



**From Employee to
Entrepreneur:
Starting Your New Virtual
Business**

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#1 - Welcome

I am excited to bring you information I hope will help you start your new business. What you will read here is intended not only to help you with the practical aspects of starting your home-based business, but also with the natural fears and roadblocks that stop many aspiring entrepreneurs. The practical work is easy compared to getting up the courage to just keep going when you can't see how to take the next step. Every successful business owner will tell you that he or she has faced great days and impossible days and the thing they all have in common is that they didn't give up.

Because I work with virtual author's assistants, to help them start and grow their businesses, we use this business type as our example all the way through, but the truth is that these principles apply to every business.

You will see in each section that we give you the practical steps followed by an assignment to check your knowledge that we hope you will email to us so we can check your progress. At the end of each section is an affirmation to use to give you the energy to focus and get inspired to continue your journey to the next section.

At the very end we give you a bonus section on how and why I started my own business and the seven strategies that made a difference for me.

Let's start with your first affirmation as we begin together. You can put this up on your computer on your bathroom mirror or do whatever makes it work for you!

Affirmation:

I know that I am learning what I need to in order to be successful and I know I can help many other people by sharing what I know. I also know that there are a lot of people on my team who will help and support me every step of the way and who are confident about my success, sometimes before I am. I am at the beginning of a very exciting time for my own personal development!

Assignment – Circle each of the fears that you feel you have in starting a business from the list of 12. Write or journal about these

fears and how they have kept you from doing the things you really want in your life.

Want feedback or have questions? Send your assignments and questions to jan@AuthorsAssistantTraining.com and get a personal response!

Introduction - The 12 biggest fears of starting your own business

1. Fear of failure – that I will get in over my head and won't know what to do

Before you start your new business, acknowledge that fear and understand that everyone feels this way. So get prepared! Talk to other entrepreneurs about what the experience was like for them. Go to SCORE or your local Small Business Development Center (SBDC) to talk about how to get trained and prepared. And maybe most importantly, get a support group. People who have been there and believe in what you are doing. There will come a time for every business owner where you have questions you need to have answered. Be prepared for that day!

2. Fear of making a foolish investment in training, equipment, etc.

Some types of businesses, restaurants for instance, take a lot of money to start. But others, like most virtual businesses are relatively inexpensive. A restaurant requires training in food preparation, special licenses and permits, signing a lease for a great location, equipment and staff. A virtual business generally requires only a phone and computer and some marketable skills that can be performed virtually.

3. Fear that it will take too much time to ramp up to making my current income

The best way to overcome this fear is with knowledge. Most new businessowners do underestimate the time it will take to duplicate their incomes at a corporate job. Take this in baby steps. Your first job will be to get your first client and then your second. Once you do this you will have the confidence you need to keep it up and build your business to the place you want it. Good client experiences will lead to referral business, the most profitable type of business.

4. Fear that there is an unknown that will trip me up and that I can't figure it all out ahead of time

You won't be able to figure it all out ahead of time and of course things will happen that you didn't plan for. The key is not to know everything, it is to know other people who know about everything so you always have someone to call for advice and moral support. Starting a new business is an adventure and part of the adventure is to overcome the unexpected and to become stronger and more competent as a result.

5. Fear that I'm not good at selling and won't be able to sell myself and my business effectively

If you are an introverted-type person then the detail of setting up and running your own business may really appeal to you. But the big question is, can you also play the part of the extrovert enough to be able to effectively talk to your potential customers. Especially because of social media, email and blogs, the answer is an emphatic yes! Gone are the days of the cold telephone call and the uncomfortable small-talk of networking groups. You can network virtually or find the type of networking group that will work for you. And once your business gets going, you will find most of your clients come from referrals from your happy past clients. Develop an expertise at what you want to do and let that expertise sell you!

6. Fear that there is too much competition and they are already way ahead of me

Maybe you look at the web sites of other virtual professionals and think to yourself, what's the point, all the good opportunities have already been taken. Wrong! This is just the beginning of the virtual age and many more people are hiring virtual professionals every day. The opportunities are still there and growing.

7. Fear that customers won't pay me and there is nothing I can do about it

Most customers who are aware of the cost up front and who have signed contracts will happily pay and pay on time. The key is to be clear up front and then meet your commitments. People want the type of work you do. Contrary to what seems to be true today, clients are still running profitable businesses and are investing in themselves

with books. These clients will pay for your services and you should feel confident in providing them and billing for them.

8. Fear that my work won't be good enough for paying clients and that I will lose them even if I can get them

The best way to retain good paying clients is to be clear in communicating with them. Send regular updates, call them and send them unexpected bonuses of working with you like articles and leads on new clients or media opportunities for them. Of course you will occasionally lose a client who changes his or her business or for their own reasons decide to take another approach. But if you have a regular referral network set up, there will be others to take their place.

9. Fear that I won't know what rules and regulations I have to comply with and will get into trouble

There are rules and regulations for all businesses, but they are minimal for home-based businesses. Most people can do two or three things and be fully in compliance with all laws. This should not be a big hurdle for anyone who wants to start his or her own business.

10. Fear of the risk of leaving a sure thing to a risky venture

This is a smart fear to have. Consider leaving your day job only when you have your business up and running and when you can no longer service your clients on your off hours. If you have been laid off, then you will have no choice, but if you have a full-time job, start working first at night and on weekends and ease into it as you can. It is hard to essentially have two jobs at once, but keeping your job as long as possible until you are at least trained and somewhat established can be a very wise move.

11. Fear that this is the wrong time to be taking this step

There is no one perfect time to start a business, but every time and every economy is the right time for someone. Waiting for the perfect time means you are waiting for a sure thing, and that time will never come. Consider what makes this the right time rather than looking for reasons to validate your fears. There are probably more good reasons to start now than to wait.

12. Fear that I will lose interest and motivation in a short time

Boredom will only set in if you let it. Every virtual profession has all sorts of continuing education opportunities and new challenges. Consider working with a partner with a different expertise you can learn from, continue to take classes and find challenging clients. If you feel your motivation ending, find a way to super charge your work life and it will pay off!

We are devoted to help you conquer these fears with the information you will be reading!

#2 - Setting Up Your Business

Virtual assistants own their own independent businesses and choose their own clients, hours and income potential. They often develop specialties in various areas of expertise and sell professional services to their clients on a contractual basis. Virtual assistants primarily work from home-based businesses and use the telephone and Internet to provide administrative types of assistance to clients who are not local, many of whom they have never met in person. Typical types of work include using the telephone to do research, book appointments, and do customer service. Other work includes using email to send finished word processing and spreadsheet assignments.

The virtual assistant industry is a thriving one. There are approximately 7,000 virtual assistants in the US, 3,000 in Canada, 2,000 in the UK and 2,000 in Australia, with estimates of 20,000 worldwide. Since more and more of the 20 million US small businesses are outsourcing, there is plenty of opportunity for you in the future.

The virtual assistant concept was developed in about 1995, following the mainstream use of the Internet. The combination of telephone, email and file sharing allows for many types of work to be done virtually that could previously only be done in person. The reason that many individuals and organizations hire virtual assistants is two-fold:

1. Flexibility of just getting the expertise and execution of work when it is needed without having to hire a full-time person to be ready to take on work at any time.
2. Cost reduction of not having to provide a physical office space, benefits, or pay workers comp or pay overtime.

Virtual Author's Assistants

According to a survey done by the Virtual Assistance Networking Association (www.VANetworking.com), 43.4% of virtual assistants have a specialty they have developed so that they can target a niche market, such as authors. Author's Assistants have been around a long time. There is a reference to the work of the author's assistant in the New York Times in 1904. Famous working authors have almost always had assistants who know how to do the work needed by authors in writing their books, as part of the publishing process and in book marketing.

What is new is that this work can now be done virtually, meaning that many more working authors can now afford to hire the help they really need. You are currently taking the only course available to fully train author's assistants.

Earning Potential

According to a survey done by the Virtual Assistance Networking Association (www.VANetworking.com), more than half of virtual assistants in the US charge rates of between \$31 and \$40 an hour. Most virtual assistants have between one and four clients at a time, and the vast majority have no more than seven at a time. Author's assistants, with their specialty training, can charge higher rates, and many charge \$35 to \$65 an hour, depending on the task and level of training. There are also tax benefits of self-employment, such as home office business-related tax deductions and not having taxes withheld from a paycheck.

Growth Potential

Just as important to most VA's and VAA's, there is tremendous potential for personal development. You learn entrepreneurial skills that will help you in any business you create. You will learn what authors need to know – particularly valuable if you or your friends or family decide to write a book.

The reason many decide to take on a career as a VAA is that you can create a life on your terms – working when you want, not on the clock. You have the reward of doing something you know is of tremendous value to your clients without leaving your children or other responsibilities or giving up the rest of your life.

The book publishing industry is in the midst of the biggest change in almost a century and authors are publishing their own books in record numbers. Because of shifts in the way money is made through books, authors are also responsible for marketing and selling their books, which is done most cost effectively online with virtual book tours and social media. Virtual author's assistants are active participants in making this change in the industry, but there are too few trained VAAs to meet the needs of all the authors. There is no limit to the work, although many choose to do this part-time.

Checklist to Set Up Your Business

When you create a new business, there are some simple legal requirements to consider. There aren't many and they are pretty easy to comply with, but you should deal with them early. They include:

- Deciding on a name and maybe a logo
- Registering the domain name (the URL for your business)
- Selecting a business organization type (you don't have to incorporate, but you might)
- Getting your business registered and getting any appropriate numbers (in the US, this means getting a DBA (Doing Business As), a business license, and maybe a Federal Tax ID number or a Seller's Permit)
- Making sure you have adequate insurance
- Setting up your banking (business checking, Pay Pal or merchant account if you want to take credit cards)
- Setting up your physical office space
- Hosting your web site
- Creating back up plans to protect your client info and work in progress

In the rest of these pages we will talk in detail about how to handle each of these.

Feeling Overwhelmed?

If even reading this list of things to do to start your business makes you dizzy, don't worry – you are in good company. Almost everyone who thinks of starting his or her own business faces this same problem. Everything is new and unknown. Will I have what it takes? Will I be able to find clients? Will I enjoy doing the work? Will the investment of time and money I make to get started pay off soon?

Because we know you will need time to breath between each of the steps in the business start-up process, we will give you two things: an affirmation to post on your mirror or on your computer to focus on as you complete the tasks in the section.

Second, we give you a specific assignment that we will challenge you to complete and send to us. We will take a look at it and send you back an email to let you know how you are doing with the work. When we say, "go to the next step!" we want you to feel the confidence in

you that we do. We've seen hundreds of people do what you are doing right now get through the fears and doubts and go on to happy successful businesses and lives.

