover? *And. . .* Do you have you any friends or professional associates who you think might benefit from our service or information?

Keep in mind that testimonials are especially important in online marketing because they act as social proof or social influence. People are much more likely to hire or buy from someone that somebody recommended to them by someone who has used their services or products.

E = Expand

The final phase of our E.S.C.A.P.E. Plan is Expand. Expanding is all about exponentially increasing your business through the adding of more team members, the adding of more products, the refining of systems, the creation of partnerships and joint ventures, and so on. If you don't have a system ready to handle an increase in volume then it cannot take place. Think about where you want to take your business right from the very beginning so you can build a foundation on which to Expand.

Our Action Item for this chapter, now that you have a general outline of the E.S.C.A.P.E. Plan, is to spend some time filling out our '40,000 Foot View Worksheet' and put some time into imagining what all the elements are going to be for you and your business.

It's going to take time to build the business you want, and you will have to grow into it—growth is part of the journey. But if you plan from the beginning how you think your business is going to grow, then you can build that into your plan right from the start which will save you a lot of re-jigging later on.

You could also create a process and license it out to other coaches. For example, we are licensed facilitators of Laura West's Passion Project. Laura created a whole framework and designed how to offer and present the program. As licensed facilitators for her

program, we can promote the program as our own. Laura charged a flat fee for a package that included the training and the licensing as a facilitator. You could also offer the same kind of package in a percentage-share kind of deal, where people pay a portion of their workshop fees. Or you might build a network of people who come and work with you, either as licensees or sub-coaches.

You can set up your business for success in whatever way you choose, as long as you have the final direction in mind from the very beginning. For example, if you are a personal coach and are looking to go down the sub-coaching route, you might start looking for (and grooming) potential sub-coaches from the very beginning, starting with your first group of clients. If you are eventually planning on licensing your program, you might want to pay extra attention to documenting your systems as you develop them.

By taking a 40,000 foot view you can identify and delve further into each individual aspect of precisely where you want your business to go which is what we will be doing in the rest of this book.

Action Item: 40000 Foot Worksheet

Fill out this worksheet in advance—to get a clear vision of your dream—it WILL change with time.

Free action item worksheets at:
<https://solobizhacker.com/planning-your-escape/>

Tips and Inspiration:

Chris Sprague On the Importance of Overcoming Obstacles

“I realized that I was at the bottom, because my wife had left and I was going through financial turmoil, my birth mom had been diagnosed with cancer and little did I know that she was going to die very shortly after that, and also I was going to lose my last grandparent. So it was just a very, very rough time. Now, I just want to say one thing. I could’ve avoided all of this by understanding how I was wired and making my business successful much sooner than I actually did.

I knew in my heart and my soul, with every fiber of my being, that I was meant to do what I’m doing. I knew I was meant to be on the stage. I knew I was meant to inspire, transform and empower people’s lives. I thought it was in a bit of a different way back then. It wasn’t until later I realized it was meant to be through empowerment, not leadership, as the lead-in. And I also knew that if I made the business successful, I could overcome everything because I believed the financial stress was the biggest worry rather than settling for a short-term financial gain, which I had no promise that financial freedom was going to work either. I had no guarantee that trying to go back and rekindle my IT career which I had been out of, at that point, for a few years and out of the deep hands-on technical stuff for even longer. Yet again, there was no guarantee that this was going to work either.

So I had two no-guarantee situations, but I knew that I had much more control over creating a business that would be successful, than I did over going to find another job to get back into the workforce.”

Free action item worksheets at:
<https://solobizhacker.com/planning-your-escape/>



CHAPTER THREE

Top 10 Reasons To Start A Passion Based Business Today

Story—Judy O’Higgins Network Marketer

IN 2005, Judy O’Higgins was in the 25th year of her counseling career as a psychotherapist, and she’d been working pretty much nonstop for 25 years. You can’t really take time off as a therapist because your clients miss you and start tracking you down. As much as she loved being a therapist, Judy was burnt out. She dreaded the phone ringing and got depressed. (It really isn’t a good thing when the therapist is more depressed than the clients!)

Around that time, Judy was introduced to network marketing through a phone call from an old friend. She got really excited because network marketing gave her a way to touch people’s lives without sitting in an office and listening to their problems all day. Within two years, she was able to match the income she was making as a therapist, so she could quit her job and work her business full time (which actually equated to only 20 hours a week while making the same money as she did as a therapist, but without the stress).

Just in case you need a little more convincing.... *here is a list of 10 reasons to start your own business.*

Reason #1—To Be Your Own Boss

The number one reason people give for starting their own business is being able to control their own destiny and to be their own boss. They can work their business around their lives (rather than their lives around their work), they can wear what they want and not have to ask for time off. They have freedom to do what they want, when they want. Freedom is a great feeling!

Reason #2—To Share Your Passion with the World

When you start your own business, you're able to share your passion with the world and you get to live in that place of happiness of knowing you are making a difference in the lives of other people.

Purpose and passion are very closely intertwined when it comes to running a business. Finding a sense of purpose is what will bring you the passion. To the vast majority of business owners, passion and purpose are far more valuable to them than the monetary rewards. A lot of people say they have lost their sense of purpose by working for somebody else. When you work for a paycheck, it's really not YOUR purpose—it is somebody else's purpose. You're building someone else's dream.

Reason #3—To Leave a Legacy for Your Children

The third reason why people start a business is to build something that they can pass on to their children. There are a few ways this can work. One way is to build your business to the point that you have a tangible asset to pass on to your children.

Or, because often children don't want to work in the family business, a business owner will plan to have an exit strategy where they sell the business in order to provide a financial nest egg for their family. One could also argue that another way of providing a legacy is simply by being a role model for your children—showing

them what it means to live your passion and living the life that you want to live, because don't we all want that for our children? Don't we all want our children to be able to make a living on their own terms and to live their own passionate life?

Reason #4—To Control Your Destiny

Of course another big reason for starting a business is to have control of your own destiny. This reason is really more about having control over your own success, because a lot of people get 'stuck' somewhere along their career path. They reach a point where they can't advance any further, or they find themselves in the position of having to wait until somebody dies or leaves before they can get a promotion. A lot of people work hard for 20 years only to find out that what was promised in the beginning is not what they end up getting. By owning your own business, you get to create your own deal and destiny. Your success is completely within your control. But the corollary to that is that it is also totally your own responsibility to make it happen. The buck stops very firmly at your feet.

Reason #5—Creating Jobs for Others

Business owners love being able to create work for other people. Even if you don't hire employees, you may hire somebody do your website. You may hire someone be your bookkeeper. You might have someone be your customer service person. Ultimately, the business needs to work without you. At some point or another, you have to pass over those tasks to somebody else and in doing so you are adding to the economy and someone else's livelihood.

Reason #6—To Create the Lifestyle You Want

It is an amazing blessing that I own my business. I started my business when my daughter was three. She is now eleven and throughout all of that, I've been able to achieve a work/life balance that I never even dreamed was possible when I worked a full-time job. I worked full-time for the first three years of her life and I felt really guilty because I didn't get to see her very much. I would drop her off at day care at eight in the morning and pick her up

again at five that evening. Then we would have dinner and go to bed. I didn't really get to know her. And now, with my own business, I get to spend a lot more time with her. If she's home on vacation I get to be with her even though I might be working while she's hanging out in the house. I still get to spend that time with her and have that flexibility to be on school field trips etc.

Whether or not you have children, lifestyle balance is important. There's no flexibility in the corporate 8 to 5 workday (with long commute time on top of that). One thing about running your own business is you can work when you want to and when you need to. Whether that's in the evening, early morning or whatever works best for you. At least you will have some degree of flexibility over your day.

Reason #7—To Change the World

As a passion-based business owner, you can use your brilliance and passion to change lives. If you can create your business around your passion, it is extremely powerful. Working in corporate, it is easy to have a small job (like monitoring one report) that makes you feel like you are not making much of a difference to anyone. But as a small business, you really are making a huge difference you can experience every day, in the lives of the people you serve and help.

Reason #8—To Work from Anywhere

One of the beauties of the modern internet age is that for a lot of businesses, you can pretty well work from anywhere. There are an increasing number of people who actually work while they're traveling. They spend their entire time traveling from one country to the other and working virtually. This type of lifestyle, if you desire, is increasingly possible nowadays.

Reason #9—No Commute

I lived in Washington, D.C.'s metro area for thirteen years and I had a forty-five minute commute each way, and some people still thought that was short. In essence, you are really just wasting

an hour and a half of your life every-single-day commuting. I still have a small commute because I work in a co-working space. But, as my daughter's school is located right across the street it is little hardship. So I had that freedom to arrange my life in a way that worked for me and my daughter. Now all she has to do is walk across the street after school and meet me at work and we go home together. This works well for us both and wouldn't be possible if I didn't have my own business.

Reason #10—To Be Part of the Revolution

We are at the stage now where being able to run your own business and being able to attract the attention of potential clients and customers from all over the world through the internet is becoming both easier and increasingly more necessary. The world, as we now can see, is quickly being divided into two camps—the people who really have control over their destinies, and the people who really don't. By starting your own business and becoming someone who has control over your own destiny and who is building their own livelihood, even if it's in addition to your 'day-job', even if it's a side hustle, you still are inspiring other people to end up on the right side of that divide. Because they see you doing it and say, 'Well gosh, if Jasper can do that, I can do that too.'

Our Paycheck to Passion Podcast and our E.S.C.A.P.E. Plan Web Show relates the stories of people who have already succeeded in order to inspire others to do the same. Building and running a business is a process—a process which can be learned from other people's mistakes and successes and information.

By succeeding and inspiring others, you too are now part of the revolution!

Tips and Inspiration:

Cas McCullough **On the Importance of Discovering your Purpose**

“The best place to start finding out what you really want to do is by writing down what gets you out of bed in the morning—and gets you out of bed with a spring in your step. What makes you feel inspired? Start journaling. I think journaling is something we don’t do as much these days, because we tend to live our lives online. Its a great idea to take yourself out of that space—get a pen, get some paper and start writing down the things that are important to you, things that are meaningful and that matter. I know some people get caught up in this idea of a ‘life’s purpose’, and I don’t think that’s a bad thing, some people are really clear on what their life’s purpose is, but some people really struggle with that idea because it is so big. I think you just need to start with what it meaningful for you, things that bring meaning and joy to your life, and go from there.

Then I would map that out so you can see how to make that profitable. So if you decide that your purpose is something you can turn into a business—and not every purpose is—then you look at that for how you can structure that to make it profitable. So I would be looking for ideas to create different income streams, and creating products, creating courses, information products and programs, and kind of just doing a big mind map of all these different ideas you might have that are in alignment with your dream or your driving purpose.”

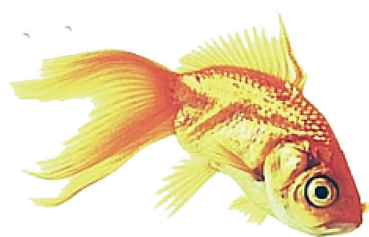
**Action Item:
The Top 10 Reasons
YOU Want to Start a Business**

Your homework for this chapter is to fill out the worksheet that we have for your top 10 reasons to start your business. Spend a little time, close your eyes, and imagine the world as it will be when you're successful. Imagine those top 10 reasons coming true. Write them down in the worksheet because this will help you with the rest of the process.

Your top 10 will inspire you to keep going through all adversity because your reasons why you're doing what you're doing are the most important aspects of starting and continuing with a business.

So, get writing.

Free action item worksheets at:
<https://solobizhacker.com/planning-your-escape/>





CHAPTER FOUR

What Does It Take To Be An Entrepreneur?

Story—Madeleine Eno

"LIKE most entrepreneurs, my path has not been a straight line in terms of getting where I am now. I think I always struggled, without knowing it, with trusting myself as a writer. For a long time I danced around it and, for me, that took the shape of being a bartender, a yoga teacher, an art teacher, a fund raiser, and going to graduate school—everything that had a little bit of writing in it, but never quite trusting myself to BE a writer.

My destiny had always been to be a writer. As a kid I wrote stories and poems and joined poetry clubs and so on, but as I grew older I lost that trust in myself as a writer. The thread through it all, no matter what I was doing—I was writing. When I was teaching yoga, I was giving people stories to read; when I was bartending, I would scribble on napkins. That common strand of writing which ran through everything was always there and I just started to listen to it a bit more.

The turning point was being laid off from a job—I was a magazine editor, which was pretty close to being a writer, to make me really

think, ‘Okay, could I run my own business and if I did what could I do? Well it has to be writing.’—that was my entry point. And then it was working with a coach that got me to see my skill in seeing someone’s whole story—not to create boilerplate copy for them, but to really see what makes them unique, what their own story is, and then weave that into their marketing.”

What is an Entrepreneur?

Within American culture there has always been a certain amount of ‘idol-worshipping’ when it comes to entrepreneurs. They typify our values of being pioneers and doing things their own way. Along with this goes a belief that entrepreneurs are a breed apart and that entrepreneurs are born and not made.

Having your own business does require a different mindset and different skills than being an employee. Some people are born naturally with these skills—or learn them from entrepreneurial parents. However, it is possible to develop all the skills you need if you are aware of what those skills are.

Here are the skills you need to develop to be a successful entrepreneur:

Passion

Passion is essential if you are going to run a business because you have to have something that gets you up on those days when you’re not making money. You need to be able to say ‘This is the change that I want to make in the world. This is what I want to see happen. I am passionate about it. I believe in it.’ If you don’t have that basic, fundamental belief in the change that you’re making, the entrepreneurial road is a very, very hard one to travel.

Big problems begin to edge their way into an entrepreneur’s life when they don’t have a passion for what they’re doing. They basically look at their business as a way to earn money or a way to replace their income. This is not a creative or inspiring way to be a business owner. There are a lot of people out there who live this way and it might work if you are working for someone else,

but when you own your own business you won't last very long if you don't love what you're doing. You're going to be doing it day in, day out, for years. With a job, you have somebody looking over your shoulder basically telling you what to do. If you don't do it, they will fire you. As a business owner, there is only you and you need to be self-motivated... having a passion for what you are doing is essential to keep you going.

Grit

The second trait you need as a successful entrepreneur is pure grit. Grit is just being able to keep going when the chips are down and the odds appear to be against you. You're a concert promoter. It's raining. You have the event anyway come hell or (literally) high water!

One of the things that we hear all the time from the guests that we interview on our podcast is that being an entrepreneur is like being on a roller coaster. You have to like the thrill of the roller coaster. It's just inevitable in business that there will always be ups, and there will always be downs. It's a matter of being able to pick yourself up and have the resilience to manage and persevere through any and all adversity. You need to know, deep down, that at the end of the day, you're going to succeed, and that it is not necessarily always going to be an easy path.

Of course, it does help to know that if you are in a down slump that there will be an up flow following along soon. If you can push your way through the challenges, it will get better, you will get better. It is about understanding the ride on the roller coaster and being able to plow through the ups and the downs.

Self-Belief

The next trait you need is self-belief. You need to believe in yourself because if you don't, then neither will anyone else. You need to know that you are capable of helping people make the change you want to help them make; or that your art is good enough to be sold; or that as a personal coach that can really make a difference in your client's life. You need to believe that

you deserve to be paid the rates that you're charging because any sort of lapse in self-belief will be readily apparent to your clients and customers making it very difficult to sell your products or services to succeed.

Self-belief may not even be a conscious thing. It may be just a vibe that gets picked up by the person you're talking with. They may not express directly that they don't have confidence in your abilities, but that's basically what it will boil down to, because if you don't have confidence in yourself, how do you expect anybody else to have confidence in you? It is a vital part of being a business owner. Many personal coaches call this 'mindset' and it's why so many coaches teach mindset, because it is very easy to undermine yourself or get undermined by other people. You need a process by which to work your way through those blocks because, if you don't, you won't get anywhere.

Being Able to See the Future

One key trait of an entrepreneur is to stay just enough ahead of the game to tweak their business' offerings to meet their client's ever-evolving needs. Ideally, you meet those needs before the customer truly knows that they even need them.

Being able to see the trends and ultimately see the future helps you to become a sought-after thought leader. Beginning entrepreneurs often want every step mapped out for them—successful entrepreneurs are comfortable mapping out new territory.

Taking Risks

The next trait you will need is being willing to take a risk, because success doesn't come necessarily to those who cling to what is safe or clinging to what is referred to as your 'comfort zone'. Successful businesses are trying out new things. They want to do things a little differently to what is currently being done and are willing to create and experiment along the way even if it means taking a risk. If safety is what you want then employment is probably a better option for you because having a business and 'risk' go hand-in-hand. As a business owner you don't really know

what is going to come and smack you in the face at any given moment and accepting this risk is imperative.

