

Stand out in the Crowd

Launch, Grow & Prosper

as a Woman Solopreneur



By Markey Read

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Are you a Solopreneur?

The Stories We Tell Ourselves

People are so creative! They tell themselves the most amazing stories about why they cannot start a business. These stories range in genre from romantic fantasy to blood-curdling horror. The most popular refrains are:



- "I have to have enough savings to live for three years before starting."
- "I have to make a choice between by family or starting a business."
- "I have to have the perfect website or logo or marketing campaign before launching."
- "I have to get an MBA or Certification."

For Solopreneurs who offer some variety of professional services, including training, coaching, advising, consulting, none of these story lines are useful or true.

"I have to have enough savings to live for three years before starting."

If you talk to the small business administration, or bankers, or other very traditional sources for business start-up resources, most will stand by this standard piece of advice because they are used to serving a wide variety of businesses. This generic concept assumes you have equipment, inventory, raw materials, office or manufacturing space, staff, and other fixed start-up costs, e.g., you are starting a manufacturing business. It also assumes a significant lag between launching your business and generating income.

Most service-focused Solopreneurs I work with, need to buy a computer, relevant software, a good printer, and a few office supplies. If you already have a laptop computer with some basic software, it makes sense to start using what you have already and building from there. Over time you will buy a



better computer, invest in a higher quality printer, update your software, and figure out which supplies you really need to keep on hand. Remember: any paper, printer ink, or other supplies you use to produce materials should be folded into the cost of your materials and thereby paid for by your clients.

Regarding income generating, it is easier for a service provider to pick up some projects and contracts to generate fast cash than it is for a manufacturer. In fact, most consultants shift to full-time because they have already been doing a few smaller projects on the side. When they look at the potential for generating their income by growing their consulting practice compared to getting a full-time job again, many decide to take their destiny into their own hands and become Solopreneurs.

You may not generate all the income you need in the first year, but if you have been actively developing your referral network, it will come. In the first few years you will attract customers that are not exactly your ideal and will likely accept projects that are not absolutely core to your vision. While I am a great believer in sticking to ideals, I recommend that you gladly take these slightly off-center projects to generate income and create some financial stability. You will attract the clients and projects that you *CAN* do, and these will lead to the projects you *WANT* to do. The exceptions are illegal activities, jobs that are against your personal morals or values, or that cost you more to fulfill than you will generate.



“I have to make a choice between my family or starting a business.”

The short answer here is “No, you don’t.” This concept is based on a narrowly defined model of success that demands a 24/7 focus on the business while sacrificing everything else.

Yes, you will probably think about your business all the time, but you probably think about your job for more hours than you are physically present, too. As a Solopreneur, instead of thinking about how to make someone else money, you can focus on growing your own income.

The real difference, however, is what is defined as working on your business. The generally accepted standard for consultants is 20 hours of billable client hours per week. The rest of the time, you will be marketing, networking, creating new materials, filing, entering your receipts, and whatever else you need to do to keep the piles on your desk at bay and the clients coming in. You are free to work more hours and bill more time, but if you are billing 30+ a week and barely scraping by financially, it’s time to raise your rates and reduce your billable hours. Base your hourly rate on the assumption that you will bill 20 hours a week and generate the income you need to pay yourself, pay your bills, and invest in your business.

“I have to have the perfect website or logo or marketing campaign before launching.”

This is just straight up procrastination! You will never have a perfect website or logo, or marketing campaign. This is a ridiculous ideal and just keeps you spinning in place. Even if you could get close, as soon as you start, it will all change; then it will change again in a year and continue to change for the rest of time.



The first steps for a consultant are to figure out the basic services you want to offer and who you think will be interested in buying those services. Then get yourself in front of the people who will make the decision to buy what you are selling. The most amazing website or logo is not what sells consulting, coaching, or other professional services. You are what sells your services. Your clients are buying you, your knowledge, your experience, your approach, your Superpowers. Engage with your target market and they will engage you.