Ready to get started? Let's go!

Affirmation:

Working virtually means that I have the opportunity to try lots of new things to help my authors and to promote my business. I will try a new approach to getting new clients and to new ways of working at every opportunity. My own story is still in development and so I will give myself the time to get used to working in a new way but I will never stop looking and listening for new opportunities.

Assignment: What Do YOU Want?

We want you to succeed as a VAA. One of the first actions you can take to start down the road to success is to set goals and think about what you want. Don't worry – we are going to make it easy for you. Just answer the questions in each of these simple worksheets and you will be well on your way.

You might want to take these worksheets to your favorite place at home with a cup or tea or go to a park or local coffee shop to give yourself some space and time to think and write. You might even choose to write more or journal about some or all of these questions so make this your own any way you wish. This is just for you!

Want feedback or have questions? Send your assignments and questions to jan@AuthorsAssistantTraining.com and get a personal response!

Your Vision for Your Business

What do you see your business becoming in 5 to 10 years? How will your life be different then?

What are the values you want to be a part of your everyday life, like honesty, caring, excellence, etc.?

Imagine talking with your new clients. What level of service do you imagine providing them (being available 24/7 versus communicating once a week, for instance) and how do you imagine you will work together?

Write 3 or 4 sentences about your hopes and dreams for your new business in terms of time, money, making a contribution and anything else that is important to you.

Analyze Your Own Abilities and the Opportunity

Now, take some time to look at YOU. You do some things very well and there may be other things that you would like to learn and practice. Also, spend some time thinking about the opportunity and concerns while you fill out this next worksheet. Remember, there are no right or wrong answers to any of these questions, but it is important to be honest with yourself.

<p>My Strengths – Things I’m good at and like to do</p>	<p>Weaknesses – Things I’m not as good at or don’t like to do</p>
<p>Opportunities – What organizations do I belong to, clients or friends I currently have who could use this service?</p>	<p>What could make it hard for this business to succeed? What are the “What If’s ” that worry me about this business?</p>

Look at Your Skills

In what skills have you developed true expertise based on years of practice?
What skills are you just developing?
What skills would you like to develop?
What skills are you not interested in developing and would like to partner or outsource to others?

Look at Your Motivations

You will probably be happiest as working virtually if you can answer "yes" to most of these items

Are you a multi-tasker?
Are you self motivated?
Do you: Like working with deadlines?
Manage your time well?
Manage money well?
Like to work on projects collaboratively?
Want to minimize doing paperwork, reports and billing?
Function best with to-do lists of work to be done in an organized way?
Like to make things simple?

#2 - Name Your Business/Domain Name

Business Name

Many virtual author's assistants decide to create a special name for their businesses, other than just using their own names. This is the first step to establishing your brand - something people will remember when they decide to become authors and need your services. The easiest name is one that incorporates your last name, like Jones Author Assistant Services. Whatever name you choose, it should be easy to pronounce and remember, and give your customer some indication of what you do.

In the United States, unlike most other countries, there is no way to register a business name to make sure you keep it for yourself and no one else can use it, but you can check to see if that name is already being used. If your business is only in one local area, you can get some idea by looking in the phone book or looking for that name on the Internet. There are research companies that can check nationally or internationally for larger business to see if the name they would like to use has been taken by someone else, but you do not have to take that step. Larger companies can also register a trademark with the federal government to protect their logos, names, or slogans.

Register Your Domain Name/Set up Your Website

Another important aspect of naming your business is to make sure that name is available as an Internet domain name. That may help you determine how to name your business. If the name you want is not available, then consider an alternative that might be close. For instance, if you looked up www.AuthorsAssistant.com, you would see that has been taken. But you might try www.JonesAuthorsAssistantServices.com and that might be available.

First, you will need to register a domain name, the name between www and .com for your website, also called your URL.

To register a domain name in many countries, go to www.GoDaddy.com. The suffix used in a number of countries is as follows: .com (US/worldwide), .ca (Canada), .uk (United Kingdom), .ie (Ireland), .in (India), .au (Australia) and .nz (New Zealand).

Domain name registration is just the first step in creating a web site.

The next step is to choose a web host, the server that will house your site. If you are working with a web developer who will be creating your site, he or she will be able to recommend something that is just right for you.

Once you have established a server location, you can begin to build your web site. You can also find a web host who will also help you build your site. One we recommend is Hostgator because they do a good job and are reasonably priced. If you want to have ecommerce from your site, you might consider Homestead, because it has a "store" capability, meaning you can sell right on the site.

The final step will be to optimize your web site, which means to make sure it is recognized in the major search engines like Google and Yahoo, and that when someone types certain keywords into the search, like "authors assistant", your site will come up, preferably on the first page. To submit your site URL to search engines, you can go to them directly:

Google, Yahoo - click "Submit Your Site for Free" link, MSN

Feeling Overwhelmed?

Affirmation:

Being an author's assistant is not about selling. It is about helping people get their books published. In many cases, the people I talk to may be too insecure to talk about their dreams to become an author and will call or email later to talk privately. I know I'm providing a valuable service in helping others make their dreams come true, so I will keep going even when I don't feel like it at the moment.

Assignment: Knowing who you are and where you are going

It's time to think more about what you want with one more worksheet of questions. Again, you might want to take this worksheet to your favorite place at home with a cup or tea or go to a park or local coffee shop to give yourself some space and time to think and write. This is not only a great exercise for you to do but it the basis of a business plan if you need or want to write one.

Want feedback or have questions? Send your assignments and questions to jan@AuthorsAssistantTraining.com and get a personal response!

Business Description Worksheet

Business Name - What are you going to call this business? Is the domain name available? Is anyone else using this name for the same kind of service in my area?

On what date did I (or will I) officially start the business?

Am I going to sell services only in this business or will I be developing products as well?

Why did I start this business? Did I start with any clients? Does anyone else have expectations about this business that they expect me to meet (like family)?

What is my business background? What formal and informal learning experiences prepare me for this business? What skills do I have and what do I need?

What do I want to earn?
How many hours a week do I want to work?
How many clients do I want to handle?
What will I charge per hour?

#3 - Business Organization, Registration and Requirements

Business Organization/Legal Structure - United States

Each business has a legal structure. This means that it exists either independently or only in conjunction with its owners. A sole proprietorship is a business owned by one person, a partnership by two or more people. These are simplest types of business legal structure, and the businesses are not separate from their owners for financial, tax, and liability purposes. A [corporation](#) is a separate legal entity.

The most popular structure for a Virtual Author's Assistant business is a sole proprietorship, followed by an LLC (Limited Liability Corporation).

You may need to spend time with your attorney and accountant deciding if it is best for you to have a sole proprietorship, a partnership, a corporation, or another type of entity for your business. It is not necessary to incorporate to run a business. If you make no decision, you are, by default, a sole proprietorship.

Most author's assistants start out as sole proprietorships and therefore don't need to do any separate paperwork or pay fees to incorporate. We suggest that unless your attorney or tax accountant suggest otherwise, that you start this way and if your business becomes big enough to warrant it, that you incorporate later.

DBA/Fictitious Name Statement - United States

If you create a name for your business, you probably have to file a fictitious name statement (also know as a DBA for "doing business as"). The reason for this is that if you use just your last name, a reasonable person could find out who owns the business. However, if you use a name like Unique Author Assistant Services, it isn't clear to anyone reading it that you own that business. This is most important to creditors and customers. When your name is on the business, they can find you if the business did not pay them money or services owed. If you use a "fictitious business name" (one you make up), it isn't clear from that name who owns the business. So, If your business name is just your last name, such as Susie Jones opening Jones Author Assistant Services, you will not need to file a DBA because that name

is not fictitious - you really are Susie Jones. However, if the name you chose was Jones and Associates Author Assistant Services, you would need to file. The words "and associates" or "and company" imply that there might be other people than just you involved in the ownership of the business and in that case the name must be filed as a fictitious business name, because it doesn't fully represent who all the owners are.

In most states, a business is required to file the fictitious name statement within a month or so of the first day of opening. You will usually be required to show that you have filed the fictitious name statement before you can open bank accounts in your company name.

The actual filing requires publishing the name of the business and all owners' names in a newspaper of general circulation once a week for several successive weeks in the county where the principal place of business is located. An affidavit of publication must be filed with the County Clerk within 30 days after publication. The fictitious business name must be renewed every 5 years.

This is not as complicated as it sounds and there are services that do all of this for you.

Business License

In most cities, businesses are required to have business licenses, and these are generally the rules that apply: You must have a separate business license for each place of business. A separate Business License is also required for each type of business activity. Fees for business licenses are usually a flat annual fee or based on the gross receipts (sales) of the business. You are required to display your business license in a fixed location in your business. If you do not have a fixed location, you are required to carry the license with you at all times you are conducting business. Your business license is not transferable if the ownership of your business changes. However, the license is transferable to a new location if the business moves. Call the City Clerk for information on Business Licenses and their fees in your area.

It is easy to get both your DBA and business license through Legal Zoom.com, just [click here](#).

Other Licenses and Permits Required

This is also a good time to stop and investigate any licenses or permits, etc., you may need to open your type of business. The city

clerk of most cities will have a list of all the licenses and permits that might be required. For a simple home-based business this is usually only the business license. If you are selling products, it might also make sense to get a seller's permit.

Seller's Permit/Resale Number

If you sell products, and in some cases, if you sell services (such as renting merchandise), you must apply for a Seller's Permit, and pay sales tax.

As a Seller you will be required to:

- Keep records to substantiate your purchases, sales and deductions. Records must be kept for 4 years.
- File sales tax returns, even if you did not sell any merchandise. Sales tax returns must be filed quarterly.
- Pay sales tax on gross receipts from retail sales.
- Notify the taxing authority if you move, change ownership of, or sell your business. The Seller's permit is only valid at the address and for the type of ownership specified on the permit.

Feeling Overwhelmed?

Affirmation:

I am excited to be able to meet new people and bring to them a level of skills that will help them meet their own goals. I understand that as much as I want to be a help and resource to everyone, not everyone is going to be the right client for me. Not everyone can afford my services and not everyone understands what value I bring and those are not the right clients for me.

Assignment: What Does Your Business Location Require?

Check out the small business web sites designed to help you know what to do for your location and create a checklist of what you need to do to legally and professionally start your business. Check off each item as you finish it.