Part of being able to take risks in stride is the ability to be comfortable with ambiguity. You can have a feeling about something and it's not one thing or another it's kind of in the middle. You have to be comfortable with situations that are not quite as cut and dried as you would find in an office environment. You have to be comfortable with it being a little smudgy around the edges.

What If You Don't Have These Characteristics?

Are you thinking, 'This is awesome—and if I am this person it will be amazing because I would conquer the world, because these are all really good success traits, and I have them!'

Or, are you thinking, 'What if that's not really me?' or what if you recognize a couple traits that aren't you at all?

I will admit that I am not a huge risk taker, which is why when I started my business; I became a service provider so that I was not putting in a lot of capital investment. As a provider of a service, I wasn't creating goods and inventory and then taking the risk of not getting paid for my products.

Fortunately, as soon as I signed up my first clients they were the type that paid me every month, and they all stayed on with me forever. But I admit, it was a very safe way to start a business. Granted, not a lot of big monetary rewards, but it was safe and easy. Basically, I created a job for myself or honestly five jobs for myself, but at least those jobs I could do with reasonable flexibility.

I have been known to have trouble with the self-belief trait of being an entrepreneur too. I feel like I can't possibly create all the value that I promise to people although everyone who's ever worked with me says, 'Oh but Meredith, you create very valuable things, and what you do is amazing, and I love being part of your community, and I've gotten a lot out of being part of your group.' But still, when I look at myself I feel like, 'Oh gosh, I'm a fraud. I'm

pretending.’ But I think doubting our own abilities is very common for a lot of people.

So, how did I overcome these issues? First, I re-structured my business to compensate for those personal challenges and then I hired a personal coach to help me overcome the self-belief issues. Another thing I did was partner with someone who has very different strengths than I do.

While I am not a risk taker, my business partner Jasper is. This is a great combination because we balance each other out and probably end up in a perfect place somewhere in the middle, between playing it completely safe and playing it completely risky.

You can balance yourself out by who you Joint Venture (J.V.) with, who you create partnerships with, who you collaborate with. You can create a business that maximizes your strengths. As I said, when I started my business, I knew I wasn’t much of a risk taker. I knew I was very flexible and fairly passionate and gritty.

Starting out, a good thing for me was to create a business where I was going to get paid for the hours that I worked. It may not have made me as much money as other business models so there is a cost benefit to different approaches that has to be weighed for yourself. For me, it was a way of getting into business and getting started. I have had income from my business every month for the past eight years, so in the end it was a successful choice for me.

When I was ready to move to something else, I needed to find a partner who had the strengths that I didn’t have in order to make my next business venture work.

You might not be in a place where it makes sense to ‘jump off cliffs’. Maybe you have a young child or aging parent to support— or perhaps you are the primary breadwinner. When you are in that place, nobody says you have to quit your full-time job to start your own business.

As a matter of fact, a lot of the people we interview on the Paycheck to Passion Podcast haven't jumped off any cliffs. They still work full-time, or they continued to work full-time for two or three years while they build their businesses on the side.

Another option is to start honing those entrepreneurial skills within your current job. That is called being an 'intrapreneur'. You can become an intrapreneur in your company by looking for problems. Go through our E.S.C.A.P.E. Plan and explore what you want to do in the company. Figure out how what you want to do fits with what the company needs. Find the gaps, go through the process so, in the end, it becomes pretty much the same kind of thing.

Create your plan with your current job's business, amplify and let people know about your plan. You can perfect the system, and then expand into a promotion, or grow into other duties or roles. Or maybe just practice for the day when you are ready to actually make the jump into your own business.

A Final Note On Being An Entrepreneur

Very few people naturally have every attribute in this chapter. The advice we hear over and over again from our podcast interviews is to find support early to compensate for and learn the traits you don't have naturally.

Your homework for this chapter is to fill out the Entrepreneur's Checklist and figure out where your strengths are and where your weaknesses are. Then, come up with the beginning of a plan to make yourself the very best business owner you can be.

“Adults over the age of 50 comprise one of the fastest-growing groups of entrepreneurs in the United States according to a new Gallup study. Among those people who don't currently own a business, baby boomers are twice as likely as millennials to say they plan to start a business in the next year.”

The majority of those prospective entrepreneurs cite a desire for lifestyle changes as the reason behind their desire to launch a new venture in the later stages of their careers. Specifically, 32 percent of the baby boomers surveyed said they are choosing to start businesses primarily because doing so will allow them to be independent, while 27 percent say it will give them a chance to pursue their interests and passions.”

Tips and Inspiration:

Mary Lyn Miller On the Importance of Moving from Employee to Entrepreneur

“There is a process from shifting from the W2 life to the 1099 life. When you are an employee you are in the waiting game—you go, you do your job, and then you wait for your check on Friday. When you work for yourself you are in the position of creating your money. Its a very different game—you can’t wait for anything. You have to be in a creative mode, which means being in a place of service—How am I going to provide services and programs that are really going to help my clients? How am I going to find a client? It’s a whole lifestyle change.

One of the things Stephen Covey said, he talks about it being reactive and proactive—its exactly the same thing. In Seven Habits of Highly Effective People, Covey talks about the difference in effectiveness in your life between waiting and creating—it’s more than 100%—it’s more than 1000%. He says it will change your life by 5000%—that’s the difference between waiting and creating. If you are a creator—bam!—Once you get into that proactive, creative frame of mind of ‘I’m going to create my money—I’m going to create my opportunities’ then you are going to see an increase in your effectiveness in every aspect of your life.

Success is truly a team sport. You can’t stay fired-up, focused, fearless, all those wonderful things without a consistent flow of support, and new ideas, accountability and encouragement.

Entrepreneurship is an emotional journey—you have to delegate (well that’s not comfortable), you have to constantly operate outside of your comfort zone, you need a new money mindset—none of this is very easy stuff—and sitting your living room, by

yourself, trying to figure out, isn't going to happen because you are going to be thinking with your own thoughts. You are going to be thinking with everything that got you to exactly where you are. So—all of us—we need new stuff. Having been in business 25 years, I buy into this stuff big time! I've always been part of some sort of group because I know that's where the action is. If you have a dream—you need to find a team! “

**Action Item:
Take the Entrepreneurship Quiz**

Free action item worksheets at:
<https://solobizhacker.com/planning-your-escape/>



CHAPTER FIVE

Story—Catharine Syblème Warns of Developing a ‘Pseudo-Passion’ Instead of Finding your Real Passion

"WHEN I was very young, my mother pointed out that I had some musical talent and encouraged me to develop it. So, being a good, compliant child, I did as I was told. I picked up the flute at the age of seven, and for the next 40 years, I practiced, studied, and performed. Even got a Bachelor's degree and played a brief stint in the Santa Fe Opera.

But deep down, I developed my musical talents because I was told that I was good at it and I felt like it was expected of me. It wasn't like I got home and couldn't wait to pick up my instrument. Every practice session was a chore, not a joy. For 40 years, I tried to bring my heart over to my talent ... and it always ended up feeling hollow. Why? Because music isn't my true passion.

Oh, it's not that music isn't fun sometimes, and it's not that I can't drum up considerable enthusiasm for it now and then, but it's not truly in harmony with me. If it were, wild horses couldn't keep me from playing the flute, even for free. This is why I never really

succeeded as a musician. I was a hobbyist who got paid once in awhile, nothing more. I was good...but not great.

Wanna know what I wanted to grow up to be when I was in seventh grade? An author.

I can't stop myself from writing, whether it's blogging, responding to a Facebook post, writing emails ... my laptop is littered with little notes and insights that I've jotted down that may never be seen by another set of eyes. And I don't care.

I wish now I had listened to my seventh-grade self instead of spending 40 years trying to drum up enthusiasm for a pseudo-passion that I was simply good at. The game of life isn't about developing your skills and then trying to drag your heart out to them. It's about bringing your skills home to your heart."

Step 1: E = Explore

Thinking about your true passion doesn't take any effort. It's always there, lurking in the shadows, ready to pounce on you the minute you're not thinking about something else. There's no sense of 'should'. It's interesting to note that your true passion may or may not be something you're good at.

Ask yourself these questions:

- What do you find yourself thinking about when your mind wanders?
- What are you drawn to when you're not doing other things?
- What did you want to do when you were a kid?
- What do you feel compelled to do, whether you're being paid for it or not?
- What do you talk someone's ear off about, even if their eyes glaze over?

You might be able to make a decent living at a pseudo-passion, but it will always feel like a slog, and you won't exude the kind

of effortless magnetism that compels clients and opportunities to beat a path to your door.

For true happiness and success, bring 'I do' home to 'I am', not the other way around.

Are You Ready to Start Plotting Your Escape?

Good. The first step of any adventure is to get out the binoculars and get a good look at the distant shore where you are headed. That sounds great but what if you don't know what business to start? This chapter covers the Explore process. We'll give you the tools you need to begin to see that far shore—to create a business that uses your passions and talents.

Why is it Important to Find a Business Based On Your Passion?

How do you want to spend those precious seconds and hours and minutes that you have? Do you want to be doing something that really fulfills you and really makes a change in the world and really helps other people?

Here's how to begin the Explore process:

STEP 1: Find Your Hidden 'Superpower'

Superpower? Yep, everybody has one—that thing that you are naturally good at. When I tell people that—they ask... 'How do I find out about this amazing talent you say that I have?' There are two ways.

The first is to think about what it is that people ask you for all the time, and you think, 'I can't believe that they're asking me for help with this, I find this really easy to do. Why are they asking me?'

My superpower is helping people to find and use the right tools to get things done online. People ask me to help them find the right tool for their system all the time. For me finding the right tools is simple. It drives other people crazy.

You can also find your superpower by looking at what is most difficult for you to teach because you tend to not start at the beginning. It is easy for you—why don't other people get it?

Another way to find your superpower is to simply ask. Ask your friends, ask your clients. Put the intention out to God or the Universe to show you 'What am I absolutely awesome at?' Start looking for clues.

When our clients do this exercise and ask their friends, they are usually surprised at the answers. 'Wow, I'm good at that? That seems so easy and fun to me.' Often it is hard for us to see our superpowers because we don't even have to think about it. Often it takes someone to point it out to us before we can see it ourselves. And who knows you better than your friends, right?

STEP 2: What's Bugging You?

Another place to find that 'superpower' is to look for a problem that you've had—a problem that you've solved for yourself and would like to solve for other people. One of the things that bothered me when I started my business was that business owners were spending too much time and money on their websites when what they really needed was a more comprehensive online marketing plan. I started offering clients simple WordPress sites—along with a strategy that included email marketing and social media. Problem solved.

One of our podcast guests, Tamar Lucien, was a recruiter. She saw a problem in how people were matched up with jobs. She ended up developing software that handled that process in a much better way for both the employee and employers. Tamar's new system allows employers to quickly find good help and employees get hired faster. This new system is a win-win. To hear Tamar's podcast, go to: <http://bit.ly/1L6Hw6C>

STEP 3: Who Do You Want to Help?

The third step in beginning to find 'your business' is honing in on who you want to help. We will cover how to determine who your

ideal client is later in this book but it helps to have a general goal in mind right from the beginning. Do you want to help people just like you make the same transformation you've made? Is there a particular group of people who would benefit the most from what you have to offer? Do you feel passionate about a specific topic or issue? An example of this could be a dance teacher who wants to use her skills to help teenage girls overcome body image issues—or an online marketing expert who wants to help retired people start their own businesses.

Tips and Inspiration:

Andrew Hayes Top Tips to Someone Who Has a Passion and Needs a Place to Start

“The first thing is you need to ask yourself is what you really want to create. I don’t want you to create what you think other people want. For example, I was a great consultant but if I wanted to make that into a business that I ran for the next 50 odd years, then I’d have to make that into a consulting company, and that’s not what I wanted—I could have made a lot of money that way, but it is not what I wanted.”

The second thing is to get feedback, based on the things you want, as to what customers are really wanting—and you just have to go out and ask people. You have to get out of your house and talk to people. And I was really reluctant to do that in the beginning. Emails are not enough. Surveys are not enough. Even if you have to buy them a Starbucks gift card, buy them coffee, buy them pastries—whatever it takes.

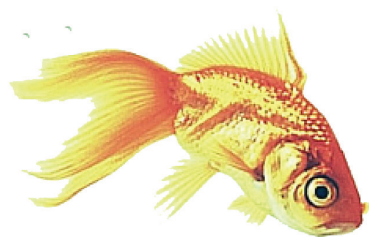
The third one is finding support systems that will support YOU. You can find them online and in your local community but you have to have at least one person in your circle who is going to support you no matter what and who will tell you that it is all going to work out fine. Someone who knows you—someone local so that you believe them when they say it.

And lastly, I always like to tell people that they have ‘permission’ to experiment, and create, and to make things the way that they want. If you are in this whole dialogue because you are in a job that sucks because you have to get up at five in the morning, and you want a job that starts at noon, you can create that—you can choose that way. You don’t have to listen to what anyone else

says. We live in a time where you truly are empowered to create a lifestyle and business that works totally for you. We are in a time now where it is all possible. So give yourself permission."

**Action Item:
Crowdsourcing Your Passion Worksheet
(10 things you ROCK at
and 10 ways you want to help)**

Free action item worksheets at:
<https://solobizhacker.com/planning-your-escape/>





CHAPTER SIX

Story—Ponchita Lilly

POCHITA has a really interesting story about how she was a government clerk processing social security applications, which was a bit boring for her, so she was trying to figure out what to do with her life instead.

“I wasn’t sure what I wanted to do with my life and about three years ago I went back to college. While I was in college I had a marketing assignment in which I had to sell a product that, one, I loved, and two, I knew a lot about. At the time I started my project, I wasn’t quite sure what it was that I was good at. Of course, that’s why I went back to school. I was trying to find out what it was I wanted to do with my life. After heavy contemplation, I looked around my room at home one day and saw nothing but cosmetics on my dresser. I thought, ‘Wow. I must really love make-up and cosmetics.’”

A light bulb went off in my head and I thought, ‘I guess that would be a perfect thing for me to start my project on because I’m pretty passionate about it.’ Long story short, I did research, I did homework, and I found out a lot of information about the cosmetics industry. And not only that, I found that I was passionate about

it. That passion was the one driving force that helped me to start my business. I loved make-up, I was always my friends' go-to person when it was time to either make up their faces or give them background information about certain cosmetics brands. That's how it started for me.

The main thing that was lacking in the industry was highly pigmented products for African American women. As African American women, we often have a hard time finding a perfect match for our skin, skin types, and complexions. So I looked for products that would help us in that area. That's how I got started with my business.”

Step 2: S = Serve

Now you know what you want to do—and who you want to do it for! Congratulations. The next trick is to find out how what you have to offer will address a need that people have. You need to find the gap between the whole universe of what you can do, and the whole universe of what the market needs. The most successful businesses are the ones that can fill this gap effectively.

To find the gap, find out where people are currently under-served with regards to your product(s) or service(s). Finding the gap might be as simple as finding a different way of doing something. Maybe you can do something in a way that saves several steps in a process, thereby making it easier for your customer to do, or cheaper for them to have done.

You might be able to create things that resonate with your particular audience better than anybody else does. I teach a lot of the same strategies many other people teach. However, people like to learn from me because I make it fun versus maybe learning from someone else who's a little more hard-driven and a little more 'serious'. You might fill a gap because you present your information in a way that resonates with a particular set of people. Or possibly you can fill a tiny little part of a niche that nobody else has seen. I know a person who makes very good money selling

guitar picks and that's all she sells. She sells various colors, types and kinds of guitar picks. She makes about \$50,000 per year writing about guitar picks, recommending guitar picks, all that encompasses guitar picks.

I know someone else who has a very successful site teaching people how to play the ukulele. Who knew that there was a demand for ukulele lessons, but it's a very popular site with hundreds of members. He saw something that nobody else saw—that there wasn't any good quality ukulele instruction available online. Maybe there is on a local basis—he is from Hawaii, so I'm sure in Hawaii it is not too hard to find a ukulele teacher, but in other parts of the country it might be somewhat harder, therefore successful online lessons.

Passive Research

How do you find the gap? The first step is to research your subject. Passive research is easy to do right from your computer screen. As you become more active, getting out in front of people at networking and other events, for example, you'll get much more detailed results because you can ask people follow-up questions far more easily when they are in front of you. But until then, doing passive computer-based research will give you some insights to begin with.

The most passive way to research is to join forums. First, figure out who the guru is in your particular field. For example, in the online marketing world, you might look at Suzanne Evans or Ali Brown. Join their forums and listen to their Twitter feeds to find out what questions people are bringing to them. Go into Quora.com and see what questions people are asking. Do a search on different Twitter hashtags—hashtags represent conversation threads that people are following. Twitter is an amazing market research tool because you can really get a sense of the questions being asked, what's popular at any particular moment (trending), and what people are listening to and wanting to know more about. If you have customers already, survey them. Ask them what their biggest problem is. Ask them what is the one thing that is

standing in their way? Ask them what is the one thing that they wish worked differently?

