

From Desperate Housewife to Diva of Publicity

9 Tips for Business Owner Hopefuls from One Celebrating the Five-Year Mark

Starting my own public relations and marketing communications business in February of 2001 at age 39 was among the most optimistic things I have done in my life. I often quip that I went from desperate housewife to diva of publicity in nine life altering steps. Along the way, I've learned powerful lessons that might prove helpful to those thinking of launching a business.

First, I'll share some background for context.

Before electing to stay home for a year with my infant son in 1997, I held a variety of corporate marketing management positions. I was accustomed to making big decisions and influencing big outcomes. That is why I grew weary of managing the expense side of the household equation only to find that the generic brand of discount wheat crackers didn't taste as good as Nabisco® brand Wheat Thins. Restless with my professional skills on the shelf, I applied my talent and passion for corporate storytelling and media relations to influence the revenue side of the household money equation. I wanted to earn money to buy better groceries.

Today my agency is a corporation of three employees and a dog, and I am too busy to cook. Our clients include fine grocery and specialty food retailers, community banks, and some of the Puget Sound region's leading professional and creative service firms. Our intention is to do the best work of our lives and pack a punch for each client's investment in our services.

With that said, here are my tips for business owner hopefuls:

- 1. Recognize the power in this most concise advice: Happy wife, happy life.** Some women are happy as stay-at-home moms. Not me. Finding a way to use my writing and influence skills for profit was my path toward the "happy wife, happy life" ideal.
- 2. Figure out a way to spend 80% or more of your time doing work you are passionate about.** Storytelling has always captured my interest, and that is the foundation of my efforts every day.
- 3. Price your services right.** Believe in the value and have courage to charge market appropriate fees.

- 4. Oprah Winfrey once said, "Surround yourself only with those who lift you higher."** Observe and learn from the success of others. Choose clients, employees, and vendors carefully.

- 5. Demonstrate your passion.** It is contagious, and it is the most persuasive tool you have to attract quality clients to your care.

- 6. Don't sell. Tell.** Be generous with your expertise in a general way so prospects will learn enough about the value you offer to engage your expertise for a fee to solve their very real and specific pain. Pain killers sell much better than vitamins.



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- 7. Image counts.** Build a personal brand. Pay attention to your wardrobe. Craft a winning elevator speech. Speak with polish and authenticity. Build a high-impact Web site. Launch an e-newsletter. Write for the media. Speak at conferences. These elements join together to say something powerful about who you are and what you stand for. Prospects will either nod "yes" or "no" based on the detailed picture you paint.

- 8. Take genuine interest in the success of others** and how you can apply your proven skills to advance their success. Their success is your success.

- 9. Have fun. Make money. One without the other isn't good enough.** Otherwise, go back to being an employee because it is much easier.

If I could build a thriving business out of a desire to buy better groceries, what other rewards are waiting for those with the passion and commitment to pursue their entrepreneurial dreams?

My son Kyle is eight years old. He introduces me to his playmates as the president of her own company. He and I talk about why it is important to do what you love so you never have to work a day in your life. That's a powerful truism for folks of any age. All this is to say that the payoffs for following your bliss are priceless. If it's time to take that step, you know it. Best wishes for the journey ahead. Most of all, thanks to my clients for trusting me tell their stories and build their brands. I do it for love, money, and better groceries.