International Business Information

US - www.sba.gov

UK - www.businesslink.gov.uk

CA - www.canadabusiness.ca

AU - www.business.gov.au

NZ - www.business.govt.nz/
 IR - www.startingabusinessinireland.com/
 IN - www.business.gov.in

International Business Organization and Taxation

Each country has its own requirements for how it allows businesses to be organized and how business income is taxed. In general, business can be one person, partnerships or incorporated. Please check for your own country for the applicable regulations and requirements for you and your business:

UK - www.hmrc.gov.uk

CA - www.cra-arc.gc.ca

AU - www.ato.gov.au

NZ - www.ird.govt.nz

IR - www.revenue.ie/en/index.html

IN - www.incometaxindia.gov.in

Business Start-Up Checklist

- Select a business name
- Register your domain name
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Want feedback or have questions? Send your assignments and questions to jan@AuthorsAssistantTraining.com and get a personal response!

#4 - PayPal and Business Banking

Setting Up a Business Bank Account

You probably have a personal checking account, but in order to keep your business expenses separate from your personal expenses for tax purposes, it is best to have a separate business checking account.

It is easy to set up a business bank account and sometimes you can do it all online. You will need to have your business name registered (in the US that would be having your DBA completed and your business license) and have an appropriate business number (in the US that would be either your Social Security number or your Federal ID number).

In order to get new accounts, many banks offer businesses free checking accounts and sometimes even free checks.

Using PayPal for Invoicing and Accepting Credit Card Payments

PayPal is the world's most respected (and secure) online payment processor. PayPal will allow you to accept credit card payments or payments from your clients' bank accounts. Clients are more likely to pay you, and pay you on time when you allow for credit card payments or an easy way to make online payments.

You can use PayPal in your business both to get paid and to make payments yourself. You will want to set up a personal [PayPal account](#), if you don't have one already, and then upgrade to a "web payments standard" business account. There is no set up fee, but there is a cost to using PayPal (similar to if you had your own merchant account to process credit cards). The fee is 2.9% + \$.30 per transaction, which would be \$3.20 per \$100. The seller pays the fee, so that fee comes out of the money you receive from your clients. You will need your business bank account number and the bank's routing number to set up your business account with PayPal.

One of the most useful ways to use PayPal for a consulting or service business like that of a virtual author's assistant is to be able to send invoices for payment. You can set up invoice templates and then just customize the client email and amount. You will be notified by email when a payment is made.

Feeling Overwhelmed?

Affirmation:

I know that while I may be nervous or feel insecure about doing new things, I'm also learning new things that I will take with me forever and be able to use wherever I go. I feel good about taking a chance and investing time in me and I know that I will feel better and better about my competence to handle whatever comes along because of these step-by-step experiences.

Assignment:

Set up a checking account with your bank so that you have a separate place to put the money you earn from your business and pay business bills.

Do some online shopping and check out setting up your own PayPal account. You can do this for free as a consumer, but there is a cost when you set up a merchant account for your business.

Want feedback or have questions? Send your assignments and questions to jan@AuthorsAssistantTraining.com and get a personal response!

#5 – Client Paperwork/Recordkeeping

Client Paperwork

It is important to maintain access to all the documents you send to or get from each client. This may start with some initial emails inquiring about your services, maybe a formal proposal, but definitely a signed contract. As part of the contract, you should have a confidentiality agreement and the client may have had you sign a separate confidentiality agreement as well. It is very helpful to keep a new client checklist so you have all the important information about the client and the client's book in one place. Finally, you will be sending invoices and having other communication regarding how you will work together.

Keep the contract both in electronic and hard copy files. Everything else you may want to keep electronically only. It will be important for you to keep an electronic file for each client, including contract and other important documents relating to your agreement to work together and then the work itself.

One of the things you will want to make sure it handy for you to get to when you need it is the rate you are charging. That may be different for each client or even for each type of job or project you are working on. It is important to follow the terms of the contract and bill when you say you will and for accurate amounts.

It is just as important that you meet the deadlines you have set with the client and that you create reports documenting your work. There will be times when a client increases the amount of work from what was originally agreed upon. When this happens, as soon as possible, document that change with an email to make sure the client understands how that changes the budget or the time for the project. The more you can document in writing, the less chance for confusion or misunderstanding. Your documenting emails do not have to sound like legal documents. Make them friendly and accommodating, but clear as to the changes from the original scope of work.

Business Recordkeeping

It is important to keep records of client contracts and communication. Another type of recordkeeping that is vital to a profitable business is keeping a record of your payments from your clients (money coming in) and your business expenses (money going out).

More specifically, you need to keep:

1. Summary of receipts (a list of all the money paid to you by your clients, by date)
2. Summary of expenses, kept by category, month by month
3. Your checking account journal, to show what you paid to whom, which counts as part of your receipts for tax purposes
4. Asset listing - a list of all the equipment you own related to your business. In case anything is stolen, lost or destroyed, you will need this for insurance purposes and for depreciation on our taxes.

This is particularly to your advantage because many business expenses are deductible from your income to reduce the taxes you pay for your business. Deductible expenses include:

- *Utilities, phone and Internet-related expenses
- *Insurance related to your business or medical insurance
- *Licenses and permits
- *Office supplies
- *Professional fees that you might pay for your attorney or accountant
- *Advertising and Marketing costs
- *Travel and entertainment costs used to further your business
- *Interest on loans and bank fees

While you will probably have an accountant do your tax filing, the accountant will rely on you to keep good records of your income and expenses for accurate tax accounting.

Bookkeeping/Taxes

As you start to spend money on your business and bring in money when your clients pay you, you will need a way to keep track of what is coming in and what is going out. This is called bookkeeping and it is a simple accounting of what is happening in your business.

There are a number of software programs that can do the mathematics for you, but probably the best-known is Quickbooks. If you use a PC, you can download [Quickbooks Simple Start](#) for no charge. There is no such animal for Mac, so you will have to buy the more sophisticated [Quickbooks for Mac](#).

You will need to spend some time setting up the program, but the hardest part for most people is to make sure and enter your receipts from spending and your revenue from customers into the program on a regular basis. But if you do, you will find tax time to be very easy.

International Tax Issues

Here are some links to the tax authorities in a few countries. Please

talk with your local tax professional to make the right decisions for you and your business.

UK - www.hmrc.gov.uk

CA - www.cra-arc.gc.ca

AU - www.ato.gov.au

NZ - www.ird.govt.nz

IR - www.revenue.ie/en/index.html

IN - www.incometaxindia.gov.in

Tax Issues - United States

In the United States, when you are a sole proprietor, you pay tax on the income from your business as part of the personal income taxes you file each year. You can also deduct many business expenses from your income taxes. If you will owe more than \$1,000 in tax a year, you may need to pay estimate quarterly tax payments. If you make more than \$400 a year, you will need to pay self-employment taxes. If you choose to incorporate, you will have to file a corporate income tax return.

Go to www.IRS.gov and look up *Publication 583: Starting a Business and Keeping Records*.

Tax and other issues vary from country to country and we recommend that everyone who starts a business have an attorney, an accountant and an insurance agent. If you have these professionals who have helped you personally, we urge you to let them know that you are starting this new business and consult with them about any issues that might be important in your situation.

Feeling Overwhelmed?

Affirmation: *While I may sometimes feel overwhelmed or worried about doing things I've never done before, I know all the preparation concerning money is my way of preparing myself to make money and take care of it in a new way. I will congratulate myself on each new step and take time to celebrate accomplishing things that I never did before.*

Assignment:

Set up files in a secure place to keep receipts from anything you spend on your business in the proper categories. Put in any receipts for things we've already purchased. Set up another file to keep a paper record of your clients and the invoices you have sent them, noting right on the invoice when they have been paid.

Want feedback or have questions? Send your assignments and questions to jan@AuthorsAssistantTraining.com and get a personal response!

#6 – Your Web Presence and Using Free Google Services in Your Business

Your Web Site

For success as a virtual author's assistant over the long term, you will need to create a system to attract authors to you. Building trust and starting relationships with future clients means helping them think of you as the go-to person in your area of expertise.

An important start is to create a presence on the Internet on both your own web site and other important places on the web.

The focus of everything you create as web content is to show that you are an amazing resource for authors. Authors don't know what they don't know and they don't know where to turn for advice they can believe in. The more you can educate them to become good consumers of author-related services, the more likely they will want to work with you.

Many author's assistants already have a personal or business web site, but if you do not, this might be your chance to purchase a domain name and get an Internet address (the www.GreatName.com, called the URL) that will make you easier to find and remember for authors. Consider including the words, "book", "publishing", "author" or "author's assistant" in your business name and/or web site URL.

Another important element of your web site will be to add the Professional Virtual Author's Assistant insignia to a prominent location as soon as you pass the final exam and become a certified PVAA.

Overall the author's assistant web site must do several things well:

1. Let potential clients know who you are and what you do
2. Create a place for potential clients to correspond with you so you can start a relationship with them
3. Give clients a place or way to pay for your services

Information about You

Your potential clients are not only judging you by your expertise, but what kind of relationship they think they would have with you. Will it

be productive or not give them enough value for their money? Easy or difficult? Formal or informal? You communicate all of these things with the words, format and graphics that appear on your web site. Make sure they send the message you want to send!

Here is the information you will want to include about you:

- A short personal (not too personal) biography of your background
- Your photo
- The services you offer
- Your education and certifications
- Testimonials from clients
- Articles or other information to showcase your expertise
- How to contact you (phone, email and at least your city and state)

When you have the opportunity to do radio, newspaper, magazine or web interviews about the advantages of working with author's assistants, you will want to capture these for your own web site. You can both link to them on the radio station (or publication) web site and put actual copies as PDF or audio downloads on your web site in a special section.

If you register for the Virtual Author's Assistant Training Program (<http://www.AuthorsAssistantTraining.com>) we can also prepare your web site for you so you have one less thing to do. See a sample at <http://www.BookEntrepreneur.com>. In addition, we have a slidecast video available for you to imbed into your site or link to that shows potential authors what they can expect in working with an author's assistant.

Email Sign Up

Most web sites now have a place right on the home page where readers can sign up for a free gift or ongoing newsletter or other information updates.

Giving away a free download (generally an article, report or audio of interest to your target audience) that is automatically sent when an individual enters his or her email into a space you have created on your web site for this purpose. Many email marketing services will provide you with the tools to do this on your own web site. This is a

great way to demonstrate your expertise and to entice people to give you their names and emails to build your database.

You are starting a conversation with your audience of potential clients that you might want to continue by using additional timed emails (autoresponders) to give potential clients more information about a subject they care about, as well as further introducing them to how you can help them.

Search Engine Optimization

A web site is unlikely to bring you new clients just because it exists. The web site is a resource for the people who come to your site, but it is up to you to drive traffic to your site.

One way to get people who need you to your site is to make sure that search engines, those places people enter keywords on the Internet to get a list of web sites that are likely to get them the information they are looking for. The three major search engines are Google, Yahoo and MSN. Be sure to submit your site URL to those sites so they can send people who need you your way.