You can also visit Amazon.com and look up the best seller list on Amazon books. Look at the titles because if there's a top-seller book on their site it means that a market exists for that subject.

If you want an excuse to go hang out at the bookstore and have some coffee, you can go to a local Barnes & Noble, or a local Hastings and see what books and especially what magazines there are for the field that you are interested in researching. If a magazine for your passion exists then it means that there is a readership large enough to create a publication for, and therefore something with profit potential. Look inside the magazines and as with books on Amazon, look at the table of contents. Each individual chapter, or individual article, may give some great ideas for the kind of products or services you could create for your niche market. This is another way to research.

More Active Research

Hang out at your local Starbucks and talk to your ideal customers in person. I know this may seem like a scary thing to do but you can get better data individually than you can from a thousand people answering an online survey. If you have conversations with twelve people who represent your ideal customer it will not only give you all the insight into your offering that you need, but it also puts those people on notice that you're creating something they might want to take advantage of later. Some of them may well end up being your first customers!

For those of you who already have customers, let them know what you are doing. Say something like, 'I'm creating a new product and I really need your help to create it.' In doing so you will create buy-in and interest so when you offer that new product or service for purchase they feel that they have been part of the development process, and therefore will be much more ready to buy because they feel as though they have played a part in its creation.

Another way to research, (a method we learned from Mike Michalowicz who put together an excellent book called *The Pumpkin Plan*), is to go talk to other businesses who serve your customer base and ask them what their customers are telling them is missing so you can fill the gap.

Mike gives an example of how he provided computer tech support for stock broker firms. He was on site at one particular company where the cable people were in doing work there at the same time he was. They found that they were both undoing each other's work. Mike's team was setting it up with all the cables configured one way and the cable people would take it down so that the cables would fit in with the furniture.

Finally what came out of this day was a whole new line of office furniture that was designed for stock market firms and their particular cabling configurations. It was a solution that not only helped service providers but also saved the stock brokerage firms the time and money spent by their contractors undoing each other's work. This was an obvious hit because it landed right where the customers' needs were.

By looking at what your customer's needs are and showing you care about helping them, they will not only know who you are, but are also much more likely to refer you others. For example, let's say you're a web designer. Spend some time and talk with copywriters about the complaints that people have had about their web designers. They might say, 'Well, my customers don't like that they find their website so hard to update.' Or, 'My customers don't like that they ask for things from the web designer such as, 'Could I have an opt-in up top?' and the web designer says, 'No.' Or, they don't like the fact that one web designer works on it, and later they hire someone else to do some amendments and new designer can't figure out what the original web designer did.

If you're a web designer you can look at those comments and say, 'I can solve those problems, I can address those objections in my copy, in my sales pages.' Then a copywriter may see you

as someone who gets it, thinking ‘They understand me. They understand what the website has to be like in order to present good copy to potential customers.’

With a good experience, your clients are also much more likely to refer you to other people and to THEIR clients. Then when a client comes to you for some web design work you can say, ‘Okay, you need someone to write your copy as well? Okay, talk to this person because they really understand what’s involved from a technical perspective to making the copy work.’ It’s a win for the client AND both of the different service providers.

Asking Questions Is The Way To Find The Gap

Finding the gap is critical. I know a lot of coaches who start with thinking, ‘This is what I feel I was called to impart into the world.’ So they create a thousand products. ‘Here’s my audio book. Here’s my DVD. Here’s my video. Here’s my retreat.’ But none of the products have anything to do with what people actually want. Their information may be what a person *needs*, but it’s not what they *want*.

The difference between those two things—what a customer needs, and what they want is an important concept for someone thinking of going into business to fully understand. Sometimes a customer doesn’t know they need something until they are shown the distinction. Often a business has to offer what the client wants in order to get into a conversation where they can educate them on what they really need. A customer doesn’t realize they ‘need’ a particular solution, it means they certainly are not going to be looking for that solution. You have to know what a client wants first, attract them based on that ‘want’, and then talk to them about what they really need later on.

By doing research on needs v.s. wants, you can position yourself in precisely the right way to attract the customers you want and be prepared to offer them more.

A classic example of this phenomenon is new businesses owners wanting a website. A customer will say, ‘I need a website.’ When

people say to you they need a website, what they really need is an online marketing plan, especially in the beginning, because just having a website isn't really going to do anyone much good without a way to have others find the site. This plan is like one hand clapping in the forest—nobody hears it. A website won't help you if no-one will find you. What the customer really needs is a whole strategy around how to get people to their website. They need a strategy about what's on the website that leads people to the next stage. They need an e-commerce system so that people can pay them for their product or service. There are a thousand things that your business needs besides just the 'website'. Yet what are people looking for when they start up? A 'website'.

A great interest generating opt-in for a business that helps people with online marketing is something to do with websites. Even though you may not offer website design, people are looking for websites. The people who are looking for websites are really looking for your services but they don't know that yet. Even if you end up referring them to a different web designer because that's not what you do, at least you've attracted a potential client with what they want and they've learned something new.

This interest then gives you the opportunity to inform them about what they really *need*. If you start out with, 'I'll help you with your marketing automation system,' they won't have a clue what that means, let alone why they would need such a thing. All they know is that someone has told them that if they are starting a business then they really need a website. They probably don't even know why they need one, other than it is what everybody else does so they probably should be doing it too.

Same thing with people who say, 'I need a Facebook page.' (and they may need a Facebook page). But just having a Facebook page isn't going to do them any good because nobody will find it without promotion. What they really need is somebody who can create a strategy to create Facebook ads, and then create a strategy to create Facebook Pages that are attractive and useful enough that people will want to 'Like' them and keep coming back

to engage with their product or service. From there, a further strategy can be created based around what action you want those followers to take once they have 'Liked' your page—and so on, and so on, all the way through to the success and results you desire.

As you can see, true success is obtained by always focusing on what potential clients and customers want—then giving them what they need—while at the same time focusing on the intersection of what you love/want to do—and combine your passion with what the market really needs. Presto!

Frankly, right now there's not a huge market for underwater ukulele players although that might be your all-consuming passion. No one's going to buy your service because you can't hear the ukulele underwater so it's kind of a problem. Now, that doesn't necessarily mean scrapping the whole idea either. Maybe you need to just lose the 'underwater' part of your plan. Instead, maybe explore teaching ukulele for people who are intimidated by music, something more specific like that. Figure out who your audience is and how you can make their life easier and you won't go wrong.

Tips and Inspiration:

Kriker Bradsher On Finding The Gap

“It all started about ten years ago when I transitioned my salon over to just a natural hair care salon. Around that time women of color were starting to realize that they had nice hair. We had been taught that we didn’t have nice hair and most women would go out and put relaxers in it to make it straight. That involves putting a chemical on it called sodium hydroxide lye, or calcium hydroxide, and then after the chemicals are applied, the hair is flat-ironed straight. It will stay that way until, of course, it starts growing out from the root area. Women typically come in every 6 to 8 weeks to get the growth area touched up. But, as you can imagine, that process is not good for the hair at all. Many women have been getting relaxers in their hair continuously since they were children. A lot of women suffer from alopecia or sudden hair loss because of it, and often the damage can’t be rectified.

The natural way is obviously more healthy for the hair and often they can do pretty much the same things with their hair when it is natural, including wearing it straight. It may not last as long, but you have to learn to embrace yourself and enjoy what you naturally have. And I think a lot of women are just getting tired of all the problems they are having with their hair because of the constant use of relaxers.

I’ve always worn my hair naturally myself and I saw a growing need amongst African American women, many of whom were coming to me because they wanted their hair styled naturally. Because there are so many different ways to wear their hair now, so many more African American women are embracing their natural look and it is becoming much more acceptable now—especially in the workplace.

When I transitioned my salon I basically told my clientele that I wasn't going to use relaxers anymore. Some complained, and at first I thought, 'Oh my God, what have I done', but a lot of celebrities were starting to wear their hair naturally and so after a couple of months they were ready to take the challenge themselves. And for me there was no going back because this was where my passion truly is, where my drive is, and where I can really help women become more appreciative of what they actually have.

After that I invented my own formulas for natural hair, called My Honey Child, especially made for African American women, because most of us suffer from dry hair and we have to apply products that have heavy types of oils, heavy types of cream-bases to our hair to keep it hydrated so it's not going to break off. That's what my line really focuses on."

Action Item: 5 Gaps Worksheet

Your homework for this section is to identify five gaps in the market, and we help you do that on the 5 Gaps Worksheet.

Access all of the worksheets in the
E.S.C.A.P.E. Plan at:
<https://solobizhacker.com/planning-your-escape/>



CHAPTER SEVEN

Finding Your Ideal Customer

Story—Kelly Enger

KELLY James Enger of BecomeBodyWise.com is a freelance writer. Kelly has been making a living writing about health issues, fitness, and personal training for the past 17 years. To be able to make a living that long as a freelancer is an accomplishment in and of itself. She has a couple of different businesses: she's still writing, and she's an active ghostwriter who sells articles to magazines. She also helps people create freelance writing businesses.

"I kind of stumbled into pitching and writing articles that I had personal experience with, but the pieces were not limited to my personal experience. The first sale was to Cosmopolitan Magazine, and it was an article on how to survive your last two weeks on the job.

At the time, I had changed jobs four times in five years. Remember, I was a miserable, unhappy lawyer, so I kept changing, going from firm to firm. I had a lot of experience with that two-week notice phenomenon—the two weeks when you've given your notice,

you're still there, and you know you don't want to be there. They know you don't want to be there. You're stealing office supplies. That kind of thing.

But the second part of that was I knew that pretty much any reader of Cosmopolitan Magazine is going to face that same scenario. I've given notice at my job. What do I do? I don't want to burn my bridges. How do I comfort myself? So I started pitching and writing articles that I (A) had some kind of personal experience with and (B) knew that the readers of the publication would be interested or affected by the topic I was writing about. So that's how I started initially.

The thing is to look for regular markets and regular clients right from the beginning. It took me about a year and a half to figure out that it's much easier to write for a market, whether it's a magazine or a corporation or a nonprofit, whoever your client is, and it's much easier to do work for regular clients than to constantly get new clients.

It took me about 18 months to clue into that. Once I figured it out, I became much more efficient because I wasn't spending as much time marketing. I also started making more money because when you are a regular writer for a publication or a client, you can often negotiate more for money than if you're a one-hit-wonder.”

Creating Your Ideal Customer Profile

Spending time up front on your customer profile will help you to get the right information to the right person at the right time—AND in the right place! This means your content strategy must be entirely planned out with each of these stages and your customer's motivations in mind. What do we mean by that?

The Right Information

The 'right person'—your customer persona—will want different types of information depending where he or she is in the buying cycle.

The 'right time' is when the customer is looking—whether that be at home in front of his computer, or browsing on his tablet at the local coffee shop, while on the train via his smart phone, or, increasingly, while he is in the store.

The 'right place' is where your ideal customer looks for information—does he search on Google or Bing? Does she use this social network or that? Does he like to read information or prefer to watch videos?

Here's our recipe for determining your own customer personas:

Collecting Data for Persona Surveys of Existing Customers and Prospects (frontline employees in the case of big companies):

1. Monitor Online Questions—check out sites like Quora or Yahoo to see what kind of questions are being asked about your customer's pain points, and what kind of language they are using;
2. Analytics—provides a lot of demographic information about the people who are visiting your website or landing pages;
3. Social Media listening tools—socialmention.com
Demographic Information from sources like Alexa.com;
4. Keyword Research—Google Adwords Keyword Tool or Aggregate user information from services like Rapportive

Profiling Customer Personas

What are the common characteristics and motivations of your best—and worst—customers?

1. Collect information about them—content preferences, search terms they use, social networks are they on, types of products or services they 'Like';
2. Look for patterns, trends, common characteristics

that you can use to segment your customers into groups;

3. Create a profile for target audiences, and even think of giving a name for that 'ideal' customer persona. Create a different one for each group or segment. Each profile should include the essential data points necessary to understand the context and motivations for that customer group that are relevant to your business goals;
4. Identify keyword groups, topics and content types for each group of personas. Use these to form the basis of a content plan that meets the informational needs of your customers as they move through the different stages of the buying cycle.

Five Stages of the Customer Buying Cycle

1. Awareness: customer identification of a need and the realization that your online business can potentially fulfill that need
2. Consideration: customer evaluation of how your offering meets this need, including the evaluation of offerings from other ecommerce sites
3. Preference/Intent: a customer's logical and emotional inclination towards one solution or another, ultimately leading to a purchasing decision
4. Purchase: the action of ordering and buying from your ecommerce site
5. Repurchase: the emotional and logical process that (hopefully) leads to a repeat purchase

Turning Your Ideal Clients into Actual Clients

If you've spent the time imagining your ideal client, you are way ahead of 95% of your competitors. Most people have only a vague idea of who their target audiences are; therefore, wasting time and money marketing to the wrong people. Since you've created a summary so detailed that you know the name of your ideal client, where they live, what they look like and more importantly, what keeps them up at night, you have an advantage already.

How do I turn that ideal client profile into a real live ideal client?

If you've always been a 'market-to-everyone' kind of person, tightly narrowing your focus can seem scary—maybe you are worried that fewer people contacted equals fewer sales. Maybe you've even tried to focus on your ideal client but ended up with less conversion and fewer customers. That's why we've developed this handy-dandy little guide for finding (and serving), your ideal clients.

You can skip the long learning curve, skip the trial and error, and hopefully skip over all the frustrating mistakes that most businesses make when trying to create a marketing strategy to attract just the right people.

So let's get started...

Step 1: Make Your Dream 100 List

Now that you have your ideal client profile in hand—keep your eyes peeled for people that meet the description you know is right. It might be law of attraction (or what I like to call the new car rule—how when you buy a new car—you see cars just like yours EVERYWHERE). Once you have something in your mind—similar things are attracted to it. As soon as you have your ideal client summary done and can visualize your ultimate 'person'—those people start coming out of the woodwork to work with you.

You don't need to reach out and try to sell them something right away—just start making your list. If you bump into anyone who you think would be a good fit—write their name down on your list. Your goal—get to 100 names on your Dream 100 List.

Step 2: Invite Yourself to the Party

If you aren't already doing so, start hanging out with your new tribe. There are several ways to find your tribe. The best way is try to be as helpful as possible in the groups you join and interact with. This is especially true if you have been in business for a while or if you have a solid sub niche.

Here's what to do... (This second step can be a little tricky, which is why I've broken it up into multiple smaller steps).

Before I get into those smaller steps, let me toss a word of warning your way. Take note that the goal here is to be seen as a resource and not as a stalker. Be helpful in your conversations—the goal here is simply to move to a deeper conversation with your Dream 100 List.

With that warning out of the way, here's how to complete this step:

Step 2.1 Find people who resonate with your ideal client profile on Twitter, LinkedIn and Facebook. You can do a search in all three platforms for your niche and get a good list of people to start with. Plus, you probably know (and should be following) the leaders in your niche. You need to take a two-pronged approach to your search. I would start by looking for groups of people who want to serve. Then, as you participate in the group, keep an eye out for people who are candidates for your Dream 100 List. Look up their profiles and see how well they match your ideal client summary.

Step 2.2: When you follow people online, take a minute to write to them and introduce yourself. Ask them something about themselves—try to start a conversation.

Step 2.3: Be a resource—not a megaphone. Spend your time listening to your ideal clients—what do they need? How can you help them? Try to point people in the right direction with no expectations of immediate return.

Once you've found your ideal clients online and have started to become a resource to them, *then move on to Step 3...*

Step 3: Create something amazing just for them

This step does require some time and patience to get right, but it's well worth the effort. Here's how to do it...

This is where automation can really help you. Not cold, unfeeling automation, but what Chris Brogan calls ‘warm automation’—this entails finding out so much about your ideal client that you can do something truly special that feels like it is just for them. For example, if you know your client loves coffee—send them a Starbucks gift card on their birthday.

Did you read that someone had a major life event, like the birth of a child, for example? Send them a card—or even better just pick up the phone and leave them a congratulatory message.

Tip: Marketing Automation software makes it easy to keep track of these details and react to them.

As you can see, it’s not particularly difficult to connect with people who fit your ideal client profile to a tee—you just need to complete the process, step-by-step, using the instructions above. But before you jump in, let me share with you a few more tips for selling to your ideal client.

- Always involve your community when creating products. Let them know what you have up your sleeve and ask for feedback early and often. The more your community takes ownership, the happier they will be with the end product. Most people are happy to help.
- Don’t hide behind your computer. It is so easy to get sucked in by the myth that staying online saves time. Even counting in drive time—often you get a lot more done in person than virtually. Try to get out and meet with your Dream 100 List, live... If you live somewhere where that’s tough—then pick up the phone and call. You won’t regret making the connection.
- FFF (FocusFanaticallyonyourFans). EVERYTHING you do in your business needs to be customized for your Dream 100 List group. Do not stray. Focus...

- Congratulations!. Now you know how to make your Ideal Customer Persona come to life. The next step is to take action. Start finding the people who fit the profile, make the connection and start creating stellar ways to help them.

Tips and Inspiration:

Danielle Louise Ross **On the Importance of Taking Action**

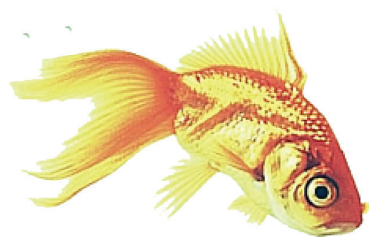
“Take imperfect action. There is almost nothing more than can hold a talented person back more than trying to be perfect. One of the many marketing gurus I look up to is Adam Pagan, and he often jokes in his trainings that the first person who implements what he has taught wins! Because it’s not just about knowing it in your head but getting into action and delivering it, seeing how it goes, and then constantly having the attention to see how it goes from there. The biggest learning is going to happen from the doing. The best way to get really good at serving clients is by serving clients.”

Sometimes getting that first version of your website ends up being such a big deal—you have to just get through it—because the best version of your website might be the third or fourth or fifth version. I’m probably on the fifth or sixth version of my website—people compliment me on how good it is and, you know what? It was an evolution. So take ‘imperfect action’ so you can get those wheels moving and you will grow faster. And you’ll be happier too!”

Action Item: **Customer Persona Worksheet**

Our Customer Persona Worksheet will take you through the process of finding the idea profile for your customer persona—stage by stage via a series of questions. Plus a Bonus Tip!

Free action item worksheets at:
<https://solobizhacker.com/planning-your-escape/>





CHAPTER EIGHT

Making It Irresistible ...

Story—Kevin Jordan

"WHAT I quickly realized was that business owners were being bombarded by people selling online marketing tactics. I didn't have a way to stand out from the crowd. That's when I discovered Duct Tape Marketing, which is a leading small business marketing brand—a simple, affordable and practical method that is probably one of the best out there.

They had already done what I wanted to do, and they were doing it well. They have a program where you like license their products and brand as an independent consultant and I thought why reinvent the wheel? It is essentially a franchise model, and the benefit of a franchise is that you are using a proven system that delivers predictable results. That's what I wanted to give to my clients and what I wanted to have for my business so it was pretty much a no brainer.

Want to learn how to read your customers mind? It is all a matter of spending time up front thinking about your customer's wants and needs. This chapter will show you how to use this information to create an irresistible offer for your customers.

Create a detailed biographical sketch of your ideal customer—including age, gender, profession, geographic location etc, but also include psychographics—what keeps them up at night?

The next stage is to interview these ideal customers. If you have existing customers—interview them. If not, then interview people you think would be your ideal client. Ask them what they liked about your product or service, or what they would like to see you offer. How do they see you as being different? Ask how they found you, or how they found the companies they are using right now that are doing what you want to do. And definitely do the interviews in person. Don't use email to survey people, do it in person or by phone because you will need to ask follow-up questions.

Based on the answers of these interviews create a Unique Selling Proposition—i.e. what makes you different? Then build your brand around that core unique difference.”

The Irresistible Idea

Now that you intimately know your ideal customer, it's time to begin to create something for them. Something in that magic gap between what they think they need, what you are a rock star at providing and what will give them amazing results!

I'm going to share two methods for coming up with those products. These methods can be used at all levels of your offering—from a year-long premium coaching program to a simple opt-in... it is just a matter of scale. Your answers to these questions will help you write clear and crisp sales copy that is focused on the benefits of your product or service for your ideal client.

These two methods are based on the work of Frank Kern who is one of the most effective online marketers working today.

The Idea Machine

Your clients need you and there is so much you can help them with. Where do you start? An easy place to start is by creating an Idea

Machine. You do that by going back to the research you did for your ideal client or customer and listing the top 10 problems they are talking about. Follow each problem with *your* solution to that problem. This can be simple—just a few sentences to begin with.

Examples:

Problem: Not knowing all the bits and pieces needed to get into place to start selling online.

Solution: Show them how to get started with two web pages and a PayPal account.

Problem: Not understanding how to get the basics done—I am just getting started and don't have much money.

Solution: Join Solo Biz Hacker and exchange hours via our time bank system, doing what you love in exchange for help in getting your 'online empire' set up and ready to go.

The 10 problems and solutions that you create in your idea machine can be used in many different ways. The first is obvious—pick a problem and a solution for your product. You can also use these as content for videos, blog posts, for a podcast, or even as an opt-in checklist.

The Why Worksheet

Getting this next exercise right will help you dramatically improve the rate of customers taking action on your communications because it helps you to get to their needs and overcome their objections right from the start.

The first step of The Why Worksheet is to brainstorm your customers' top three desires. For potential members of Solo Biz Hacker, some of those desires are:

- To have a steady stream of clients in their business;
- To create better systems so they can delegate more to their team and focus on their sweet spot or brilliance;
- To get more eyeballs on their offerings (so that they can have more clients in their business)

The top three desires are great on the surface—but they're just scratching the surface. Now go a level deeper by asking why they want those desires.

They want to create a successful business so that...

- They don't have to live hand-to-mouth;
- They feel secure in their ability to make a living without worrying about pleasing a boss;
- To have the freedom they need to adjust their schedule to be there for their family and live their lives as they want to;
- To spend their days doing what they love to do

You can keep going deeper with these things if you want to. Sometimes the best motivations are buried three or four 'whys' deep. *Here's an example of going deeper...*

Motivation—Not living hand-to-mouth

- Why? Because living hand-to-mouth is stressful especially when worrying about feeding your children.
- Why? Because you love your children and want something better for them.

See how the motivation changes when you go deeper—you can use that information when you write your copy.

Consider Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

(Motivation as a means of satisfying human needs)

Maslow's five types of needs:

- Physiological: food, water, sleep, exercise, sex
- Safety: security, shelter, normalcy in daily life
- Love and Belonging: affection and acceptance as part of a family or group

- Esteem or Status: self-respect and the respect of others; the need to feel competent, confident, important, and appreciated
- Self-actualization: the need to realize one's own potential, to achieve dreams and ambitions

Overcoming Objections

Once you have the whys (and the deeper whys) in place, the next step is to brainstorm all the objections your customer may have to your potential product or service. For potential members of Solo Biz Hacker, some of those objections might be:

- I can't afford the \$30 a month membership fee;
- What do I do if the people I work with via the time bank don't do a good job;
- I don't have time to be volunteering my time;
- I don't need any more 'coachings' or webinars

Once you've listed out ALL the objections (you should have at least a dozen listed), go through and choose the top 3 or 4 objections. You will write about these objections in your content and sales pages. People will think you are reading their minds!

Tips and Inspiration:

Shannon Cherry On the Importance of Knowing your Market

“Knowing who your target market is—knowing how they like to be reached are really important aspects that every business owner needs to know. If you don’t know these things then you won’t have a business. There are a lot of people out there who say ‘everybody is my market’—but the fact of the matter is that it is not everybody.

Take an example of being a massage therapist who may think, ‘Everybody’s my target market’. Well, you know what, my children aren’t ... I have 8 year old twins—my children are not your market. First of all, they have no money to pay you—so if you focus on children then you had better focus on the parents, not the kids! But also, are you a massage therapist that practices holistically? Being a holistic massage therapist is a whole different avenue verses someone who does massage for pampering—there’s a whole range of people in between the two. And you have to make that decision and you have to know them so well that you know intuitively how to market to them.”

Action Item: What Does Your Community Want from You?

How do you want to spend those precious seconds and hours and minutes that you have? Do you want to be doing something that really fulfills you and really makes a change in the world and really helps other people? This worksheet will help you Explore what YOU can offer to the world.

Free action item worksheets at:
<https://solobizhacker.com/planning-your-escape/>



CHAPTER NINE

Story—Danielle Louise Ross

"I THINK that the biggest thing as a starting point is you need to be able to describe what you do in one sentence in a way that your audience can really understand what you're giving them.

A simple way to think about this is you need to be able to really express the result that you're going to help them get to through your service, as opposed to the process or the methodology that will help them get there. This is a big one because when we go through our training, we're taught the professional lingo. We're taught the terms, but we're not necessarily taught the art of how to communicate with our audience. That's a language, a fluency. So first, just start with that sentence, because if you can describe what you do in a sentence, then you can start telling everyone. And your first client is probably not that far away from you, but they just need to know that you're there, that you're a resource, so that they can recognize you're there. That's a beginning point."

Step 3: C = Create

Okay, so up until this point we have been in the visioning and planning part of the E.S.C.A.P.E. Plan. There's still a little bit more

planning that needs to be done, but now we are going to start doing some action items to build a platform for your business.

This chapter is about learning how to tell your story by writing your manifesto. You need to have a big vision of your business: the who, what, where, why, and how, very firmly entrenched in your mind. Write them out so that you're ready and able to share with others—both potential customers and those who might be interested in collaborating with you to make the change that you want to make in the world with your business.

OK... so now you might be thinking... I have done a LOT of planning—can't I create my website yet? Almost... but first you need to get really clear on the story of your business—on what makes YOU different from everyone else who might also be offering what you are offering.

Even if you are selling a product (like office supplies), your manifesto is just as important to create. Why (other than lower prices—because someone can always beat you on price) should someone buy from you? What is *your* story? Your unique story *is* your manifesto.

Here is our quick reporter's guide to creating your business manifesto...

Who is Your Ideal Customer?

We covered this in depth earlier. Not only do you need to know who your ideal customer is, but also why you chose them. You need to be able to articulate this in all of your marketing materials so that people really understand who it is that you're serving and speaking to. Even if you're talking about your business to people who don't fit your ideal customer profile, they'll know who to refer to you in the future because it's clear in your materials.

What Are You Selling?

The second question you need to ask, and this is a big one people really focus on, is the 'what'? What is it that you're selling? What

is your product? What are you planning on making money on out of this venture? Often, people make mistakes in defining what 'the what' is.

One major mistake is in creating a product without creating a manifesto. Or they create millions of products they think people will want, and nobody ever buys them because they are not connected with their customer persona needs.

Another mistake that business owners make is they get totally wrapped up in creating content. They have a blog with thousands of posts, they have all these free reports, and they send out a bunch of information via email. They are passionate about their subject, but they never come up with an actual product. Without a product or service, there's no way to facilitate an exchange of money! It's just, 'Here, I have more free content, and more free content,' but information without a product or service never becomes an actual business.

Ultimately, even though the point of a passionate business is to make a change in the world, you also need to make money. You can only do free volunteer world-saving for a while, and then you need to eat and pay the bills. Clearly, you need to know what you're going to sell to people. And in turn, you can actually help a lot more people if you are successful.

Where Are You Selling Your Product?

- Is it online?
- Is it mostly through social media?
- Is it mostly through a website?
- Are you selling through masterminds or forums?
- Do you have an offline component?
- Do you put on live local workshops?

These questions are going to determine the structure of your business. If you are primarily selling to Americans, that is going to look very different than if you're selling to multilingual Europeans

and your site needs to be translated into 12 different languages. Consider and really think about these details in the beginning as it all makes a difference. Are you going to be a regional business? Instead of focusing on a really specific problem, your niche might be based more on a specific geographical region. For example, you might be targeting people who live in the Southern United States, even though your business is purely online. The language you use to market to Southerners is going to be different than the language you would use to market to those in California. The kinds of events you put on are going to be different. How you interact with your mailing list is going to be different. Being specific for this one all depends on the question of where.

Why Did You Start This Business?

The next one is the 'why'. If you have been through the exercise from Chapter 1 you will already know what your 'why' is. Your why is the difference you want to make in the world, the reason you started your business in the first place and the fire that drives you to carry on.

The why is the core of your story and having a why works for all types of business models. For example, if you are selling furniture—you can say—'I want to make beautiful tables that inspire people to sit around them and share conversations. And I want them to be made of the finest quality wood from the Southwestern United States so that people have something to talk about and are inspired by the beauty of a different part of the world.' Your uniqueness *is* a world-changing story and why you are selling furniture.

Spend some time and think of your specific story. Then consider what it is about your own qualities and experiences that make you the one your ideal customer should seek out to solve their problem, over and above anyone else.

This is especially important for creative entrepreneurs. If you are an artist or a writer, or you make jewelry or some kind of actual item to sell, it's not about the items that you are creating;

it is about YOU as the creator. This is probably one of the most important things to get right because there's lots of jewelry out there for sale. There's also plenty of art out there on the market and there is certainly no shortage of books to choose from. The thing that makes your particular creation unique is *you*. As you can see, it's very important that you are selling *your* story, not just your products, because your story is what people will really buy into and enjoy. It's not just about the art you're creating. It's about you as the artist.

How Will you Transform Your Customers' Lives?

The next question to ask is about the 'how'. And here is the flip side—this one is not about you—the how is about your customers. How is it that what you are about to do for them is going to transform *their* lives? Transformations are possible with any business. If you're a restaurant owner, you're transforming people from hungry to full. It's simple. With a nice ambiance you are creating a space where friendships are bonded, or transforming their social life because they have a choice to go somewhere nice to eat—or they can go somewhere quick to eat.

Take teaching ukulele, which is an example I keep coming back to. Maybe someone has had trouble learning music in the past and by teaching them to play a simple instrument like a ukulele you are giving them the confidence to master that one thing. Mastery of some one thing then may give them the confidence to go on to master other things in their lives. Or maybe you're just giving them the opportunity to create music for people and help them be happier. It's all still a transformation.

Think hard about what it is that you do that really makes a difference in people's lives. What is that difference? It is that difference that is going to influence what you write as headlines for your sales pages, and how you talk to your ideal customers.

Take some time with your manifesto—and don't be afraid to make it a long manifesto. Yours might end up being a couple of pages—or it could be ten. That's fine. Whatever it takes to get your ideas

across. Once it is written—start posting it everywhere. Post it on your blog; on your Facebook page or make a video and post it to YouTube. Solicit feedback and monitor people’s reactions. Start sharing your story with the world.

Use your manifesto to get some support for your fledgling business because nothing exists in a vacuum, and entrepreneurs, especially, don’t thrive in a vacuum. Everybody I know who has achieved success has done it with the help of other people. There are all sorts of different ways of getting the support (coaches, masterminds or maybe a top-notch virtual assistant), but you do need other people to bounce ideas off. One of the primary reasons we created Solo Biz Hacker was because we observed and experienced the importance of having other entrepreneurs to interact with, learn from, and find the support needed to get a business started.

Explore your local resources, meet up groups, networking groups, etc. Think about getting your first small team together. Your team can be sourced locally, or it can be virtual. Virtually is nice because then people aren’t coming to your house. I’ve worked with people virtually who live locally. It all depends on who you find and where they are—you want others who are going to be the right fit for you. You also want a team of professionals who can give you some sound and practical business advice when needed. This would, at the very least, include an attorney and an accountant. Even if you only meet with them once in a while, but especially at the beginning so you get your business entity set up correctly.

You might hire an accountant on an as needed basis, and a bookkeeper more regularly to maintain your accounting records. I recommend that you have an accountant do your taxes because then you can get all of the different deductions that you’re entitled to as a business owner and make sure that everything is filled out correctly, preventing possible trouble later on.

A resource that we recommend highly is the Small Business

Bodyguard, found here: <http://bit.ly/1Epsjly>. It is a .pdf based informational product that includes sample contracts, checklists, and all the different aspects of running a business that you need to consider from a legal standpoint. Your attorney and accountant can then be contacted when required to get answers to your specific (and informed), questions.

Tips and Inspiration:

Madeleine Eno On The Importance of Creating Your Manifesto

“In order to get to that story you need to really just try it. We are not that far from the years where solo entrepreneurs would write ‘we’ when they talked about their company—we are not that far from the corporate language of writing on websites. And it can be scary to share our own ‘real’ story—a story that might not be very linear, or very pretty, or that might be a little bit raw. But suspend your disbelief and trust that telling a good story is so much more compelling than giving people a ton of information or data. People will remember the story.

I was at a conference recently where I watched a lot of presenters who all told stories. And then there was one woman who went through the PowerPoint, bullet point by bullet point, and the difference was so clear—I don’t remember a single thing she said, but I remember everything about the stories the other presenters told. So just trust it.

Your story is the thing that is going to set you apart from everyone else. People worry about ‘niche’ and their ‘ideal client’, or their ‘cool offering’, or the title of their company, etc. to set them apart from their competition. But it is really your story that sets you apart, and you don’t even have to worry about competition in a way, because your story is yours and yours alone. Your story is what is going to make you unique.