Search engines work by keywords, so the more good quality content you can put on your site, particularly with words that potential clients might search, the closer you may get to the top of the list. Use words and phrases such as self-publishing, publishing a book or book publishing often on your site.

Google Search Engine

Google is the ideal way to do research for your author such as fact-checking or audience research. You will want to take advantage of its ability to search by using a phrase or name in quotations marks. Words enclosed in "double quotes" will appear together in all results exactly as you have entered them. This is especially useful for specific topics or concepts ("sales training") and proper names ("Susan Page").

Google is a search engine that you will use often in doing research, but it is a lot more. You can use Google to share documents and work on them together with your clients right on the web, share a calendar and both add to it, and set up Google alerts to track book marketing progress.

To sign up for a Google account, you must first get a ["gmail" email account](#). This account will be your passport to a number

of wonderful services, all free.

Sharing documents

In the course of your work, you will need to send documents to your clients and they will need to send documents, images and other files to you.

For the most part, email will work just fine to send documents and other files back and forth. But if files are too large or if you both need to work on them together, it can be beneficial to use a file-sharing system. It can also be helpful to share documents if you both want to make changes to them. [Google docs](#) is the perfect answer.

Other tools you may wish to use include:

[Transfer Big Files](#) when you want to send a file by email but it is too large to be attached. This site allows you to send a link to your client where they can download the file.

[eFax](#) when you need to send or receive a fax but you don't have access to a fax machine. Faxes that come are attached to an email.

Creating a Shared Calendar

Google has a calendar feature which is great if you are setting appointments for your author client. The author can give you his or her open schedule for something like a virtual book tour and you can book interviews, podcasts, etc. and use the calendar to allow the author to see this and any notes about location, where to call and other information. To [set up and use your own calendar](#) you will need to sign in with your gmail.

Google Alerts

With Google alerts, you ask Google to send you an email when a specific word or phrase appears on the web. Especially if you are writing articles, you may want to [put your own name or business name into Google alerts](#). It is great to use with your author clients to see if the author's name or book title is coming up on other web sites.

Google Analytics

Another great Google tool to use on your own web site is Google Analytics. Google Analytics is code that you can easily put on your own web site that isn't visible to the user, but which allows you to keep track of how many people are visiting each page of your web site. This tool can help you know what is working about your site and what isn't and might need to be changed. To learn more and get the code you

need for your site, see http://www.google.com/analytics/sign_up.html. You must first register at Google.com for your own Google account before you can register for Google analytics.

Feeling Overwhelmed?

Affirmation: *Even though I only have limited experience with technology, I believe that learning what I need to know step-by-step, will free me to work where I want, when I want. I know that millions of people use all aspects of technology and there are so many websites and helpful people who are there to support me as I make my way in this new way of working.*

Assignment:

Go to <http://www.Google.com> and set up your own gmail account which will allow you to access all the free tools Google has to offer.

Want feedback or have questions? Send your assignments and questions to jan@AuthorsAssistantTraining.com and get a personal response!

#7 – Setting Up Social Media Success

One easy way to network using the Internet is to sign up for some of the best social networking sites. The good news: they are all free. The bad news: they can take up a lot of time with few results unless you know what you want and make a plan to get there.

Once you have set up your web site, you could spend all your time sending out communication via your blog, Twitter, and by participating in Facebook and LinkedIn groups. These are all worth doing, but doing in a measured and focused way. If you don't spend enough time on social networking on the web, you may be giving up some great opportunities. If you spend too much time, you will be missing opportunities for referral business.

There are several things you hope to accomplish with social networking that may be unique to this group of web sites:

1. You hope to show a human face to the world. Where your web site might be all business, your more chatty blog or tweets can let someone into the funny side of doing the work you do.
2. You are working to interact with your clients and potential clients in a way that will appeal to them. Interaction that demonstrates your ability to collaborate and understand the needs of your clients is key. Ask questions, stimulate discussion, do surveys, create polls to involve your readers.
3. It isn't about what you want people to know about you, it is about what your readers want to know about you and your work that will help them understand themselves and their own work.

Step One is to sign up for accounts and integrate them with your web site.

Step Two is to make a plan for how often you will participate and what topics you will focus on, based on what you want to accomplish.

Step Three is to stick with your plan, but be open to opportunities for commenting on the news of the day that come your way.

We have prepared some brief introductions to these important parts of your marketing plan. Read through them and follow the instructions to create this part of your marketing plan.

A Brief Introduction to Twitter

Twitter is becoming more and more popular as a way of sending short messages to those who are interested in you and what you do.

Once you set up a twitter account, you have your own Twitter page from which you can send 140 character messages called tweets.

Go to www.twitter.com/signup to get your own Twitter account. Fill in the simple online form and click on "join the conversation". Be sure and note your twitter URL which will start with <http://www.Twitter.com/NAME>.

Once you sign up, you can go to your twitter page to send, to see what you sent before and to see the tweets of the people you are following (more on that below). There are also ways of following tweets through your Internet browser, email, phone and more.

Things to think about

1. Personal versus business - Twitter is a fun playground and you can frivolously tweet about what you had for lunch and your new outfit or you can use it for business. If you use it for business, even when you send personal tweets, they should be intended to interest your audience of potential clients.

Just as you would with clients on the phone, you definitely want to talk about the weather or good books, so think about what would be appropriate small talk at a retail store and you will be on the right track for what to tweet about from a personal standpoint.

Don't think of twitter as a sales tool, think of it as a connection tool to build your brand and allow people to know and trust you.

2. Think ahead – Just because twitter can be used at a moment's notice doesn't mean it has to be. Create a list of tips for your target audience and tweet them when news stories make them relevant or schedule them (see link below).

3. Express yourself with causes – If you love animals, then tweet about the Humane Society or the local aquarium and their latest event or news. If you care about writers or books, tweet about the local independent bookstore or meeting a new author. This is a great way of expressing your personality without the tweets being all about you and what you are selling today.

Write about what makes you happy, makes you take notice, makes you concerned, about what you are really working hard on, but whatever you choose, stay focused on your audience and what they want to hear from you.

4. Promotion versus expertise – I stand firmly on the side of tweets (and blog entries, etc.) on showing off your expertise rather than blatantly promoting your business.

If you want promotion, cross-promote. In other words, send a tweet about your wonderful new author, who will send a tweet about your fabulous assisting skills. If you tweet day after date about your new blog, about your radio show, about your new article, about your latest event, your clients will get bored in a hurry.

Good to know

1. Setting up your account – it is good to use your own name for your account or your business name. You are referred to as @yourname (ex: @janbking) when others refer to you on Twitter so your real name or something professional is best.

2. People who follow your tweets are called your “followers” and people you follow are referred to on your Twitter page that you are “following” them. The aim is to follow people who you want to get to know and hopefully get people to follow you. People follow you because either you are famous or because you have something to say that they want to hear, or because they hope by following you, that you will follow them and their stats will go up.

It is a good idea to follow any potential clients, writing and publishing gurus and writing and publishing organizations. Search for them (see search links below) or try this link to many famous authors who tweet: <http://mashable.com/2009/05/08/twitter-authors> or at <http://www.highspotinc.com/blog/2009/02/a-directory-of-authors-on-twitter><http://www.highspotinc.com/blog/2009/02/a-directory-of-authors-on-twitter>.

Look for book professionals on Twitter at: <http://www.highspotinc.com/blog/2008/12/a-directory-of-book-trade-people-on-twitter><http://www.highspotinc.com/blog/2008/12/a-directory-of-book-trade-people-on-twitter>

3. You will want to put your web site and other information on your twitter page so people can get more information about what you do.

Applications

Many people create special tools that help social networking work better and Twitter is no exception.

Search

You can search for tweets related to you or your business by using the following: www.search.twitter.com

If you want to search by a word or profession, use www.TweepSearch.com (try searching on "author")

Be informed of new tweets about you or your business

You can have certain tweets emailed to you so you know who is talking about you or your business (similar to a Google alert) at: www.TweetBeep.com.

Schedule tweets ahead

Try www.twuffer.com, www.twaiter.com, or tweetlater.com. the first two are the simplest, but Tweetlater also has an autoresponse capability so you can welcome new followers and more.

Customize your Twitter page

See a great blog post for all the details at: <http://www.twitip.com/6-tips-for-using-your-twitter-profile-to-get-new-followers>
<http://www.twitip.com/6-tips-for-using-your-twitter-profile-to-get-new-followers>

Link your social networking

Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn each have applications to link to the others so that no matter where someone finds you, they can get to all of your information.

Resources to Learn More and Keep Up With New Developments

www.Twitip.com **Clever Ways to Use for You and Your Authors**

1. Just get on Twitter and watch what people are talking about
2. Tweet expert viewpoints and commentary on the news
3. Do a twitter campaign
4. Create a contest using Twitter
5. Create a Twitter scavenger hunt
6. Catching up on industry news
7. Looking trends in what writers are writing about

8. Challenge the author to create an elevator pitch for his or her book within the 140 character limit
9. Use Google search (<http://www.google.com/insights/search/#>) to see what the hot topics are today and use those to inspire tweets and blog posts.
10. Take a poll or send out a question (www.poll daddy.com)
11. Locate resources or interviewees
12. Refer to great resources

A Brief Introduction to Facebook

Facebook is one of the most popular social networking sites. There is no cost to create a profile on Facebook but it is important to know that your Facebook page must be tied to a human name, not a business name.

To sign up for Facebook you fill out some simple information on their [Sign Up Page](#) and click "sign up".

Once you have signed up, Facebook will take you to your own Facebook page where you can begin to add information. Make sure and copy the URL so you remember how to find your way back to the page. The URL will start with:

<http://www.Facebook.com/people/NAME/NUMBER>

Create Your Profile

You can both create a personal profile page for yourself as well as a Facebook "page" for your business. First, you create your personal profile page as a base where you can add videos, a connection to your blog and more. Be sure to include all the information requested in the sign up process to make the most of your profile. Use the "About Me" section to describe your business and what you do. In the "Information" box on your main profile page, you can feature links to your website, blog and other business resources. Be sure to include your photo so that others can recognize you online.

At the center of your profile page is your "wall". Here you can add things like photos, videos, notes and other content. The "Publisher" at the top of your Wall allows you to "update your status" and share content through many different kinds of Wall posts.

Communicate with Wall Posts

Each Facebook member has a "wall" where friends can post messages. This is a great place to post a quick note to those in your friends list. In the business networking world, this is the online equivalent of

picking up the phone to say hello.

Update Your Status

At the top of your Facebook home page is a status box. When you post a status update, everyone in your friends list can see your update on their home page. Those using Facebook for social purposes might update their status to say, "Jenny is putting the kids to bed." For business purposes, this is a place to share tips, promote events and even boost sales.

Find Friends

Facebook is based on the concept of connecting with friends. You can send and receive friend requests and once accepted, your friend can view your profile and you can view theirs. To begin connecting with people that you know, you can either import your contact database or you can search Facebook for individual people.

You can also view the friends list for each person you are connected to. As an example, once you have accepted a friend request from your peer, Mary, you can view her list of friends. If you know any of Mary's friends (or you would like to know them), send a connection request.

Build Your Friends List

The point is to connect with as many potential clients as possible. One way to do this is to join a group and send connection requests to fellow members with a note. Just as you would with an in-person business introduction, take a moment to learn about new people you meet on Facebook. Networking always works best when there is a two-way exchange. If you can help a new Facebook friend, they will likely want to return the favor.

Join Groups

Online groups allow you to network virtually with potential clients and peers. To access groups, start from your Facebook home page, view the list of applications and click on "Groups." You can browse through thousands of themed groups with topics ranging from business to hobbies and everything in between.

You can also search groups to find topics related to your industry. For example, if you own a virtual business in New York, you might search for writer's groups based in New York.

Create Groups

If you really want to maximize the potential with groups, consider

starting one of your own. Once again, there is no cost to do this and the visibility can be great. For example, if you are an author's assistant in Toronto, you might want to start a writing and publishing group for Toronto. You do not need to promote your business at every turn. Instead, make it known that you're a broker, but provide value for members by sharing interesting tips and engaging with them in the online forum.

Create Fan Pages

To create a fan page, scroll all the way down to the bottom of Facebook and click on "Advertising". Next, click on "Pages" at the top of the screen. You will find some helpful explanations about how pages work, along with a link that will allow you to create your page.

Pages function a lot like profiles so you can add links, events, discussion boards and other features that make them interactive. Facebook will also post updates from your fan pages back on to your profile so others know about them. And instead of sending friend requests out, you can invite others to become a "fan" of your page. You will also have the ability to send messages to all of your fans, allowing you to cultivate a community online.

A Brief Introduction to Linked In

LinkedIn is an online network catering to business people. Each individual member builds a personal profile. There is no way to set up a profiles for your company, so this is for personal networking based on your past jobs, organization and friends.

Join LinkedIn

To have a LinkedIn profile, sign up using the simple online form at <http://www.Linkedin.com>. Once you click "join now" it will take you to your new profile page. One of the first things you will want to do is to get a simplified URL with your name, if it is available. On your page, click "profile" in the left navigation bar, and then "edit my profile" on the top box in the center of the screen. Scroll down to "public profile" and click "edit". Enter in the name you would like to use and if approved, note that name so you can use it as your LinkedIn URL.

Create your profile

When you open a LinkedIn account, the first thing you do is create your own profile. One of the parts of the profile is to create a "professional headline". This headline shows up in search results and when you comment in Discussions or Answers, so consider it part of

your personal brand. Consider using "Professional Author's Assistant" or "Virtual and Extraordinary Author's Assistant", "Publishing Industry Expert". You can use words that are keywords for the industry as well as words that attract the kind of attention you want.

Other important keys are to list past employment, important honors or organizations and make sure you use a professional-done photo.

You can link your blog, twitter and Facebook accounts to your LinkedIn profile.

Adding Connections

Once your profile is complete, it is time to build your network by importing contacts from your email program (like Outlook or Gmail) and connect with the people who are already a member of LinkedIn. LinkedIn will automatically search for those names to see which individuals are already part of the network.

Invite new people to link to you, and customize the standard LinkedIn invitation to say something personal. To find new people to invite, use the search feature to find people by company, industry and city.

You can find people in a company using advanced search using the "Search People" field. Sort the results by "Relationship." Narrow your results by using the advanced search area on the right side. Find out how to reach a 2nd Degree contact by looking at the "Shared Connections" under their name.

Using LinkedIn

When you look at someone's profile you will see several unique and interesting things. Each individual has the opportunity to connect with many others, and you will see some people have thousands of connections and others only a few. Some people are very active and join groups and interact in a number of ways. LinkedIn profiles can help you find work, make connections and attract author clients.

Joining Groups

Join LinkedIn groups that are where you are likely to find clients or people who will refer them. This includes groups around common interests (like writers, authors or publishing industry professionals) and alumni and other organization groups.

Being active in a Group helps to increase your visibility and credibility. Check out the profiles of the people you are connected with to find out

of which groups they are have chosen to join. Search other author's assistant profiles so you can see how they are using LinkedIn as well.

Authors, Agents and Publishers

Many famous authors are on LinkedIn. You may not realize that someone you know very well is connected to an agent, author or publisher you wish to meet. By viewing your contacts' connections, you're able to ask your contacts for introductions to people who can help get a book published, provide a review or testimonial or even find an agent.

Use the LinkedIn Answers to start or add to a discussion

(<http://www.linkedin.com/answers>)

At the top navigation bar on LinkedIn, you will see the option to click on "Answers". Answers allows you to "Ask a question" to the LinkedIn community or to "Answer questions" that have already been posed.

Answering questions can raise your visibility as an expert in your arena. Before you answer any questions, check to see what has already been said in response to the question.

Also consider posting questions that can build conversation and empower the LinkedIn community. You can ask private questions to your network only, or to the larger community.

Posing Questions

LinkedIn has a feature where you get to ask questions, either of your network or of people in a particular industry. I am working on an e-book that will be a list of a particular group of sites. I asked the network where to find more of these sites and I got an amazing response that made this e-book my top priority. But you could also ask a question like "Do you know how I could find people to interview for my book who have a successful arranged marriage?". Not only would you get suggestions on where to find people to interview, anyone with a successful arranged marriage would be likely to offer to be interviewed.

It's also possible that people have already asked questions on your topic, so if you search the Answers section using appropriate keywords, you are likely to find some usable information as well.

Giving Answers

Speaking of the Answers section on LinkedIn, another way to use this is to post questions that you need answered; need to find a

connection, or the answer to an obscure question? Post it in the Answers section of LinkedIn and you'll have your own group of resources providing answers to help you out. Check out the answers to questions previously asked, as a great and unique source of information.

Get Quoted

There are hundreds, if not thousands, of editors on LinkedIn who are constantly seeking "experts" to quote for their next story. By positioning yourself as an expert on LinkedIn, you position yourself squarely in their sights the next time they need someone to fill out their story. Be sure to indicate that you are an "expert" on your subject in your profile, and go to the Answers section of LinkedIn and answer questions pertaining to your area of expertise to further bolster your reputation as "the source to go to" on your topic.

Getting Recommendations

Ask your connections to recommend you (after you have enough of a relationship so they know your work and honestly evaluate it) Make it easy by writing the recommendation for them, especially including any problem you solved for the client. If you draft a recommendation for the connection you can email it directly or message it through LinkedIn. Make sure they know they can either copy and paste the recommendation or that they are free to change it as they wish.

Creating polls

Need stats for an article? Post a LinkedIn Poll and get the hard data you need – fast at

[:http://www.linkedin.com/osview/canvas?_ch_page_id=1&_ch_panel_id=1&_ch_app_id=7231830&_applicationId=1900&_ownerId=0&_appParameters={%22uri%22:%22\polls\intro%22}](http://www.linkedin.com/osview/canvas?_ch_page_id=1&_ch_panel_id=1&_ch_app_id=7231830&_applicationId=1900&_ownerId=0&_appParameters={%22uri%22:%22\polls\intro%22})

Keep Updated

Make sure you update your LinkedIn.com status often. You can do that by:

Sharing useful articles and resources that will be of interest to customers and prospects, including downloadable files.

LinkedIn Learning Center

At the bottom of every page you'll see lots of links. The first row of links has "LinkedIn Learning Center." Click it. You'll find tons of neat articles. Under "Training Resources," you'll find free e-learning modules and webinars.

A Brief Introduction to Blogging

A blog is an easy way to write information of interest to your audience and make it available online. You set up a blog separately or as part of your web site and there are a number of free services to help you do this including the one we recommend at www.wordpress.com.

Once you create the blog, your next challenge will be to decide how to use it. As with the other social networking opportunities, you hope to provide information that will draw potential clients to you. This is not about what you are thinking and doing, unless that relates to the subjects your clients are interested in. While you could write a blog about your daily activities, this is not recommended for a business blog.

Blog entries or "posts" can be of any length, but you might try to write posts of 250 to 500 words or the equivalent of a page or two. Blog posts are similar to articles, but because they can be made more immediately available, they are often your own views about the news of the day.

Your potential clients and others can subscribe to your blog through an RSS feed (really simple syndication). When you set up a blog, that blog has a URL address. You can use that URL to get the RSS by using a service called www.Feedburner.Google.com. Take the blog URL and enter it on that page and it will give you the RSS feed for your blog. You can use that in many places (such as on Facebook and LinkedIn) to have your blog show up on your profile pages. It will automatically be updated whenever you make a blog post.

The best blogs are updated often (at least once every two weeks) and talk with energy and enthusiasm about the interesting parts of the work you are doing or the challenges you are facing or your clients are facing. They allow you to showcase your expertise and show you get what is going on in your industry and are actively finding solutions for yourself and your clients. You can use a blog to interview someone (or to have them write a guest blog), to talk about an event you attended or just to give your opinion about what is going on.

If your blog is read widely, you will find that people leave comments for you about your blog posts. Some may agree, others disagree, but the point is to stimulate constructive discussion. You can delete blog posts that are malicious or just spam.

Feeling Overwhelmed?

Affirmation: *Although I am worried that there is so much to know and that I am just at the beginning of understanding a small part of it, I know that I can do this little by little and do just what I need to find clients and communicate with them. I will enjoy having new ways to reach out and get to know people who are far away from my own community but anxious to get to know me and how I can help them.*

Assignment:

Join Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn. Note your username, passwords and screen names below.

Facebook

Username:

Password:

URL to link to my website:

[http://www.Facebook.com/people/_____](http://www.Facebook.com/people/)

Twitter

Username:

Password:

URL to link to my website: [http://www.Twitter.com/_____](http://www.Twitter.com/)

LinkedIn

Username:

Password:

URL to link to my website: [http://www.Linkedin.com/_____](http://www.Linkedin.com/)

Want feedback or have questions? Send your assignments and questions to jan@AuthorsAssistantTraining.com and get a personal response!

#8 - Office Space/Office Equipment and Supplies

Office Space

You probably at least need a desk in a relatively quiet area in your home. Find a place where your things will be left undisturbed when you aren't around. You will need a desk chair and enough space to spread out papers and projects.

Office Equipment

Of course you will need a telephone, preferably a cordless landline phone with a headset so you can talk and type at the same time. An important part of your toolbox will be the ability to make national (and maybe international) telephone calls at a reasonable rate. Look into what your phone company offers for package deals. You will need to have a voice mail system and preferably one offered by the phone company so you don't have to worry about a broken machine. You may wish to use a cellular phone for your business.