Scholar, presenter and author, Brené Brown writes a lot about ‘vulnerability’ and ‘shame’. We live in a pretty shame-based culture and a lot of us don’t always feel so great about some parts of our stories. But Brené Brown’s whole thing is about stepping into it by telling our story as a way through it to the other side. By hiding our story it is almost like creating a shield from ourselves being really ‘known’—we are preventing people from seeing us—

knowing us—liking us—trusting us [all the things we need for people to do business with us]. Brené has this line that says:

“The shield required that I stay small and quiet behind it so as not to draw attention to my imperfections and vulnerabilities. A lot of times we are trying to appear perfect—to the point where we just become small and invisible.”

Look at allowing yourself to be vulnerable as allowing yourself to be seen in the marketplace. Again, it’s a scary leap, but it’s so foolproof that it works.

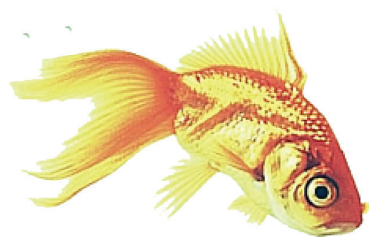
One of my favorite ‘quickie’ ways to start getting at your story is to quickly just write down ten things you believe in—just one word by one word. Often times it might just be something like ‘integrity’—showing up when I say I’m going to show up ‘love’, ‘honesty’—whatever those things that you believe in are. Almost always there’s a story in there from your life that we can find.

For instance, why do I believe in integrity? Well, my dad said he would pick me up and he never showed up and I waited my whole childhood for my dad to show up, so that’s why I believe that showing up is really important. So often there is a cool story behind the things we believe in that can become really meaty. Jotting down those things can be a quick inroad into our stories.”

Action Item: Create Your Manifesto Worksheet

You need to have a big vision of your business: the who, what, where, why, and how, very firmly entrenched in your mind. Write them out so that you’re ready and able to share this with people—both potential customers and those who might be interested in collaborating with you to make the change that you want to make in the world with your business.

Free action item worksheets at:
<https://solobizhacker.com/planning-your-escape/>





CHAPTER TEN

The Minimum Viable Online Sales Machine

AHHH..... the good old days.

Opening a business was as simple as setting up a folding table in your local park. You had a shoebox to collect money and sold the lemonade that your Mom helped you make. If you were particularly on the ball (or had parents who worked in local government) you might have spent \$10 for a permit to sell lemonade in the park. Otherwise, the mechanics of running a lemonade stand are pretty basic.

Fast forward to 2015, you now run (or are starting) a virtual business with clients from all over the world. Just like a lemonade stand, you need basic infrastructure—but the mechanics are slightly different when your business is primarily online.

Of course, you can do anything more easily if you have the right tools for the job. Unfortunately, a lot of entrepreneurs get stuck in a sort of analysis paralysis when it comes to choosing the right tools for their business. Don't let that happen to you. Read this chapter and get the answers you need to choose a system that will work for you.

What Do I Really Need?

Of course, it is really impossible to answer this question without knowing specifics about your business. But, generally, you need:

- A way to communicate with your customers (usually this is an email/autoresponder service). Autoresponders let you pre-schedule emails to be sent at a certain time. If you try to send an email from your personal email address using Outlook etc to a list of more than a few dozen, your email will likely be relegated to the spam folder.
- A way to keep track of your prospects and customers and track their engagement and interaction with you. This tracking system also tracks your prospects progress through your sales funnel as they become customers.
- A way to collect money (because if you are not collecting money, you do not have a business).

Of course, there are many more nice-to-have systems including social media, a website, a referral (or affiliate tracking system), etc. In this book, we are focusing on the big two: email marketing and e-commerce.

How Do I Communicate With Clients Through Email?

It has never been easier to communicate with large groups of people. Social media makes it simple to spread your message to thousands with a click of the button. Your permission-based email list is the biggest asset you have as an online business owner. Your subscribers are the people who WANT to hear from you. They are the people who are more likely to buy your product. Most importantly, you can continue to communicate with them even if you change mailing list providers (you are not at the mercy of a social media site that can lose popularity in a heartbeat... remember MySpace?).

Great, Why Can't I Just Use Outlook?

In the U.S. (and this applies to anyone who markets to people

in the U.S.), the CAN-SPAM Act has specific requirements for emails that include not sending to anyone who has not specially asked to receive emails from you; including a physical mailing address in the footer of each email; and a way for people to unsubscribe. This is one of the main reasons that you cannot run your list from Outlook—email service providers make sure that you are complying with CAN-SPAM so you don't need to worry.

The other reason you need an email service is that the email services have agreements with the major Internet Service Providers to let their emails into your inbox. If you try to send emails directly from your email box, not only are you going to have to manage the unsubscribe process manually, there is a big chance that your message will end up in your client's (or potential client's) spam folder.

What Do I Look for in an Email or Autoresponder Service?

There are two types of email services—stand alone or connected to a shopping cart or CRM (Customer Relationship Management) program. I'll talk about the pros and cons of an all-in-one system v.s. a standalone system later.

First, let's focus on the features you want to make sure you have in any email service you choose.

- The ability to segment contacts into different lists based on what they opted in to. When someone opts in they should automatically receive initial and follow up emails based on what they requested, not on all subjects you are emailing about.
- The ability to segment contacts based on purchasing history. You should be able to remove people from your prospect list once they have purchased so you are not sending prospect sales emails for a specific product or service to people who have already purchased that product or service.
- An email editing/creation service that is easy to

use. Templates are a plus—but if the basic editor is working well, you shouldn't need them.

- An easy way to create an opt-in form (a way for people to sign up for your list) and put the form code on your website.
- Easy to understand tracking—so you can track what is working well and tweak what is not working as well.

BONUS FEATURES

In addition to functional email sending and tracking, having automation (the ability to segment people into lists based on their clicks and other actions) is highly desirable. With a little bit of practice and guidance, it is pretty easy to create work flows, sometimes called sequences or campaigns, to automatically take care of basic customer service tasks.

A new feature that is just rolling out is demographic research. For pennies per contact, you can have your 'electronic minion' add publicly available information about a contact to your database. Because the computer does the work for you, you don't have to pay a virtual assistant to do this time-consuming research. You can find out where a contact lives, how much money they make, and if they have children. All very useful information if you want to target a specific segment of your demographic online.

How Do I Actually Get People On The List?

The rules are simple. Everyone who is on your list must 'opt in' or accept being on the list. Most of the time, people will come to your website and opt-in in exchange for a small free sample of your work (a great checklist, an audio, a coupon...). You CAN collect business cards and add people to your list manually—but be very sure that the people actually want to be added to the list before you add them. (I tear the corner off the card if the person has asked me to add them to my list.)

Why Do People Have to Double Opt-In?

Asking your customers to confirm their email addresses before

you add them to your list ensures that they truly want to be on your list (and that they weren't added accidentally through a typo or a spam bot). Asking customers to take the extra step and confirm also improves the deliverability of your messages because messages coming from double opt-in lists get priority delivery by Gmail, Comcast, etc.

The downside of double opt-in is that often your customers will sign up for your free taste and then not remember to go back and click the confirmation email. The remedy for this is to be very clear at all steps in your opt-in process that clients will need to find that email (sometimes it ends up in spam) and that they need to click the confirm link to be added to the list.

Now, that we know a little about the email communication side of things; let's look at the e-commerce or shopping cart side.

How Do I Collect Money Online?

(What does a shopping cart actually do?)

From a customer perspective, buying online is a pretty straight forward venture. You go to a site, fill out a form, give your credit card number, once your credit card is accepted, you get a receipt and you can download your order (or your order is mailed to your home). The buying process actually is a three part process involving your shopping cart program (i.e. Infusionsoft or 1ShoppingCart), a payment gateway (i.e. authorize.net), and your merchant account.

How Do You Choose Which Services to Use For Your E-commerce Process?

This depends on what you are selling and where you are in your business. There are four different types of e-commerce solutions. In this book, we'll cover three of them. The fourth is a shopping cart for a company that has hundreds of products.

A complete back-end system includes an email component, an e-commerce component and a customer relationship manager component.

Here's how this looks in the different stages of your business:

1. The Virtual Lemonade Stand

When you are first starting out, it is likely that you'll start with an email service that is free for the first few hundred (or even few thousand) subscribers, and paired with a simple payment app like PayPal or Stripe.

Using PayPal on your website is very easy. You create a 'buy now' button in PayPal. After filling in information on the name of the product, the price, whether or not taxes are included, PayPal gives you the code to paste into the html section of your website.

PayPal also talks to a number of autoresponder services (including AWeber, MailChimp, Active Campaign). Go to the help menu of your autoresponder service and look up 'PayPal integration' to see if yours is one of them. If it is, your buyers will automatically be added to your email list when they purchase.

OK, you are probably saying, that sounds dead easy, why would I want to use anything BUT PayPal? Here are the disadvantages:

- PayPal does not work well for recurring subscription payments because users can cancel their subscription and you are never notified. This is why many shopping carts that integrate with PayPal don't support recurring payments or subscriptions.
- You are at the mercy of PayPal. PayPal has an aggressive fraud prevention program. They can freeze your account at any time without warning—effectively shutting you out of business if you don't have an alternative way to collect payments. This does not happen often—but is DOES happen (usually to people who process large amounts of money through their PayPal account).
- PayPal charges more than your average merchant account to process payments. They can do this because they offer a very complete payment solution.

- Unless you sign up for Website Payments Pro (an additional monthly fee), visitors will be taken from your site to complete their payments with PayPal.

If you are a developer and use API (if you don't know what this means, this isn't for you), Stripe is a low priced payment gateway which manages the whole process like PayPal does. You need to be able to write code to integrate it into your web page.

If you really need recurring payments, have clients that don't want to pay via PayPal, or want to pay via e-check and don't want to set up a merchant account, PaySimple [<http://paysimple.com/>] might be a good option for you. There is a \$35 monthly fee—but the processing fee 2.39% + 29 cents is lower than PayPal. You can send basic transactional emails through PaySimple—but that's all. PaySimple doesn't integrate with any of the popular autoresponder services.

AWeber and MailChimp both have integrations with PayPal so that buyers end up in your email database. If your email doesn't integrate with PayPal you can create an opt-in form for your thank you page so customers can add themselves to the list of purchasers. For CRM, Nimble, Hlghrise or Capsule CRM are all nice choices. (You can use a tool like Zapier to create a basic link between the CRM and email pieces). The solution lacks the integration of an all-in-one system but definitely works if you are on a tight budget.

2. Moving Up to a Co-working Space

Eventually, if your lemonade stand is successful, you'll want to move into a space with more amenities. Maybe you'll go join a co-working space or rent a cubicle in a shared office space.

Instead of just grabbing code from PayPal to stick on your website, you are now ready to keep better track of your buyers, run sales reports, perhaps even create some referral partnerships. Congratulations, you are ready for your own shopping cart!

Shopping carts are a step-up from PayPal and include email, e-commerce, and store basic customer information. These web-based services allow you to truly start to manage your customer database because almost everything is in one place. They also usually include the ability to track and pay for referrals (affiliates).

Unlike PayPal, which manages the whole checkout process, shopping carts act as a front-end product database. They pass your information through a payment gateway which then passes that information on to your merchant account. You can choose whether to have your customers pay with credit cards, PayPal, or both.

Two examples of these types of shopping carts are 1ShoppingCart and Shopify.

1ShoppingCart has been around for a while. For \$99 a month, you can get a system that not only includes the cart, but also a basic email autoresponder service, a landing page creator, affiliate management, sales reports and more. Because everything is included, you don't need to mess with cobbling together a system. 1Shopping Cart doesn't provide a payment gateway. To use 1Shopping Cart, you'll need either a PayPal or a merchant account (like PowerPay or Authorize.net). I'll be talking more about merchant accounts later.

The main disadvantages of 1Shopping Cart are that although it includes a basic email autoresponder, a landing page creator, an affiliate center, etc, none of the features are best in class. And, it lacks the marketing automation of the CRM-based systems.

Shopify is relatively new on the e-commerce scene. Unlike 1Shopping Cart where you need a merchant account to accept credit cards outside of PayPal, Shopify offers its own payment gateway. You can offer your customers the ability to pay with either credit cards (using Shopify's gateway) or use PayPal. The built in landing page and cart themes are attractive. Shopify also offers effective and easy to understand analytics.

However, building your own custom back end—by cobbling together 15 different apps—can get both unwieldy and expensive (all those \$10 a month charges can add up quickly).

Are you reluctant to make the jump from PayPal to 1Shopping Cart or Infusionsoft because you are confused about the merchant account process? Then read on.

Why Are Merchant Accounts So Hard to Get?

The alternative to PayPal (or using the Shopify built in gateway) is getting a merchant account to process credit cards. Because the bank will have to pay any refunds or fraudulent charges if you go out of business, getting an initial merchant account can take time. The bank weighs the risk involved in making a loan to your business based on your business credit, the probability of fraudulent charges being posted (people using stolen credit cards) and the ability for the merchant to actually fulfill on the product.

The first step to getting a merchant account is to contact your bank who will set you up with an account and then recommend a payment gateway provider (the layer between the bank and your website). You usually need to pay a set up fee for the gateway plus a small monthly fee. You can also start the merchant account set up process with your payment gateway provider.

We like both Authorize.net and PowerPay for gateway providers. The back end set up is easy to use on both systems. They both offer reasonable rates.

Your merchant card provider will ask you to fill out an application that will ask you about your business, about your estimated monthly charging volume and your credit history. If your business is considered high risk, you will likely be charged higher rates. Once you are approved, your provider will help get you set up with a payment processing gateway. You'll get instructions for how to hook the payment gateway up to your shopping cart and merchant bank account.

3. It's Time For Your Own Office Building

Congratulations! Your business has grown and now you are on your way. You have more work that you can handle and you need a system that can help you take care of your customers so that nothing (or no-one) falls through the cracks.

At the top of the scale, are all-in-one programs that include a CRM (customer relationship management) function as well as email and e-commerce.

Until recently, powerful CRMs were only available to large companies. Now, more and more e-commerce/email systems are including a CRM component in their systems.

The advantage is that you can track, manage and automate because *everything* is in one place. Historically, the big disadvantage of the complete all-in-one system has been the price. Although, if you add the cost of all the components of a 'cobbled together' system, you may find that it is less expensive to move to something that includes everything you need.

We live in an age of customization. Providing highly personalized service and communication helps your clients know, like and trust you. They read your emails and feel like you are reading their mind.

This magic is possible through constantly collecting data about your customers and using it to tailor every communication your customer gets from you based on their needs. You can use your CRM to determine which customers are engaging with you so that you can offer them special deals.

Infusionsoft, Ontraport and Rainmaker are true all-in-one systems that track your customers purchase clicks, social media engagement, web page visits and more — and then automatically tailor your marketing to match their actions.

Now That I Know the Basics, How Do I Choose?

We've covered the basics of email, shopping carts, and customer relationship management systems ... now on to the good part—how do you choose the right system for you?

One of the reasons people get stuck is that they think that they are 'marrying' their choice of systems, rather than choosing a system to use for now (while it makes the most sense for their business). In fact, you'll likely migrate through two or three different systems if your business is successful.

Just like moving to a new office space, there are costs involved, (lost time, lost customers, set up time). Moving when you need more features or more automation is always the right thing to do.

You should choose the system that will work for where you want to be in six months to a year. You should have some room to grow into the system, but it doesn't make sense to invest hundreds of dollars a month on an 'all-in-one' system when you don't have your first client yet. There will be plenty of time to do that later. One thing to remember though, you will lose customers in the move. Many list providers require everyone to confirm that they still want to be on your list. It can be disheartening to lose a third of your list when you change, but this is completely normal.

Plus, it has the added bonus of helping you get rid of people who no longer really still want to be on your mailing list. Think of it as pre-moving house cleaning.

Now, that we've gotten that out of the way... here are five steps to choosing your ideal back end system.

Five Steps to Choosing Your Back End System

1. Know your current business systems. By spending time thinking about what your current processes are you'll get a better idea of what you need the system to do. I guarantee you DO have processes and systems (even if they're not written down).

2. Make a list of all the things you want your new system to do, who is doing that now, how much it costs to have those tasks done (take into account both team costs and software costs). Your current costs (including staff time) are a good baseline for your monthly budget for your new system. Note, different systems have different strengths—i.e. one might be good for affiliate programs while another rocks at membership sites. The least expensive option might not be the best for your situation.
3. Take into account your business growth. Are you adding a new affiliate program? Will you be using more social media? Adding a text message campaign?
4. Armed with a list of what you need the system to do, start asking for recommendations. Be sure to ask people who have businesses similar to yours. What works for your favorite guru might be the entirely wrong system for you.
5. Pick a system or two and get demos, ask for trials, etc. See which system is easiest to use for you and for your team. Decide whether to pay for expert help getting your system set up. This is often worth it because setting a system up right in the beginning pays huge dividends later because you don't have to re-work your system.

And... that's it! Now, that you have your shiny new system in place—go out there and make some money.

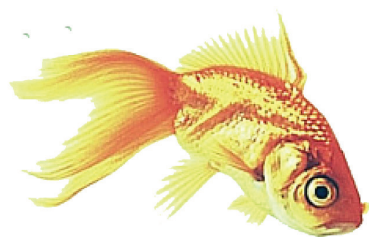
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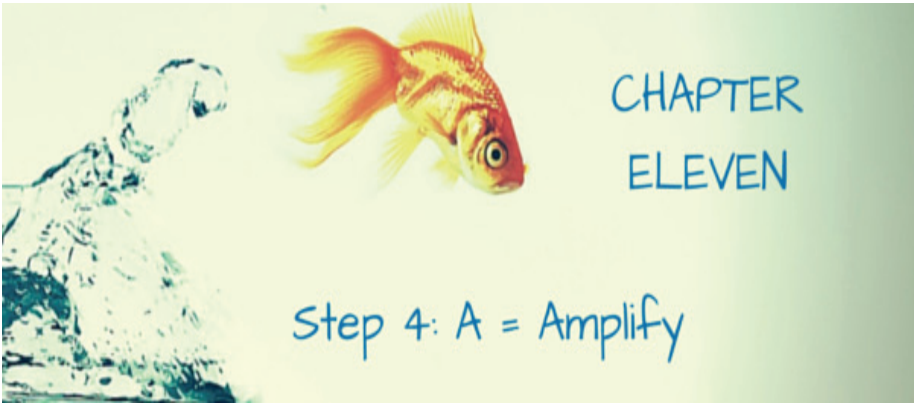
Andrew Gunn **Keep It Simple**

“The internet can be very overwhelming at first—and I have gone through this myself several times over the last 12 months. You can get a day here or a day there where you can get completely overwhelmed by the sheer enormity of the thing that the internet is. It can be quite scary, because for a lot of people it can be quite technical, especially if you don’t know how to use a computer—how do I set up an opt-in page—how do you set up an autoresponder? When I was reading about all these things I did panic.

I thought that there is so much that you think that you need to know. But essentially, when it gets right down to it, there is a really really simple basic model—and if you keep reminding yourself of that simple basic model of:

- 1. Finding a hungry crowd of people that want to listen to you and buy your stuff, because you are offering something that they need and they want, and then;*
- 2. Present it to them—so that they can;*
- 3. Purchase from you, and then you just;*
- 4. Repeat the process.”*





CHAPTER ELEVEN

Story—Lynn Ruby

It's About the 'Know, Like and Trust'

"I SEE the power of video every time I go to a networking event because several people will come up to me, they have seen one or more of my videos, and they already have started to get to know me, they like me, and they have started to trust me. So the whole 'people won't buy from you until they know, like and trust you,'—well I've already sped through two and half of those even though the person has never met me before.

In terms of content development, everyone has their area of expertise and could give you a hundred tips that relate to that expertise. So that's a great place to start for video content—create a series of tips—keep them short, and relate each tip as though you were sitting opposite a client and telling them your particular piece of expert advice."

Step 4: A = Amplify

This chapter is all about the Amplify part of the E.S.C.A.P.E. Plan. This is where you already have a basic website and product or

service in place, you know your manifesto, and you know your story. Now is the time to get the word out so people can come to you and buy your product and take part in what you have to offer.

The main vehicle by which you amplify your business is what we call The Platform. The Platform includes your whole marketing arsenal put together as one cohesive machine.

Here are the elements of a rocking platform for an online information business. Platforms vary by the type of business. The example below is a good starting place for any business.

Website

You need a home base on the web where people can come and find out more about you. It's best to control this yourself which means having a hosting account (where your website and all its content is stored), and a domain name (your own personal address for that website).

People sometimes use their Facebook page as their home base, but it is not advisable to do so because you don't control your content on Facebook. Facebook can change the way they let their users operate the site at any minute, and I have seen people who have created a Facebook page for their business and then have their accounts frozen. Facebook can be a quick way to get the word out, but you need your own website. With your own website, you have control over your content and on your site you can set up a form where people can opt-in to get more information from you via email. Your mailing list belongs to and is controlled by you. Your website and email lists are your primary business assets and are just as important as having a store-front for a retail location.

The second thing that you need is a presence on one or two social media channels. I wouldn't restrict your business to just one. I would have two. I probably wouldn't go for seven, at least in the beginning yet you do want to make sure that the channels you choose are the ones where *your* people hang out.

If you are a photographer your social media presence might be on Instagram or Pinterest, because that's where people who are interested in pictures go.

If you are targeting moms, you might be on Facebook and Pinterest. A lot of moms are on Facebook talking about their kids and family life. Moms are on Pinterest looking for their mom-related interests. Those would be the two that you might choose.

If you're in entertainment or if you're dealing with media, you might be on Facebook and on Twitter. Or you could be on Twitter and LinkedIn.

If you're dealing with human resources professionals and you are a business consultant working with corporations, you might want to be on LinkedIn and Facebook or LinkedIn and Twitter.

Where you have a presence on social media depends on where your people hang out which is something you will find out when you research your customer personas. You might choose YouTube if you're offering acting classes or anything that can be visually demonstrated. For example, if you sell cooking classes or kitchen utensils, YouTube and Pinterest might be your two choices. Obviously we cannot cover every possible combination here, but we do suggest that you look at having a presence on at least two networks to begin.

In addition to those two networks, Google+ is really important because it's owned by Google and as you probably know, Google is used in approximately 85% of all search engine searches. You might not get a lot of interaction on Google+ but it does help you tremendously in the search results. You'll want to at least play the Google+ game a little bit and, at the very least, set up a profile, have the +1 sharing buttons on your posts, and be sure to +1 other businesses because that will help get people to your website.

Having a presence on Google+ is particularly important if you blog as part of your marketing exercise, because Google+ verifies

who you are in relation to the content you are producing and this is extremely important if you want that content to be found in searches.

The most important thing to Google is being able to provide the best possible results to the people using their search engine. They don't want auto-generated spammy content to appear in their search results and their Google+ verification system is the first step in sorting the content farms from the genuine content.

The relationship with people who connect with you on social media is not anywhere near as close as those who give you their email address (generally by opting in to receive some free content you offer). Your social media friends are not really friends, they are acquaintances at best. Facebook can decide at any minute to change the rules on who can or cannot follow you, and there is not really any good way of reaching out to everyone who 'Likes' you or friends you on Facebook.

Plus, nothing you post on Facebook goes out to everyone you are connected to anyway. Even if a post does show up on a friend's feed—there is a chance they won't notice it or even see it when you make the post. There is a much better chance of someone seeing or acting on an email message that appears in their personal inbox.

Once you have all the different methods for reaching out to your customers online set up and running, you need to interact with the people who show up. Social media is not designed to broadcast everything that you're doing all the time—'We're doing this, we're having a sale on this, we're doing that, we're having a sale on that.' Don't be that guy at the party. You really need to take some time to listen to what people are saying, genuinely interact with people with no expectation of getting anything from them, and to actually be helpful.

Angela Jia Kim, who is the founder of *Savor the Success*, has a philosophy called Give, Give, Get. You need to give twice in

order to receive, and that's really a good ratio. Think about it in these terms—'I want to get something, so how can I give to some different people to make the laws of the universe work in such a way that I'll get something back?' You may not get back from the people you give to—it may be from someone else entirely. When you give, you need to give with a genuine pureness of heart, not expecting anything back but just to be helpful. Going back to your story and to your manifesto and giving in the spirit of making the transformation that you seek to make in the world, will provide you with that the reason to give versus get.

When you do things in this way, people begin to pay attention to you and they begin to realize who you are and what you are about. And so 'give, give, get', is a motto that you really should be using in your social media as well.

Finally, a reminder that your platforms are not news stations. It's not broadcasting. It's a salon, it's a party, it's an open house. People are coming in to get to know you, and you are getting to know them. You're building a community. I see on Twitter all the time people who just purely broadcast stuff like, 'Check out my blog post. Check out my blog post. Check out my blog post.' This broadcasting gets really repetitive and really boring and you tend not to click through or take a close look at anything this type of person has to offer.

An oft repeated, but useful analogy is: Imagine yourself going to a house where there's a party going on, you don't necessarily know many people there. How would you interact? If you start off by going, 'I'm so-and-so and I do this, and I do that,' then people are going to start edging towards the bar pretty quickly.

If you want the really good connections then you talk about *them*, not about you.

One of the things that I love the most about the online marketing world is that it really is about collaboration and not competition. You can grow your reputation and grow your list very quickly by

working with other people. You can make pretty good money referring clients to other people's programs, for which you can earn a commission for the referral (affiliate commission).

With affiliate programs, a business will pay you for everyone who buys a product from them because of your recommendation of their product or service. The sale is tracked through a special URL link they give you, which identifies you as the referrer. You generally receive a percentage of the sale which can be up to 100 percent, but typically it's around 25 to 40 percent. If you personally use a lot of products and like to try out new programs and make recommendations, then affiliate marketing is where you can create another stream of income. Affiliate Marketing can also be a great way to introduce somebody to your audience that could solve a problem that you don't directly resolve. You can earn an affiliate commission from everyone in your audience who purchases their product or service. Just be up front with your clients about what you are doing.

A more advanced and more intensive way of doing the same thing is a J.V. or Joint Venture. With a Joint Venture it is more than just receiving a tracking link. You are actually planning a promotion together and working in tandem as a team for this one project. J.V.s are another way to collaborate with someone without having to compete. Joint Ventures are a really smart thing to do especially when you're first starting out and you don't have a huge range of services to offer.

Further, if you are specializing in one niche market and you are looking to find other people who serve the same audience but who overlap with you slightly, you might recommend their services so that your customers get a one-stop shop. Customers and clients can come to you and get help with everything they need based on your recommendations and you make money from the referrals.

I have also participated in simple reciprocal referrals where it is just a 'I refer you and you refer me' arrangement which is perfectly legitimate model as well.

For example, if you're a website designer, it would be great to team up with a graphic designer and maybe an SEO guy. Both those services are highly complementary but without the problem of treading on each other's toes. It is very easy to refer customers to each other all the way along the line.

Part of what we've built in Solo Biz Hacker is a database to help you make some of those connections. To help you find a web designer, to help you find graphic designers. If you're an SEO person, it can help you find copywriters and web designers and people who can compliment your offering. Our back-end system allows ways for you to collaborate on projects for clients so that they can have the experience of working with a much larger agency-type team, comprising a collection of independent businesses. Feel free to check that out. We've even built in a way to exchange services with no money changing hands. This is not only a great way to build your portfolio as a service provider but also a way to get your platform built when you are just starting out and don't have much of a budget to spend.

The final part of building a platform is creating a media network for your business. Media networks get you in front of more customers so you can grow your business. The traditional way of doing that, which is still probably the best way to get quick results, is through speaking engagements. You will need to do some research to find suitable places where you can speak in your town.

The audiences you speak to need not be big audiences although, if you can pull that off it would get you a lot of traction. You can start with meetups, Rotary clubs, local professional groups—there's a whole variety of different levels to which you can go out and speak to groups of people. Which of these options works best for you really depends upon your particular business.

If you don't want to speak locally (or live in a small town) with few opportunities, another way to get speaking engagements is to take part in teleseminars and telesummits, or be a guest on someone's podcast. One of the ways to get bookings quickly

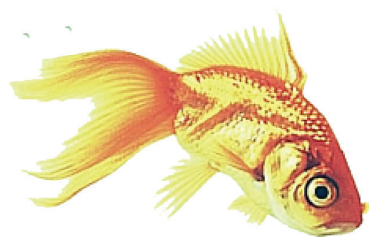
is to create your own podcast or teleseminar series. You can book guests on your own show and, in exchange, you can be interviewed on their show—it's a win-win.

Tips and Inspiration:

Garrett Robinson Advice for New Authors

“A lot of people talk about platform, and a lot of people are confused about what ‘platform’ means. Platform only means a place where when you speak people will hear you. For most people that’s a website. But a lot of people don’t want to build a website, so they will build their platform on Facebook or Twitter, or Goodreads—which is a very popular site for both readers and authors. I recommend your own website. Get somebody else to build it for you, because if you are on Facebook or Twitter or Goodreads and they change, you are forced into that change, and you might not interact with that website well any longer. For example, Facebook used to be great for authors—until they changed the rules for Pages in a way that people who follow your page don’t necessarily now see what you post—so that sucks—and there’s nothing you can do about that. If you are on your own website then you are in control. If people are subscribing to your website and they are getting an email every time you post something that is thoroughly within your control. You can be other places too, but your website needs to be your home.

You also need to build an email list. Authors generally hate the idea of doing this, don’t want to do it, or just don’t see it as being important. You have to do it. You can build a free email list to start with MailChimp (you do have to pay once your list gets bigger), or a paid one with AWeber—there’s lots of sites out there that will do it. You need to have a thing in the back of your book that says ‘Did you enjoy this book? Do you want to get an email when I publish my next one? Sign up here.’ This will become your best marketing tool. That email list will become how you connect with your reader directly—how you persuade them to buy direct—essentially how you do everything with them. It is extremely important, and not enough authors see how important this is.”





CHAPTER TWELVE

Story—Michele Scism

"I WOULD tell someone just starting out to look for your systems. Anything that can be systematized can be handled by someone else. A lot of times people say to me—I don't have a system. Yes you do. Everyone has a system; you just don't realize you have a system. Write those things down and start to look at how to teach other people how to do those things.

The biggest hurdle in the beginning is that we are so in the DOING that we aren't taking the time to CREATE the business. We are creating a job for ourselves. We're so worried about where that next client is going to come from that we're not looking at the bigger picture.

If you're just getting started in a business obviously there are lots of things that you have to do. You have to put in the time. For example, take coaching—you have to be doing the coaching because you are creating the system. One mistake I often see is that people start out thinking they are going to have a leveraged business from day one, therefore, not actually having to do the work themselves, just having their team doing it. That's a dangerous place to play in the beginning of a business unless you're very good and you have your systems well thought out

and in place. I'm not saying that you don't have to do that type of work. You do, at least to start with. You have to earn the right to bring in that team. However, if you've been in business for years and you're still playing in that place, where you are still doing all the work yourself, then you need to be looking at how you are going to build a sustainable, scalable, sellable business.

When I started my business, I started with my first virtual assistant right off the bat. It frees you up to look at those other pieces of your business. So here's the other side of that. We all have lots of talent. I have a degree in accounting. I'm my bookkeeper's worst nightmare. I could do my own bookkeeping. I realized early on that wasn't going to make me money in this business. I got a bookkeeper right away. I got a VA right away. We started with one person. I went through a couple of V.A.'s before I found the right one. You have to get out there and get people to help you. If you don't do that you will be that person sitting there five years from now going—why is this still so hard? Are you building a business or are you making a living?"

Step 5: P = Perfect

Now that you've created your website and you have customers, you are going to reach a point really quickly where there is more potential work than you have time to do. Of course, you can hire team members to help you with the work, but you need a method in place to inform them of what they need do and in a way that your business still reflects you, your unique story and your way of doing things.

The way to do that is to create systems. The starting point of systems creation is a project management tool, and there are many out there that do an excellent job. Some popular online based project management systems include Asana, Basecamp, and Trello. The best project management system is the one that your team will use consistently. It might take some experimentation to discover what works best for your particular team.

A project management system is basically a giant online to-do list that you can use together as a team. These programs relieve a lot of the emailing back and forth between team members because everything is stored online where you and your team can go into your project management system and see what tasks are still pending, which tasks have been completed, by whom, and when they were completed. You can also create checklists for different projects that occur over and over again.

The nice thing is that as soon as you have everything systematized you can pass off a lot of the routine tasks to somebody else. For example, a new client comes on board; you have a client on boarding checklist that says exactly what needs to be done—your assistant can take care of everything. The benefits are that the customer gets tended to faster, no details are omitted, and you have more time to spend with your existing clients.

When you create systems always employ the KISS principle. You want to Keep It Simple. Include as many details as possible, but don't make it complicated. The more complicated you make something, the easier it is to veer off course, causing problems. Keep it very simple, and make sure all of the information that an assistant might need is in the system. A good test is to give the new system to someone who hasn't been through the process before and see how they do. Also, consider assigning a responsibility to a team member for a particular part of your business. Make them responsible for creating the system. Subject to your approval, of course.

I often liken this to a game that I played in high school called the 'peanut butter sandwich game'. The idea of the game was that one person had to write down very detailed instructions on how to make a peanut butter sandwich, assuming that the person who has to make the sandwich is from Mars, had never had a peanut butter sandwich before, and had no clue how to put one together.