Another essential element is a computer. You may already have a computer and it is probably fine for what you need. Two things that will make your life much easier are as much memory as you can get (RAM) and a high-speed connection to the Internet (DSL, Broadband cable).

As part of the hardware, you will have the hard drive, the monitor and the keyboard. Set these up so they don't get in the way of your work and so that you are comfortable using them for long stretches. Another essential part of your computer hardware is a back up hard drive so that you protect your work as well as the work of your clients in case of a computer crash or other disaster.

You will also need computer software – particularly for word processing (Microsoft Word is the most common) and for producing spreadsheets (Microsoft Excel). There is a lot of additional software, some of which is free, that you may wish to obtain, but if you have a PC, then an anti-virus software (such as Norton) is particularly important. This will not be necessary if you have a Mac.

You will also need a printer for your computer. A great all-in-one piece of equipment will also give you a fax, scanner with a printer.

If you travel a lot, you may want to consider a PDA (Personal Digital

Assistant) that will serve as both a cell phone and a way to get your email on the road.

Office Supplies

Take a checklist with you to the office supply store or order online from Staples.com, OfficeDepot.com or other stores. Many will deliver.

Paper

- Note and message pads
- Printer paper
- Mailing labels
- File folders
- File folder labels
- Envelopes

Writing

- Markers
- Pencils
- Pens

Computer/Printer

- Computer disks (blank CDs)
- Ink cartridges

General

- Calculator
- Calendars
- Copyholders
- Glue
- Scotch tape
- Packing tape
- Paper clips
- Rubber bands
- Scissors
- Stapler
- White board/bulletin board

Feeling Overwhelmed?

Affirmation: *I know that keeping an organized office will be important in being able to best serve my clients. I will create a place devoted to my work, even if that is just a small side table and treat it as an important place, where important work is done for great clients.*

I will feel pride as I think about the wonderful books that will be helped along from that place.

Assignment:

Create your own checklist of what you already have and what you need to buy. Don't feel you need to get everything all at once. You can buy what you need as you need it to work with clients.

Want feedback or have questions? Send your assignments and questions to jan@AuthorsAssistantTraining.com and get a personal response!

#9 - Time Tracking and Invoicing

Billing for Your Time

When you are selling services, like virtual author's assistant services, you are selling your time. It is important to protect your time, charge for it appropriately and make your best use of this valuable resource.

You have two types of time involved with your work – billable time and nonbillable time. Billable time is the time you spend actually working on client projects and that you invoice your clients for. You must have a way to keep track of each hour (by each 15 minutes) you spend so you can give the client an accounting of how you spent his or her money.

Nonbillable time is the time you spend working on the business – setting up the office, restocking supplies, invoicing and preparing reports, and doing your own marketing.

A good rule of thumb is that you will probably spend at least one hour in nonbillable time for each eight hours you spend in billable time. If your nonbillable time is more than that, you might want to check your own procedures to see if there are things you can do to reduce that.

Tracking Billable Time

As you start, you may want to keep track of the time spent by client and by project with paper and pencil. With one or two clients, this is just fine. But when you start to have many clients, you will probably want to use some time tracking software or a free or low-cost online service. We recommend OfficeTime.net because it works either for PC or Mac and works internationally. You can try it out yourself with a 21-day free trial and see if it works for you. If you like it, it is \$47US to buy.

You will need to invoice, or send a bill for, your services. You can send invoices through PayPal, which is simple because people can pay you directly through a link using their credit card or bank accounts right on line. OfficeTime.net also has invoices and we also provide you one you can customize in the Toolbox.

Feeling Overwhelmed?

Affirmation: *My time is my money and I will treat both with the respect they deserve. I know clients will value my work and expect to pay for it. I will proudly send out my invoices and happily watch the money increase in my bank account.*

Assignment:

Take the sample invoice and customize it for you and your clients. Make up a first client if you don't have one and put that client's name and address in the proper place. Keep this invoice in a place you will find it on your computer to be ready when you need it.

Want feedback or have questions? Send your assignments and questions to jan@AuthorsAssistantTraining.com and get a personal response!

Pat Smith

Professional Virtual Author's Assistant

1161 531 Main Street, Suite 1161
El Segundo, CA 90245

888-337-0636
Pat@Publishing4Authors.com

INVOICE

Date: 9-6-09
Invoice: #09-34

Client: Ms. Carol Smith
616 S. Beverly Dr.
Los Angeles, CA 90034

Project: Relationship Success

Project	Dates/Hours	Amount
Coordination with book printer	8/2-7 12	\$660
Virtual book tour preparation	8/10-21 9	\$495
Book copies out to reviewer	8/25-29 5	\$275
Billing rate for services: \$55/hour		
TOTAL		\$1430

Total Due this Invoice: \$1430
Contract Terms: Net 15

Please make check payable to: Pat Smith
Thank you.

Social Security # 556-14-0000

#10 - Professional Standards and Ethics

Setting Professional Standards for Your Business

While there is a standard of professionalism for the industry, in general, it is important for you to set, and commit to, your own set of standards.

For instance, your set of standards might include the following:

1. I will respond to all phone calls the same day (or within one business day).
2. I will respond to all client emails with one business day (or two business days).
3. I will proofread all work before it leaves my office. If the work is for a critical business presentation, I will have it proofread by a partner or proofreading professional.

Ethics for the VAA

Ethics are the values you promise to your clients that you will uphold. Ethics are more than just operating your business in a legal manner. This is a higher standard than you are required to maintain. You promise to your clients that you will do the right things for them and their businesses.

For instance, whether or not you have signed a confidentiality or non-disclosure agreement with your clients, you have a duty to keep the client's work confidential. What this means is that you cannot reveal who your clients are to others, unless you have specific permission to do so. You also cannot share any conversations you have had with your clients or any documents on your web site or in any other public way.

Many virtual assistants (and virtual author's assistants) take the idea of ethics so seriously that they decide to take an [exam on ethics offered by the IVAA](#) (International Association of Virtual Assistants). Once you pass the exam, you can put the Ethics Check seal on your web site to show your commitment to your business and your clients. We accept the Ethics Check certification for our MVAA (Master Virtual Author's Assistant) certification ethics requirement.

Feeling Overwhelmed?

Affirmation: *In all my work with my new clients I will always try my best to do the right things – to tell the truth about how much I can get done and when, to accurately bill for my time and to respond as*

promptly as I can to requests for clients and potential clients. I am happy to be involved in important work and I will help the cause of other virtual professionals by providing great value to my clients.

Assignment:

Make a list of your own standards that will be important to you as you grow your new business.

Want feedback or have questions? Send your assignments and questions to jan@AuthorsAssistantTraining.com and get a personal response!

#11 - Continuing Education

Becoming a virtual author's assistant is a specialty chosen by many virtual assistants. But even within the virtual author's assistant specialty, there are additional areas of expertise you may wish to concentrate on as you decide what niche you most like working in with authors. Some people are more interested in the manuscript creation services and may wish to get further education on those. Others will be more interested in adding to their expertise in publishing or book marketing. Whatever you enjoy most, set a plan to continue your education by considering how you will add to your skill set each year. Here are some possibilities.

VAA Specialties

Manuscript Creation

The professional teaching organization for editors, proofreaders, etc. is Editorial Experts in Alexandria, Virginia. They offer [online classes](#) in the following:

- Editing (certificate program)
- Technical editing (certificate program)
- Copyediting
- Proofreading

Other specialties might include:

- [Indexing](#) - Certification program offered by the American Society for Indexing
- Technical writing
- Internet research
- Word processing
- Transcription
- Multi-media presentations

Publishing

- Self-publishing
- Computer related services

Book Marketing

- Event planning and management
- Public relations
- Online marketing
- Social networking services (Editorial Experts has classes on blogging, podcasting and Twitter)
- Copywriting (Editorial Experts Certificate program)

Customer service
 Newsletter/ezine development
 Database optimization and management
 Website design and management

Master Virtual Author's Assistant

Accumulating actual significant experience – 3 posted articles, 6 clients and 6 different tasks, at least 1 in each of the 3 major specialties

You may also wish to acquire more general virtual skills to work with many types of businesses which use virtual help. Here are some of the best programs.

Online

[Assist U](#) (CPVA, CMVA)

[VACertification.com](#) (PVA, MVA)

[BrainBench.com](#) – online skills testing and certification

[VirtualAssistanceEU.com](#)

Live Training

US - Mira Costa College

CA - [Red Deer College](#)

Feeling Overwhelmed?

Affirmation: *I will strive to keep current in my professional work and always be learning new things that will help make my work better and my clients' lives easier. I enjoy learning and understanding and every year I will consider how I can add to the list of services I offer so that my work will stay interesting and fun for me.*

Assignment:

Make a list of future areas you might like to explore learning more about – not today, but maybe in a year or two as you grow your virtual business.

Want feedback or have questions? Send your assignments and questions to jan@AuthorsAssistantTraining.com and get a personal response!

#12 - The VAA Business Plan

Every business should have a plan and your Virtual Author's Assistant business is no exception. But don't worry – we've done a lot of it for you and will guide you through the rest of it with a simple question/journal format.

The purpose of creating a business plan is to give you a reasonable idea of what to expect as you begin to grow your business. Much of your time, at first, will be spent getting your first clients. When you have clients, you will be splitting your time between doing the client work, continuing to market to make sure you have a steady stream of future clients and in doing the business paperwork that every business must do, like recordkeeping and sending and following up on invoices.

Having a plan will help you see if your business is on track, because when you get started, it can seem like you aren't doing what you expected. It takes every business time to get up to its full potential, so you need a way to know if you are doing well or need to work harder.

A business plan has 4 major parts:

1. Setting your own vision for your business based on your own abilities, motivations, goals and the current opportunity
2. Talking about what products/services your business will offer
3. Talking about how you are going to market and sell your products/services
4. Talking about the money that will come into your business (your sales or revenue) from your customers and the money you will need to spend.

The first part of the business plan was focused on things inside your office – what you are selling, how you are getting the business set up and how you are going to make money.

The second part of the business plan focuses on things outside the business itself – the industry you are in, your customers, your competition. After gathering some information so you can fully understand the opportunities and challenges, you figure out what your own strategy will be to best take advantage of what you've got where it connects with what your customers need.

We want to give you a completed VAA business plan sample, including sample financial spreadsheets and blank spreadsheets for you to download and use in your own business plan

A business plan should not be a one-time thing. To continue to grow your business and keep you accountable to maximizing your success, consider reviewing the plan at least once a year, especially if you can do that with a group of other VA's or other business people who can ask you the tough questions.

When you start a virtual business, you are taking on the significant challenge of building a business. Everyone who has started a business faces challenges. It isn't easy, even though it can be very rewarding. It takes patience, persistence, resourcefulness and passion and energy to make it succeed. Here are some of the more common challenges you may encounter.

Business Troubleshooting

Help! I've been in business two months and I've spent more than I've made. What should I do, quit now or spend more?

The first thing to do is take a deep breath and congratulate yourself on setting out to build a better life and career for yourself. Almost every business spends more than it makes in the opening months. If this weren't true, there would be no reason for anyone to borrow money to start a business. There are start-up costs, like equipment and training, and then you have to keep yourself going while you get those first clients.

This is why it is so helpful to have a business plan. If you make a plan, including financial projections, you will see how much you expect to spend and exactly when you estimate your business will turn that financial corner and be on its way to making money. Consider making a plan, even now after you've started.

Check out the VAA Business Plan we've started for you - it's easy!

With your plan, it will be easier to see if you have made one of the most common business mistakes, which is underestimating the time it will take to get enough clients OR spending too much money on things you really don't have to have at first.

Don't quit now - you are probably only days or weeks away from success! But stop doing anything else except focusing on ways to bring in new clients. Even with new clients, it will take several weeks until you can invoice them and have them pay you, but it will be worth it when you get out of this particularly difficult period of time.

I have done a month's worth of work for a new client and I just received an email that she has a client who didn't pay her and now she can't pay me until next month. Should I keep working for her hoping she will do what she says, or should I do no more work until I get paid for what I've already done?

If this is a client you have worked with for some time and she has always paid her bills on time until now, then I would consider continuing to work with her. If she is a new client and this is only her first, second or third invoice from you, then I would not continue to do work you aren't sure you will get paid for.

This can happen to the best of your clients from time to time, but not regularly. Your clients who are trustworthy will be loyal to you forever if you help them through a difficult time. But do not allow the situation to continue. If another month goes by with no payment, then do not be afraid to put the relationship on hold. You will find yourself in financial trouble if you do not have paying clients.

I just had a baby and I thought I was going to be able to get back to work in 2 weeks. I am taking longer than I thought to get back to work but I have clients waiting for me. What should I do?

This is why you are working virtually! You can set your own hours and make your own decisions about how much time to spend working (or not). But don't leave your clients hanging. In the future, the best way to handle a situation where you know you may need to be unavailable for two weeks or more is to partner with another VAA who can take on your clients temporarily (as you can do for her the next time).

The best way to handle anything unexpected is to communicate with your clients and give them some options. If you can work part of the time, then keep some of your clients and work just with them. With the rest of the clients, find them a wonderful VAA who will take your place until you can return. If you don't communicate with them and guide them, you will lose them forever, and they will lose respect for you.

Feeling Overwhelmed?

Affirmation: *I am so excited about starting the next part of my life's adventure. I know I will be challenged and some days I will be scared,*

but I will always seek to hold onto the reason I started down this road – that I want a better future for myself and my family. I know that the difficulty of learning will be rewarded by the freedom and independence I am building. I can't wait to see what the future will bring!

Assignment: Send us your business challenges! Is there something stopping you from starting your own business that we haven't covered? Let us know what it is and we will send you our best answers to your concerns!

Want feedback or have questions? Send your assignments and questions to jan@AuthorsAssistantTraining.com and get a personal response!

Bonus

From Employee to Entrepreneur: My Seven strategies for building my successful home-based business

From 1983 to 1990, I was an editor and then editorial director at a mid-sized publishing company. In 1990 two big things happened in my life and in this order: I was offered the job to be president of the 50-employee publishing company (my dream job) and (the same week), I found out I was pregnant with our first child.

I was determined to meet my career goals and to have a child and do both well. I like to think I was successful at both, but it was exhausting to say the least.

In 1998, we received an unexpected and fantastic offer to sell the publishing company. Although I was worried about what would happen if I no longer had my corporate job, I was also excited about leaving the rat-race and not commuting and working long hours. I could finally have the time I wanted with my by then eight-year-old son.

Closing the door on working with the greatest group of book-loving people imaginable was a hard decision to make, but harder still was the fact that the buyer was serious about keeping me out of the publishing world for as long as possible. Part of the deal was a non-compete clause; I would have to stay out of the book business for three years.

I was certain, as I signed the final papers, that three years out of publishing would make me a dinosaur and that I would have to find a new career. Amazon.com, just-in-time printing, and desktop publishing were gaining traction, as were the Internet and personal computers. We were clearly in the midst of the most dramatic period of change in the history of publishing.

So for three years, I didn't think about the industry. I wrote my own book, worked part-time with an environmental nonprofit, and most important, spent time with son. I bought the grand piano I never had time for before and got the dog I'd always wanted. And I watched as the publishing world kept evolving, but not really changing, as I had originally assumed.

Publishing companies were suffering financially, but authors were coming into their own. Changes like Amazon and on-demand printing gave authors a lot more power over their own intellectual property.

When my son entered high school, I began to contemplate a re-entry into the publishing world, I knew for me there were two absolutes: First, I wanted to be doing something I believed in, and, second I wanted to be doing it with the full richness of collaboration with other people.

So I started working with authors and with publishing companies who really cared about the books they were creating and were trying to figure out how to keep what was great about books, but also use the Internet to create communities and to sell books.

Besides working from home as a consultant, I decided I wanted to teach.

Almost accidentally, I went from a corporate employee to an entrepreneur, making good money and being much happier and more fulfilled with my life as a whole.

Looking back, I followed seven strategies that made all the difference for me and I think might make the difference for you.

1. Become an expert on something

While I wasn't really thinking about it at the time, working for a mid-sized company in an industry I was excited about was the best training I could have had to become an entrepreneur. Working for someone else allowed me to develop my own skills and talents without having to worry about finding clients – that was someone else's job in that company. Working for a mid-sized company instead of a very large corporation also allowed me to watch how a company worked – how to ramp up during good time and how to conserve during downtimes. I was part of many decision-making meetings, even as a new employee.

More than anything else, with a regular paycheck and not having to worry about all aspects of running a business, I had the time and space to learn from more senior people who had done this work for a long time and to practice getting better at what I did day by day. I had time to read the business trade journals and I was paid to attend big industry conventions.

It is unfortunately very easy to say you are an expert on something these days and not really have the expertise you need to do a job well. To truly master and understand all the aspects of a type of job you must spend years doing it. It is only over years that you encounter all or most of the situations you are likely to need to understand to best help your clients.

If you have been fortunate enough to develop mastery in a subject because of years learning from others in the industry and long time to practice it, then consider how you can use this expertise in your new entrepreneurial business. It may be one of the biggest assets you have.

If not, consider how you can apprentice with experts while you are building your business. It is never too late to learn and grow and with the pace of change, especially technological change, there are more ways than ever to attend virtual classes, read blogs and learn from those who know!

2. Know what is “success” for you

Twenty years ago it was pretty easy to define success: the corner office at a large corporation, a six-figure paycheck, a home and a family. While this was terrific for many, it wasn't right for everyone. For many men it was the perfect formula, but many women found themselves to be dissatisfied with their lives, even when all the elements of professional and personal success seemed to be present.

Today, we define success on more personal terms: close family, great friends, time to enjoy hobbies and nature. True, money is always an element to be considered because it allows you to enjoy the rest of your life, but money and status are just two of the many measurements of success.

As an employee, it can be easier to define success than when you become an entrepreneur. Career development, plum assignments, job advancement, pay increases are all indicators of success.

When you become an entrepreneur, you are making your own job and you will be defining your own success as well. For me, success meant making enough money to be comfortable, but what I really wanted was the freedom not to worry about money and focus on enjoying

important time with a growing son. Your definition of success can also change over time. Now that my son is away at college, I've redoubled my business efforts because I have the time and interest to do that. Right now, my definition of success is more on growing my business where ten years ago it was not.

It is one of the challenges of becoming a new entrepreneur to know whether you are doing well or you are not. One of the critical elements is to do a simple business plan so you have an idea of what to expect. Most entrepreneurs are overly optimistic about how quickly success will come. I find it takes two to three times as long as you might think to build a business, so you want to be prepared to go slow but steady until enough people know about you and have used your services to start referring you to others – that is where great success usually starts, by word of mouth.

An entrepreneur's focus must be on getting clients. While it is wonderful to have a beautiful office space, a well-designed logo and time to sit back and plan your next moves, you do not really have a business until you have clients, and a steady stream of prospects so you know where your next clients are coming from.

When you start out, define success by how many people are calling to inquire about you (or visiting your website), and how many clients are saying "yes" and then paying you.

Secondly, you must define success as "profits" – the money you keep from the money you received from clients after your bills are paid. Cash is king with a new business and everything else should be in support of money coming in.

As your business grows in clients, you can begin to think of the life you want to create with it. How many clients is too many? What kinds of work do you like best and want to specialize in? What times of the day or week do you want to work and what times do you want to save for other aspects of your life?

It is critical to be realistic about your business in terms of what the rest of your life requires. If you have six kids, you will not have as much time to focus on your business as someone in her early 20's who has relatively few family responsibilities. That isn't a burden, just a fact. When you do have time to work on your business, have a list of the most important things you need to do and always focus on the most important thing first.

Success at the beginning of your business will be concentrated on just getting your business off the ground. As you start to enjoy some money success, your definition can change to living the life you love!

3. Know how to attract your ideal clients

Some businesses are all dressed up with no place to go. In other words, there you are, sitting by the phone with your filing cabinet ready, your printer ready to put out great work and you have no work to do.

The number one critical element to start a successful business is to be able to attract profitable clients. Notice I said “profitable” clients, not just clients. Especially with the types of clients I work with, authors, there are authors who have the budget and value the type of work I do and other authors who are writing as a hobby and can’t afford and don’t see the importance of publishing strategy.

So when I created a website for my business, it was important to create the kind of site that would attract the first type of client, not just all authors.

This is true for most businesses – that there are all “potential” clients and then a smaller group of client prospects who are more likely to quickly understand, value and desire the work you do.

Although educating clients on the value of your work is important for most businesses, there are some people who would take more of your time to provide this education than the value of their business to you.

A website is one of the first things a client may see, other than meeting you in person. Although it can be fun to have a very creative website, be careful to make sure that it says that you are a qualified professional and not just someone who is in this business solely for the fun of it.

A website that gives the right message can save you a lot of time by weeding out people who aren’t serious about paying for your work. I like to include free resources on my sites as a place to send the do-it-yourselfers who aren’t going to be my paying clients anyway. You never know when they may be back after they try it on their own.