The instructions start with cutting the bread and were literally as detailed as 'take the bread out of the cupboard on the right-hand

side of the kitchen, take the cover off of the knife, make sure the knife is sharp, cut the bread, put the butter knife in the peanut butter, twirl it around' etc. The idea was that the instructions contained all the steps needed to make a peanut butter sandwich. The proof came when someone then had to try to make a peanut butter sandwich by following the literal instructions given. It was surprising how many people left out some key essential step.

A good way to make sure that your systems are good is to ask someone to use it. Even if you don't have a team at the very beginning, go ahead and create your system and then give it to your mom, or give it to a friend and say, 'Hey can you try this task based on my system?' And you'll very quickly find out where the glitches are.

There are a lot of systems in your business that can be automated and email auto-responders are a key to a lot of them. When a customer places an order they should quickly get a receipt. They should automatically get a follow-up email asking them to book their appointment (or whatever the follow up is for the product in question). Or, if someone has been a guest on your podcast they should automatically get a thank-you note, and so on.

There are many ways to automate systems and tasks, even where several different types of software are involved. Zapier allows you to make different programs work together. For example, if someone books time on my calendar, Zapier will send an instruction to my email system telling it to send an email that says x. These integrations will save you so much time once you have them set up. You will still save money even if you decide to pay someone to set up the automations for you—because over the long term, you are not going to be paying someone to do those tasks.

A lot of the processes are going to be customer-service processes. Answering the same query over and over again is not a good use of your time. A lot of the issues that are going to come up are the same ones that come up over and over again. An easy system for

customer service is to create a series of draft emails that answer your customer's most common inquiries.

The rule of thumb is that if you do something more than once; write down the steps involved because even if it is just you repeating the task, it will save you time to have all the passwords, all the websites, all the links, etc., in one place, ready to go. A great place to keep all this type of information is generally in your project management system.

Planning

Once your systems are in place, or even as you're developing your systems and processes, you need to find a way to make sure that you are staying on track. It's very easy to get bogged down in the day-to-day 'doing' of your client work and not take time to step back and look at your processes from a bigger perspective. I like to do this at least once every quarter.

The 1st Thing Is To Review Your Systems

- What systems do I have in place?
- What systems do I need to develop?
- What more can be done?
- What can be done better?
- What mistakes are happening?

If there's a constantly recurring mistake in your business, it's not usually the fault of the person who's doing it, it's the process. Finding that hole in the process will save that problem recurring and thus save a lot of wasted time and energy.

The 2nd Thing You Want To Look At Is Your Marketing

- How many people are visiting your website?
- How many people are buying your products?
- How effective are your Facebook ads?
- Do you like to try a different kind of social media because your Facebook ads aren't as effective?

- How can you plan your marketing to make sure your marketing is reaching the right people?
- Has your customer persona changed?
- Are different people attracted to your ads than your customer persona? And, if so, do you need to adjust your persona? Or adjust your advertising copy? You can use split testing to help you decide which way to go.

The 3rd Thing Is To Look at Your Financial Statements

- Am I meeting my revenue goals?
- Am I meeting my sales goals?
- What needs to change to have my company be more financially viable?
- Are my expenses too high?

The more you track things, the more you tend to stay on course, because you will know for sure whether or not your course is valid or you're veering off somewhere and need to make a correction.

Within your quarterly reviews, you might also set some weekly goals: 'This week, my goal is to achieve this.' Go through your tasks on a weekly basis and look at needs to happen in your business. Make sure that you're spending time on your income-producing activities instead of your 'busy' work. You can redo your logo, and redo your website a thousand times but neither are going to make you any money.

Closely look at the things that directly lead to making money. The more money you make, the more people you can help over the long-term. Metrics are the key to discovering what activities are really making you the money. There are all sorts of different metrics you can track. Social media metrics are amazing, because in Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, etc, you can drill down to exactly who is following your content. How old are they? Where do they live? What kind of computer are they using? Are they accessing

you via smart phone? Facebook goes even deeper than that. What are their shopping habits? Do they like baseball?

With all the different areas you can target and really learn about the people who are in your audience. This information allows you to better target your messaging.

The other metrics to keep a regular eye on check are those provided in Google Analytics. Google Analytics has become very sophisticated over the past couple of years—you can even learn where your customers originally came from and where they go after they've viewed your page.

Some Of The Things Google Analytics Can Tell You:

- Do more people buy from you who find you on Facebook or do more people buy from you who find you on Pinterest?
- What times are most people accessing your content?
- What sorts of content gets the most activity? You may find out that people really like your infographics. Okay, do more infographics.
- How many pages do people visit on an average visit?
- How long do they stay on my site?
- Which pages get the most traffic?
- Where do they go most often after leaving my home page?

In terms of revenue, you should be tracking your sales, your expenses—and also your cash flow because the money from some sales doesn't necessarily come in immediately. For example, a coaching program might be paid in installments. The sale might total \$10,000, but you are only receiving \$2000 of it immediately. That is something you really need to know which Analytics can give you so you are not shooting blind.

Intuition is an amazing thing, but data is unstoppable. The difference between people who spin their wheels in business and the people who really go far boils down to those who are paying attention to the data. If you look to the people who are making seven-figure incomes or more in their business, they all have very sophisticated tracking and metrics set up to monitor what is really happening in their business.

You also need a process by which to get feedback, reviews and testimonials from your customers. Get that in place early. Testimonials are worth gold, especially if you have an online business because people don't know you, and they need to know, like and trust you before they will do business with you. Testimonials act as social proof of your trustworthiness. Proof that you can deliver the transformation that you are promising people in your sales copy.

Amazon is tops when it comes to social proof. Not only do you see reviews for every product—you are also automatically asked to provide reviews for every product you purchase. How many of you reading this always check the reviews on Amazon before you buy a particular product? We certainly do.

Beyond reviews and testimonials, you need to build a way of co-opting your customers into your production process by letting them co-create with you, giving them a way to offer suggestions and feedback. When you get feedback (even negative feedback)—make sure you mention and appreciate it. 'A customer suggested that we do this, so we're doing it! Thank you, Lucy, for your awesome suggestion.' Because that way, you are building people into your community and to some extent, your community can help create new offerings for your business, and all without having to pay them to do so.

One of the greatest examples I have seen is from British musician, Rob Chapman. He now sells his own signature line of guitars, all of which he creates from suggestions by his community. Every time he decides to create a new guitar, he'll ask his followers

what type of wood they want the neck made out of, or for the fretboard, how many frets they want, what kind of pickups they want to use, what kind of machine heads they want. Each new model is co-created within the community and this gives people a sense of ownership and belonging and in turn, they're much more likely to follow through and buy from Rob because of this connection.

Your homework for this chapter is to go through and map out the different systems that you need in your business and create a plan for getting those systems implemented. Systems and automations are going to save your sanity once your business starts to grow.

These very systems will enable your business to grow in the first place, because without a way to scale up, you're going to find yourself stuck on a certain plateau, and there you will remain. The only way you can physically expand your business is by introducing and maintaining systems that work.

Tips and Inspiration:

Dana D'Orsi On Having Fun!

“Always be asking yourself as you are implementing your plan—how can I make this process easier and more fun? How can I take what I am doing and make it more efficient, or more effective? A lot of times people are taking action, but they are taking too long to do it, or it’s not working—they are doing the same activities but they are not yielding results—so always analyzing what you are doing and seeing if there are ways you could be leveraging your time better. For example, if you are writing a blog article, how can you re-purpose that—so you are taking one piece of content and you are blasting it everywhere—because you have already gone to the effort of creating it you might as well leverage that.

Or you might have a speaking engagement and you have someone come along and videotape it, take the audio out and create an information product. I did that myself—so it was something I was already doing and it allowed me to create a new product.”

Action Item: Systems Checklist

Once your systems are in place, or even as you’re developing your systems and processes, you need to find a way to make sure that you are staying on track. It’s very easy to get bogged down in the day-to-day ‘doing’ of your client work and not take time to step back and look at your processes from a bigger perspective. Go through this systems checklist at least once every quarter.

Free action item worksheets at:
<https://solobizhacker.com/planning-your-escape/>



CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Story—Michele Scism

"MY dad said to me when I was eight years old, 'You know you're a real business owner when you can take your family on vacation and you're still making money.' I'll never forget that. Ever since then as I'm building businesses I'm thinking wait—can I go on vacation and still make money?"

If we look at the coaching world in particular, a lot of times, and there are a lot of businesses like this, where we develop a business and yeah we started it, and yeah we own it, but without us it doesn't operate. If you're in that position you've created a job for yourself."

Step 6: E = Expand

The final element of the E.S.C.A.P.E. Plan is all about expansion. This is the point where your business has grown to the position that you really can no longer be chief cook and bottle-washer within your business. You need to scale it if you are going to grow. Some people choose never to do that. They are content in just keeping their business at a level that provides them a comfortable living and there is certainly nothing wrong in doing that. Your business obviously has to be what works for you.

Most of you reading this book will be at the beginning stages of your businesses, so you are probably not yet at the point where you have to think about expanding. But, if you think that you will want to scale your business in the future, maybe in order to get it to a place where it can grow, or so you can sell it, you do need to have some ideas of how you would make that happen because this information is going to affect how you create your business in the early stages.

As we said above, you need to have some idea of what you want your business to do for YOU. Ultimately, if you don't then it could very easily end up failing because you'll just get overwhelmed. Or, it will end up becoming another job.

A lot of people go into business because they want to leave some kind of legacy to their children. They want to leave something behind that goes beyond more than just them. They're happy to create it, but they want it to carry on after them. If this is the case for you, then you really need to think about how you are going to reach that stage as early as possible. Eventually you will want a business that can run smoothly whether you are there or not, and that is the focus of this next chapter. It's about expanding your business to that level.

I didn't really realize I was starting a business when I first started out. I became a virtual assistant, providing freelance administrative support, so that I could have more time to spend with my daughter who was three years old at the time. As my business grew, it became very evident that I had less freedom rather than more. I found that I could never take vacation because my clients always had things that needed to be done. I didn't have a good backup system in place that would allow me to provide an uninterrupted service while I was away.

As I got more clients and more work I found myself working all the time. Finally I had to make a choice to scale that business back so that I could have the freedom to do what I really wanted to do which certainly wasn't doing other people's administrative work.

Had I thought about the expansion and scaling and exit strategies from the beginning, I think I would have been able to make that transition work much better and in a way that I didn't lose so much of what I had worked so hard to build up.

There are different ways you can expand your business. The first and most traditional way would be to hire team members to do some of the work for you. One way that we advocate, especially for people who are selling their creative capital, is to create a business in the artist/apprentice sort of way so that you hire more and more people to do more and more of the non-creative work. This might mean hiring a bookkeeper, and then maybe a virtual assistant to make the appointments, and then you might take on someone to do your marketing for you. So it goes on, and on, until really all you are personally doing in your business is the thinking and the creating parts, and directing your team.

We recently interviewed the founders of a company called ImageThink which was created by two artists. Their business is visual recording. Although they are founders of the company, they still do the visual recording themselves, but by necessity they can't do two hundred or more gigs a year between them, so they've really had to train people to do things the way that they themselves would do them. They spent a lot of time on their processes so that their clients continue to get a uniform experience. When we asked them whether, as managers, they felt less in the creative flow, they were of the belief that creating the systems and processes and defining the company culture, were rewarding and creative in and of themselves. They enjoyed being able to provide a livelihood to other people, doing something that was both fun and rewarding.

In terms of a more traditional view of an artist, an artist will paint paintings (among other things, of course, but for the sake of the argument). Normally, in terms of the business, you would think that you, as the artist, need to be present to paint the paintings, and therefore can only paint so many paintings in any one time period. But an artist can go beyond that. If you think of Laurel

Burch, for example, who creates cat pictures that end up on bags—they are very iconic recognizable motifs that can then be used on a whole variety of items, so you only have to create the art once and then that can naturally be put on a whole range of products.

Another way to expand is through licensing. Licensing allows you to create the beginning of something while allowing other people the chance to use what you create in different ways. In that way you don't end up having to paint a thousand paintings. You start with the individual paintings, then create the prints, the coffee mugs, the T-shirts, etc., etc.—this is another method of scaling what you do.

Another way is to expand the reach of what you're doing. If you're an author and you're selling books, you can add audiobooks, you can create videos, you can offer things in different formats, you can offer compendiums, and you can have different people creating those different additional products for you.

Personal coaches can expand their reach by teaching others their methodology. Others can create their own businesses by teaching your method, and pay you to learn that method. They might even be willing to pay you a percentage of what they earn from applying your method if that method or guru's name attracts significant amounts of business.

We actually license somebody else's program for our Passion Project. We were provided with all the materials to run the program—the call scripts, the ads, the emails, everything. We paid to take the class and get licensed in the methodology. Our Passion Project isn't exactly like the original, it's different but purchasing that base and all that came with it has been a godsend to us. It has saved us more than the amount of time it would have taken to get a system off the ground ourselves, so it really has been perfect for us.

The most traditional way people expand is to add team members. In the beginning you want to add team members that can support

you in your areas of weakness. For example, you may want to hire a bookkeeper if you don't like bookkeeping. You may want to hire someone to do your technical stuff if that's not your joy. You want to find people who can take things off your plate to allow you to spend more time for creative and revenue earning tasks. The next level up is to hire people to actually do what you do, so that you can support more clients or customers through them.

We like to hire for personality traits rather than skills. Skills are easy to learn but personality traits that fit with you and the rest of your team are far harder if not impossible to train someone for.

If you want someone who is very particular and will ask you a lot of questions, then hire that person. If you want someone who will just run with things but you are not bothered exactly how it gets done, then you should hire a person who can do that. As you hire more people you will soon get a better sense of which types of people fit into your particular culture. One of the things that works really well in the online world is to hire fast and fire fast. So hire people, see how they work out. If they don't work out, move on to the next person quickly and then eventually you will find just the right person for you. I've also been known to hire two people for projects and see who performs the best and then choose accordingly.

Most online businesses hire other contractors for very limited amounts of hours at first. Rather than hiring one support person, you could hire a variety of different people to fulfill specific roles. You might hire one person to work on your website; you may have another person who creates graphics for you; you may have yet another person who does your all your booking, customer service, or similar tasks. Tap into the expertise of others you need when you need it.

In the beginning it's better to hire specialists in a variety of different areas that you can coordinate. You can even hire somebody called an online business manager to coordinate all those different pieces for you and you get the best of both worlds.

Whatever your preferred strategy, you need to plan towards your goals. Even if that might be five or ten years away from where you are now.

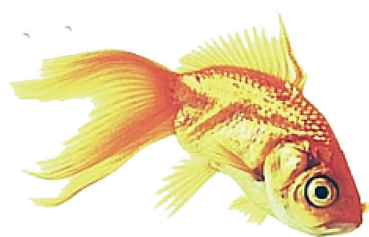
The final thing I want to leave you with is that big businesses and little businesses make a difference in different ways. As a very small startup business owner, the transformation that you are making is based on a real intimacy with individual clients. However, as your business grows you become more removed from direct client work and so are making a difference through your company, through your systems, processes and culture. You also make a difference in the lives of the people for whom you are creating opportunities for employment. Not everybody needs a big business. Some people would prefer their businesses remain small. By thinking of where you are going from the beginning, you can create a business that will be more likely to lead you to where you ultimately want it to end up.

Tips and Inspiration:

Tressa Beheim On Working With A Virtual Assistant

“I think systems are probably one of the most helpful ways to work with a VA. If you have tasks that you do over and over again those are really easy to have a VA start with. Something like your scheduling or your intake process for consultation. Things that are very simple as far as there’s not a lot of potential for... ‘or maybe we do this’, ‘or maybe we do that’. It’s just like, ‘Step A, step B, step C...’. And then the second thing is you really have to ask yourself, ‘Is it worth it for me to do this?’ I think that’s what a lot of business owners get caught up in and they don’t want to pay somebody to do things that they could do themselves. So the question is, it’s not necessarily can you do it—but rather—is it the best use of your time?”

And a lot of time, yes, you could easily build your own website. You could easily do all of your own blog posting, you could easily do all your scheduling, but you probably shouldn’t be doing it because you can have somebody help you with that and then you can focus on growing your business—on the things that actually do require you to do them.”





CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Getting The Support You Need

Story—Rae Majors-Wildman On Being a Lone Ranger

"I WILL tell myself—get out of the 'Bat Cave'—I have a home office and I can stay in this home office all day long—I love my 'Bat Cave', as I call it! The reality of it is being in the Bat Cave, being isolated, is not the key to success. But it is not only that—it is this myth that being a lone ranger is a badge of honor.

If you are going to be successful you are going to have to build a team. You have to find a community that is going to support you. You have to find a team—whether that's a virtual assistant, a graphic designer, or an attorney, you have to build your bench of individuals who are going to be there and raising you up in order to get your message across.

If you just stay in that lone ranger space, first of all you are going to get burnt out trying to do everything—which is crazy. And secondly, you are never going to make the greater impact because the impact comes by leveraging other people and systems."