I cannot emphasize enough how important attracting the right clients is. I do a lot of training of new entrepreneurs and I can't tell you how many times I've heard a sense of failure when a client relationship fell apart. It really takes its toll when a client is unhappy, writes an angry letter or worst of all, tells others that you did not do a good job. When we take a hard look at that client relationship it usually seems obvious in retrospect that this client was going to be a problem from the first meeting. If only the entrepreneur said no, she could have saved herself so much grief later. But saying no to a paying client is not an easy thing to do if you are insecure about your ability to find others.

One key clue is that if you had a hard time convincing a client to work with you or if they expressed expectations of your work that was not in the realm of reality, you know you have a problem. If they don't value you and aren't realistic now, that will be an ongoing problem for the life of the relationship.

A long time ago I found a great way of saying "no" to a potential client who wanted a proposal but who was clearly going to be a problem to work with – I multiplied my regular rate by what I called the "x factor". When you create a customized proposal for a specific client for your work, there is no ethical reason for each proposal to quote the same charge for the same work because no work is ever truly the same for two different clients. Otherwise you could just have a rate sheet on your site and would not need a proposal at all. If you sense that one client will take a lot more hand-holding, emotional energy or explanation time than another after talking with her and assessing her style, then it is perfectly reasonable to quote her higher rates. And for the most part you can assume you will "lose" the client when you do this – which is an outcome you can live with!

Finding profitable clients is equal measure attracting the right people and knowing how to pick the clients who you are most likely to find joint success with. It is those clients who will recommend you to others and bring in additional profitable work.

4. Know how you can be at your most productive

You know how it feels when you get into a groove with whatever you are doing and it feels so natural that you wish you could feel this way all the time? That feeling comes for some people when they are running or at a networking event meeting new people or when you are on a roll working on a project.

Each of us is different. Some of us are introverted and are the happiest alone in a coffee house reading a book. Others of us are extroverted and love to be at a conference or delivering a workshop. Take stock of what your perfect working style is and when you feel happiest and most productive. We do our best work when we feel confident about ourselves. We are at our most creative and we are most likely to make the kinds of changes and take the kinds of risks that make us outstanding. What I mean by this is that we are likely to think out of the box and make suggestions to clients that may not work but may also be the best things they have ever heard.

While you cannot guarantee that every day will feel this way, there are things each of us can do to set the stage for maximum satisfaction with work. And we owe it to ourselves to think about what makes us happy and productive and to find ways to build those things in to every day.

I have a friend who loves to get up at 4 am, go to the gym and then spend an hour journaling and preparing for her day. By 7 am she is at her desk working, knowing she is clear and focused about the important things to be done and feeling good about herself that she has already met the commitment to her health she made a long time ago.

I have another friend who refuses to begin work until her children are off to school at 8:30 am. She never schedules appointments or attends breakfast meets that would interfere with what she considers her prime obligation and joy – being fully present and happy during every minute she has with her kids.

Personally, I love to get right to work with clients early in the morning. I live on the west coast and work with many clients on the east coast, so 6 am for me is already 9 am for them. I feel great about being able to bring focus and clarity to their work early in my day and it gives me great confidence for everything I do. I tend to lose focus on these high-energy activities about 2 pm so I rarely work with clients past this time.

I hope you are taking from these examples that there is no right answer, but there are many wrong answers to how you should work. If you are grumpy and feeling overworked and worst of all, resent your clients then you need to think about whether you are taking on too much or just taking it on with a work style that doesn't work for you.

Taking on more than you can or accommodating the work style of a client that makes you grouchy with your kids just isn't worth it.

Another thing that has worked well for me is to break each project up into steps. Everything is more manageable for you (and for your clients) if you can do a little bit at a time.

In terms of my managing my own moods, another key is to learn to overcome distractions. One of the things that irritates me is when I have set aside a day to work on a larger project and then suddenly I have 20 smaller things to do that eat up the whole day. In reality there may be three things that absolutely have to be done and the other things can wait for a couple of days. Being an entrepreneur means having to set priorities all the time, without neglecting important issues (like marketing). It is a juggling act, but you have the power to determine how many balls will be in the air at any given time.

I also know that I can't work in chaos and that I must take time every week (usually on Friday afternoons) to sort through my workspace, keep up with the filing and generally uncover my desk under the piles of paper. Some people find chaos to be energy producing, but if you don't then you need to build in time to give yourself the gift of calm and peace in your workspace.

A happy person is a productive and creative person and that person is the one who will grow her business most successfully. You owe yourself the time to discover your own most productive work style.

5. Keep communicating with clients and others

Unfortunately we have all had the experience of being at odds with a friend, family member, co-worker or client. One thing goes wrong and then there is a cascading series of event where something small turns into a big disagreement.

When this happens, the only solution is for one person to call a timeout and figure out how to make things right. If you are a smart and mature entrepreneur, that person will be you.

Right or wrong doesn't matter here. Even if you need to end the relationship as a result of the events you do not want to end on a sour note.

It takes courage to take the first step, send an apologetic email or make that phone call to get things on track again.

It is counterintuitive to wade into a controversy in a direct way. Most of us want to run the other direction and avoid conflict in any way. But this is not the way to be a successful entrepreneur. If there is a problem it will not be solved by pretending it doesn't exist. In fact, it will only be built up in the mind of your client.

The first minute you see a problem send an email or make a phone call and offer a friendly explanation or idea of how to get the relationship back on track. Your client doesn't want to be stuck with this miserable situation either.

Retaining good clients is the best way to a profitable business. It is so hard to acquire these clients in the first place that it is very costly to your business to have to replace them. Keep the lines of communication open. Be easy to communicate with and don't be defensive. Don't just listen, but listen with a smile and a willing heart.

Ironically, bad times that bring out the best in you are a fantastic way to cement a client relationship. The stories your client will tell about you will be the times that something went wrong and you bent over backwards to make it right.

Communication includes setting boundaries. We all know clients and others who will call us at inappropriate times or insist we do something we didn't agree to up front. If you let these things go, expect them to continue and your resentment to build. Find clever, humorous ways to approach these things when you can. Remember that the only control you really have is on your own behavior. You can't change the behavior of others. So if you have a client who emails you all weekend, just don't check your email or don't answer if you want to send the signal that you keep regular business hours. It is highly unlikely you can convince a client to change her behavior, except by actions on your part that are consistent with your boundaries.

Sometimes when clients email all weekend it is just because that is their only time to work on this project, not because they expect something from us before the workweek. Try not to make

assumptions and feel bad about things that may only be true in your head. Instead of being angry, it would be easy to drop the client an email on Monday morning thanking her for the emails and saying you devote your weekends to your family and that you will always read what she has written first thing on Monday morning.

6. Get out of the house regularly

If you find that you are more and more irritated by the actions of your clients then you may need a break. Although many of us find it difficult to give up the superwoman ideal, when you feel frustrated and blocked the best thing you can do is take a mini-vacation or at least schedule one.

Because we have created a virtual world where we could literally work on our computers and with clients in other time zones 24/7, we don't have the natural breaks in work we used to. It seems like a lifetime ago, but I was in the workforce before the Internet and email and even before FedEx and fax machines. Twenty-five years ago we had to wait for the mail to get new work or wait for a review of completed work. Although it definitely slowed productivity, this pace was more natural for us as human beings and allowed time to think and reflect between what we considered to be productive work.

Now it is up to us to create thinking and reflecting time while taking advantage of the increases in productivity the virtual world allows. Especially when you work from home, and particularly if you are single or live a relatively quiet life, it is easy to not get out of the house or spend time with other people. But you cannot be your best without the perspective time away from your business allows. An entrepreneur's work is truly never done, so you will have to establish a way to get away yourself – it probably won't happen naturally.

At least once a week you should spend an afternoon going to the movies, to a museum, to listen to live music, to go shopping or whatever else you enjoy doing. That break should also include having a meal (or at least coffee or tea) with friends.

I also suggest you subscribe to some fun magazines and join a book group to get you spending time at home doing things other than work. This is not a luxury – it is an essential component of entrepreneurship. Getting new ideas from the world outside, particularly by talking to people and hearing what they are interested in and what's new with an

ear open to how these things may impact your business is not wasted time. Most of us get our best ideas from things completely unrelated to our businesses by putting two things together in a way that maybe no one has before.

The other reason for getting out of the house is that dreaded word “networking”. Over time you will find your best clients may not be the people you meet directly but friends of friends. When you need a plumber or a new logo or a new book to take with you on vacation you probably ask a friend for a recommendation. You are not alone! Most people trust the opinions of real people far more than ads in the yellow pages. When you meet someone new you are meeting all of her friends and business associates as well, indirectly. If this new person likes and trusts you, she will be happy to have added a new person to refer to her friends. These are opportunities that happen naturally when the person you are having lunch with bumps into an old friend at the restaurant and introduces you. That won’t happen if you aren’t out and about.

7. Get support and keep learning

I teach business planning and with each new class I meet aspiring entrepreneurs who are contemplating leaving corporate jobs and who want to be as ready as they can for this big transition. By the end of the class I always offer this piece of advice: Some people in your life do not think you should leave the good job you have and go it on your own. They aren’t risk-takers and they are more comfortable when they know you have a good, steady income. If you are determined to become an entrepreneur, then you need new sources of support for that new adventure. That doesn’t mean not spending time with family and old friends – it just means that they may not do well with talking about your new business because they don’t want things to change. So talk to them about sports and kids and the weather and talk to other entrepreneurs about your new business.

There are so many entrepreneurs out there who you already know if you work with any small business people as suppliers. Check with other entrepreneurs in your area to see what has worked for them. Know that you will need support and find it before you need it. There isn’t an entrepreneur who has been in business several years who hasn’t had moments of doubt about the wisdom of running a small business, especially in this economy. Today, however, you can find just as many ex-corporate-employees who have been laid off and wish

they had planned to become entrepreneurs before they had to create their own jobs out of necessity.

There are many fantastic local and online mastermind and other support groups to help you when you aren't sure you are on the right track.

Final Thoughts

The bottom line is this: choosing an entrepreneurial path is not easy but it can be very rewarding. I highly recommend it, but it takes preparation and you can never stop thinking about what your clients need and how to stay ahead of the competition. You can never stop learning and you must stay tuned to what is happening inside and outside of your industry.

The more time you spend feeling good about what you are doing and the less time in self-criticism the better. It will take time for you to find a new rhythm with a very different life, one that will feel good for you and your family.

For me, the rewards could not have been greater. I set my own hours and stuck with them. I spent the time with my son that I wanted and didn't miss the little things that happen every day.

I also found job satisfaction I hadn't known since I first started work. There is something very right about having a one-to-one relationship with a client and getting paid for doing good work. We are so distant from the people we work with when we are part of a corporate structure.

A big part of the job satisfaction was also being able to respond to new opportunities immediately instead of having to talk to others or get committee approval. Setting your own goals and meet them feels great. I hope for you that you make this investment in yourself and what you can do and go for it!