I think a lot of people have the idea that if they start their own business and it's a one person business, that they need to really be able to do everything themselves. The secret is—nobody can do everything and the people who try end up getting overwhelmed.

If you are an expert in web design or online marketing, then maybe you should start an online marketing business or an ad agency. For most people though, you should be spending your time honing your own particular craft—not learning how create a WordPress website.

One of the big downsides of being a solopreneur is that you don't get a lot of feedback. You are sitting there in your La-Z-Boy with your laptop, working away, and working away, and you don't have anyone to provide you with the structure, the accountability and the expertise you need.

When I first started my virtual assistant business, my husband, the civil engineer who works for our local city government, thought I was doing some semi-legal internet gambling business. The only other people I talked to all day were moms at the preschool who had no idea what I was doing. They thought that I was in some sort of multi-level marketing sales organization which wasn't what I was doing either. Nobody had a clue, really.

As an entrepreneur it is important to build a support network around you of people who do get it, and who do have the expertise that you can call on as needed. You don't need to hire a team of eight people when you first start out but you do need to know who to call when you need assistance.

To help fellow passionate entrepreneurs find other people who get it—we created Solo Biz Hacker. Solo Biz Hacker is a modern day guild (or affordable incubator) that offers the ability to meet other entrepreneurs who are doing similar things and to exchange experience and skills. It helps you to spend time on getting better at what you do—rather than learning to do all the things needed to run your business but have no interest in learning.

We've created a virtual village, so that you can find the different people who can help you and find the experts you need when you need them. Our back-end system makes it really easy to collaborate on projects and to find other people who need exactly the skills you offer. Likewise, you can post what you are working on, and people can come in and say, 'I can help you with this, and I can help you with that.' What it accomplishes is a virtual co-working space. You can find out more about it at Solo Biz Hacker—SoloBizHacker.com.

At SoloBizHacker.com you will find people who you will want to develop relationships with and people you can call on when you need them. At the beginning, when cash is tight, it might be a trade kind of situation you would benefit from. Our time bank option allows you to earn 'hours' by doing work for others, and then you can spend those hours with different people for the services you need. Time banking is a highly useful option for people who are just starting out. Time banking also allows you to try out services, get feedback, and earn testimonials before you put those out to a wider audience.

One of the big reasons for choosing collaboration and exchange, especially early on in your business, is that in trying to do everything yourself you end up doing a lot of work that isn't making you any money. You go into business to provide a particular expertise in solving a particular need for people. If you end up doing all the secretarial work, or all of the customer service work, or designing your own website, you may find yourself spending a huge amount of time doing these things and not putting the time in on the tasks that actually make money. This is where a lot of businesses fail.

Hiring someone to do these tasks may seem like it adds unnecessary costs into the equation but, in the end, if you have priced your products or services correctly, you will find that you actually make a lot more money by delegating these tasks.

The first thing you need is a business coach. One of the most common tips we hear in our podcast interviews is get a coach

as soon as you can because it will save you years of trial, error and uncertainty. You need someone who is a little bit further along than you are to show you what you need to do. We have interviewed over one-hundred people and probably seventy percent of them said, 'My advice to you is to find a mentor, find a coach, get someone who can help guide you to where you need to go, because you don't know what you don't know.'

This addresses one of the primary reasons people are afraid to start businesses. They see the statistic that appears in publications all the time that says '80% of businesses fail in the first five years'. Half the problem with those failures is that people are just stumbling around in the dark, not knowing how things should be done, and therefore they end up failing. This whole process of connecting with other people who have done it before means that you don't have to make the same mistakes. You don't have to learn by trial and error. Everything has been done by somebody before. Learn from others and then the chances of you actually being one of those 15% or 20% who succeed is going to be all that much greater. Affordable coaching is built into membership tiers of Solo Biz Hacker.

The next person you will inevitably seek out to work for you, especially if you are not so technically savvy, is a virtual assistant. There is a huge variation in what virtual assistants do. There are virtual assistants who are very good technically, who can set up your website, who can set up your emails and your auto-responders, who can create newsletters and email blasts. There are virtual assistants who are very good at content, who can do some of your copy writing for you. There are virtual assistants who are basically secretaries, who can book your calendar for you, respond to your incoming email, or send out your newsletter. The amount of money a virtual assistant will charge ranges from \$10 an hour to \$100 an hour depending on their individual experience and skill set.

You will probably want somebody to work about ten hours a month to begin with—someone who can manage some of your

workload, provide a backup and a sounding board for you, as you build your business. You need to be very clear on what you want that person to do and what role you want them to play in your business.

Other roles you may want to add to your team are a social media person, someone who really knows the ins and outs of Facebook ads, or just someone to do the day-to-day posting of your social media for you, which can be a huge time saver. You might also want them to monitor what is going on in your social media communities and suggest connections for you to follow up with, or find new marketing opportunities to explore.

At certain times you will very likely have need of a graphic designer. You want your website and marketing materials to look nice. What you put out is a direct reflection of you and your business. You want your website to look professional and attractive.

Unlike the corporate world, where you have an IT guy you can call on to solve problems, you don't have this luxury as a solopreneur. Being able to get tech help or knowing someone who is very technically oriented and being able to ask them for help when you need it is vital to the continued smooth running of your business.

If you don't have a techy friend you can call on at will, you might want to opt in to a service. There is a great company called WPCurve who provides a membership program costing \$70-80 a month, for which they provide on-call support for any issues that might crop up with your website or your WordPress site. Not only can WPCurve fix any problems, but you can also have them do your postings for you. If you are a (Apple) Mac user, being in AppleCare might be a good investment, so you can ask questions and get troubleshooting help when needed.

The key is to have people available from the beginning—so that when you need them you can call on them. If your business is providing services to others, you may want to be the 'person' for somebody else's business. Let's say you are a graphic designer.

You want the people in your network to know that you're a graphic designer so that when they need something they will call on you, just like you call on them. Developing reciprocal relationships can end up providing regular and ongoing clients.

Finally, especially for people whose business is based around manufacturing or making some kind of product, having a local mentor can be really useful, especially if your market is a local one. A local, experienced and connected mentor can open doors for you, let you know who the best suppliers are in your area and help you find the resources you need to be successful. They can answer those tough questions that only someone with local connections and knowledge can answer. A common connection is formed and a lot of times local people are willing to mentor you for free.

It is also very helpful to have somebody you can physically meet with because if you have somebody advising you who lives several states away, you can't connect with them very easily. If you are relying on their help and they don't answer the phone or if the time difference creates a conflict, then you are really stuck. A local mentor will be far more invested in supporting another local business, and you will get much more out of that relationship than you are likely to do with someone further away.

The big secret to success as a small business is to belong to a support network and to have access to the support you need when you need it so you can stay on track. We would like to invite you to join our support network, Solo Biz Hacker and you can do that at SoloBizHacker.com.

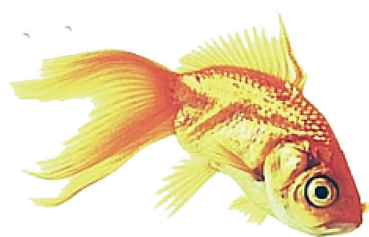
Tips and Inspiration:

Rae Majors-Wildman On Finding Support

“You need to find a community of people who will support you. It is finding that team, hiring that VA, and for a lot of people it is someone who can help them on the personal side—someone to pick up the kids, someone to pick up the groceries—it’s having that support team.

One of the important things to understand is that in running a successful business you will NEVER get it all done. You need to set realistic expectations. The more success you achieve the more things that are going to be left undone. So make sure you are okay with that. Its not like being an employee where at the end of the day you can leave your desk and say ‘That’s it I’m done for the day’. Being an entrepreneur it doesn’t work like that—just be aware that this is the case and be okay with it.

Make sure that you start with the end in mind. When I first started out in business I was supporting one of my mentors at a live event. She said something and I literally had to leave the room because I had the proverbial meltdown. She asked me what was wrong and I realized that I had hit the wall. I was doing everything they were telling me to do, I was sending out the emails, I was marketing, I was doing webinars and teleseminars, and I was having some success—I was making a six figure income, but I was burnt out. But what my mentor shared with me is, she said ‘Rae, what does success look like?’ It is knowing what your business looks like, starting with the end in mind and saying ‘My business will be successful when’ whatever that number is, or whether you are doing it to sell, or to transfer to your children, or whether its just to have a healthy six figure or seven figure business, you have got to know what that goal is. Because if not you are going to keep running on that perpetual hamster wheel and you are never going to feel like you are winning.”





CHAPTER FIFTEEN

The Power Of The First Step

Story—Kimberley Simon

"If I could go back in time to when I first started out, what I would tell myself, knowing what I know now, is 'share yourself all along the way'. Don't wait until you have that new certificate, or study more—start now, wherever you are at, and just share in whatever way you are inspired to do so. If you hold back on that, the people who are waiting for you can't find you.

Also, when you are scared—and by that I mean afraid to move out of your comfort zone—because even if you don't like your comfort zone it is familiar, you can manage it—you are moving into new territory that there is no map for it—particularly when it is deeply personal and you are moving into your core power. So KNOW that there is no map. Stay calm, don't get overwhelmed—and just focus on the next step."

One Month Projects

One of the most powerful things I know for getting things done in your business is the 'one month project'.

I really like the one month project because sometimes when you have a 90-day goal you tend to get lost along the way a little bit. Ninety days is a major chunk of time and during that three-month period a lot of unexpected things can happen.

A one-week goal is too short, because you need to have time to figure out the goal and figure out what you are doing to achieve your goal. By the time you've done that, the week has passed. So one month seems like the perfect amount of time to really get something accomplished.

The project is a mixture of group accountability and creativity training. In our 30-Day Passion Project, participants have created business plans; made a new opt-in page; created a new training program; developed a new membership site... a whole variety of things.

Any of these projects can be completed within a one month period with the right support. The right support is exactly what we give you in our Passion Projects. A lot of people ask, 'How do I pick which of all my various projects I want to do?' The answer is actually pretty easy. The first step is to write down *all* the things you might want to do—anything and everything, whether it has to do with your business or not. 'I want to eat more healthily, I want to go for a walk every day, I want to learn how to meditate, I want to create an opt-in page, I want to create a membership site, I want to write my book'—anything you could possibly wish to do, write it down. Then take some time to meditate on that list of possibilities, maybe even put your hand on the piece of paper you wrote the list on and sort of feel the energy coming up from the list to give you inspiration. Sometimes a project will bubble to the top of your mind, giving you a place to start.

Realizing that even if you have a hundred possible projects, realistically you can never do them all at once but you can do those one hundred projects sequentially. Think of that first project as the first stepping stone in a bridge that goes across the creek—you are advancing step-by-step by step, each step getting you closer to the other side of the water. Think of that first step, that

first project, lighting up as you go and becoming that first one-month Passion Project.

If you have whittled your list down to a shortlist of projects but you still really can't decide which one to start with, choose the one that excites you the most. The only way to make that project a sure fire success is to do something that you've always wanted to do, not necessarily what you should be doing. Half the time, those things that you think you SHOULD be doing—deep down you don't really want to do.

The second ingredient of a successful Passion Project is surrounding yourself with a group of people who will keep you accountable to your goal. By accountable, I don't mean in a strict, schoolmarm kind of way but rather as supporting you and being with you, giving you some place to go when you run into problems and roadblocks. It is nice to have someone pop in and say, 'Hey! What's going on here? Why haven't you done that?' Or, 'Is there anything we can do to help you get closer to your goal?' When you know people are following your progress and rooting for you, it helps you stay accountable to what you said you were going to do, because you want those people to be with you in celebrating your progress.

If you find yourself getting stuck or having problems, chances are one of the other people in the group has been there themselves, found a way through and can help you with it to the other side. Just the mere fact of sharing their experience can help you in overcoming your own blockage. People think that their problems are unique when, in actual fact, there are many who have been through the same thing at some stage or other in their journey.

The other unique aspect to our Passion Project is that we celebrate the small victories. Most accountability groups give you a structure and make you feel like you need to check in with the other members of the group. In Passion Project we actively and joyfully celebrate your progress every week. We have rattles and music, and everyone is very excited to hear what you've done.

Seldom is progress a linear process. You need to celebrate the small victories where you find them.

The magic is in knowing that in just making it to the call, people are going to celebrate any progress you've made. I was astounded at what was accomplished in our last Passion Project group. Everybody who actively participated in the group completed their Passion Project. Their particular project may have changed and morphed over the course of the month but they all completed something that they were proud of and that they could celebrate.

It is all too easy when you are creating a project to say, 'Okay, here's the ten steps to complete this project' and you get to stage three or four and you go, 'Oh, I still have five or six to go.' But what you should be doing is celebrating the fact that you have completed those steps and reached that next stage and that you are raring to go for the next one.

Having a group of fellow travelers there to help you celebrate those small wins is really valuable, and many entrepreneurs we have talked to have expressed the importance of doing so.

The Passion Project is structured as a monthly program, with Mondays as our intention setting day to set yourself up for the week ahead; Fridays, we have the celebration call. In between those calls we have a Facebook group where you can post what you are working on, what your struggles are and get support from the group. We also provide you with new tools along the way to help you stay focused, motivated and on-track.

If you are interested in joining us for the Passion Project, you can do that at SoloBizHacker.com and we'll get you signed up for this fabulous and really useful one month program.

APPENDIX

The Tools We Use in Our Business

Asana

Active Campaign

Instant Customer

Rainmaker

Audello

Audio Acrobat

Audacity

Evernote

Gmail

PayPal

Stripe

Wave

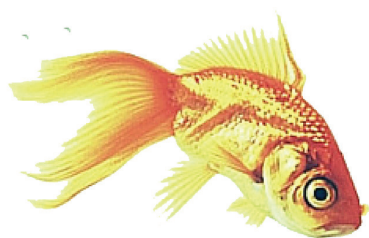
Text Expander

Appointlet

Zoom.us

Small Business Bodyguard

OptimizePress





DID YOU ENJOY THE ESCAPE PLAN?

IT *HAS* never been easier to reach an audience using the growing range of simple and affordable online tools now available and which are being added to all the time. However, one thing we learned from over 100 interviews on our Paycheck to Passion Podcast is that solo-entrepreneurs invariably struggle with very much the same kind of issues—

- Fear and doubt
- Loneliness
- Lack of understanding from spouses or family
- Distractions by everyday dealings with kids, pets, life
- Not knowing what they don't know
- Lack of money to pay for services they need
- Distracted from their brilliance by needing to learn aspects of running a business they don't know or enjoy
- Hating the 'selling' process
- Being dissipated and inefficient in how they run their business
- Losing the sense of why they wanted to start a business in the first place

Most of all, the one thing that solo-preneurs need more than anything, more than even the knowledge of HOW to run a business, is a network of like-minded entrepreneurs who understand what they are going through and who can give help, support, advice and a listening ear when they need it.

By helping, supporting and informing each other, solo-preneurs can E.S.C.A.P.E. the drudgery of the dull job and make a good living on their own terms, whatever the economy.

Find out more at:
<https://solobizhacker.com>

Facebook Group
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/solobizhackers/>

ABOUT MEREDITH AND JASPER

Meredith Eisenberg is a Marketing Nerd (and Tech Goddess). She has been helping business owners market their businesses online for over 10 years.

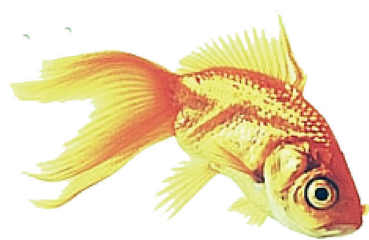
She was an award-winning Public Information Officer for Fairfax County, Virginia before moving to Albuquerque in 2005. There, she started a successful Virtual Assistant business, gradually moving more and more into coaching of technology use in small businesses.

Meredith is an Active Campaign certified consultant (She also knows a thing or two about Infusionsoft). In her (spare?) time, she also works as Head Coach for an Inc 500 marketing agency that specializes in LinkedIn.

Jasper Blake is an ex-pat Brit who has spent most of his life working for himself. He formerly worked for a film production company, working on a series for UK's Channel 4 Television, and later for the BBC.

Jasper has marketed himself, and created websites for himself and others since the late 90s, but it was in 2008, at the start of the blogging and social media revolution when he became inspired by the possibilities. He started working with a blogging company, and eventually went on to set up his own company. When he moved to New Mexico he met Meredith at a coworking space in Albuquerque and they started working together.

Jasper Blake has partnered with Meredith since 2014 and is also a contracted business coach with the same Inc 500 Company, for its Mastery Program. Together they co-founded SoloBizHacker.com—a free tips & tricks site for solopreneurs that was born out of a podcast that they co-hosted, and where they interviewed 100 successful entrepreneurs. Those lessons and stories are chronicled in this book.



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