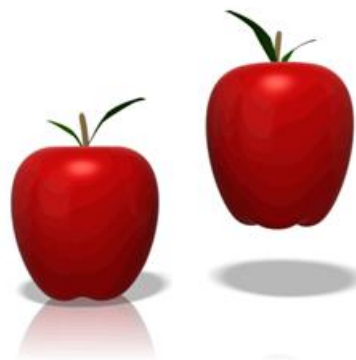
“I have to get an MBA or Certification”

This one naturally follows from needing a perfect website and marketing campaign and it is just a dressed-up version of Imposter Syndrome. If you think you need an objective measure of your competence before launching, you are being too hard on yourself. When you accurately represent your level of knowledge, expertise, and experience, there will always be someone who knows less and needs your level of expertise. Your ideal client may be executives in large organizations, but you can start with emerging leaders and build your reputation. You may want to be a keynote speaker at international conferences, but you can start by speaking to local organizations and conferences to build your following. Over time, you may want to add a degree or certification, but you don't *need* it to get started.



No Two Businesses are Alike

Remember that there is no right way to do business. Averages, norms, and standards are just theoretical concepts and do not exist in nature. Did you know that every single apple seed will produce a *completely different* variety of apple? The only way to guarantee that a new Honey Crisp apple tree will produce a true Honey Crisp apple is to literally cut a branch off the parent tree and graft it onto a new root stock. It's called cloning. You are not a clone, and neither is your business. Define your business on your terms.





Shifting from Employee to Entrepreneur

What is your Entrepreneur Mindset?

To shift from being an employee to an entrepreneur requires a shift in thinking. If you don't see yourself as enterprising, it may be helpful to review your origin story.

Let's start this process by taking a look at your beliefs about being a Solopreneur. In my experience, our beliefs or mindset are vitally important to our ability to launch, grow, and prosper as Solopreneurs. These beliefs influence our entrepreneurial origin story.

The people around you help shape your mythos. These people may be family members or friends. Reflecting on our stories can give us important clues about our own entrepreneurial journeys. If grew up thinking entrepreneurs are dreamers and workaholics, for example, you need another point of reference to fully embrace the entrepreneurial life.

The biggest players in my story were various characters from my family of origin. My family is filled with stories of entrepreneurs. For example, I am the great granddaughter of the people who started what is now known as ConAgra, one of the largest food conglomerates in the world. My mother's father's family hail from Nebraska and in the 1890's they bought a defunct grain mill along the Platt River rebuilt it stone by stone and started milling grain for their neighbors. They eventually partnered with two other mills along the Platt, becoming Consolidated Mills of Nebraska and eventually ConAgra. As fiscally conservative Midwesterners, they managed to stay alive through the Depression and then methodically built a thriving enterprise. I grew up with the belief that if you worked hard and stayed committed you could create something important and lasting.

On my father's side, I have a completely different heritage. The most memorable stories I heard are all about my aunt. She is a serial entrepreneur and has gone through multiple boom and bust cycles as has she journeyed through various businesses, including a casino in Montana that literally went up in flames. The stories about her are filled with humor, horror, and resiliency - She always landed on her feet. Through her adventures, I learned that, even when it looks like you failed, you can always start over.

These two stories provided me with a fantastic range of what is possible as an entrepreneur. Both stories were based in taking risk. Both stories have great successes and great losses. The two big lessons I heard in these legendary tales are that you can start small or big but, however you start, build a business that suits you.

If you have already started and stopped a business or two, for whatever reason, you may not have found the right fit. All types of people are capable of starting and building a business; but not all businesses are for all types of people.

I started and stopped two businesses before becoming a partner in the business I eventually came to own. After being constantly frustrated as an employee and getting myself fired a few times in the process, I decided that entrepreneurialism was my destiny.

Take a moment now to think about the stories that inform your beliefs about being in business for yourself. Look for people who took risks, stood outside the cultural norms, and created something from nothing. They may not have been wildly successful or moved through many cycles of bust and boom. What is key is that they made an impression on you.

Who were family members, friends of the family, neighbors that were entrepreneurs? What messages did you get about them when family members or friends recounted their stories? Were those people seen as irresponsible, brilliant but misguided, innovative geniuses, hardworking and honest?

Getting clear about your why

What are your motivations?

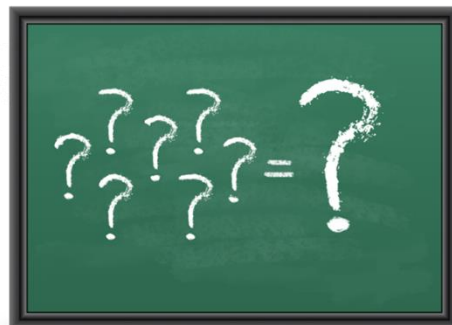
Now let's take look at your motivation for being in business. This is about finding your why or your *core motivations*. Yes, making an income is part of this, but I want you look deeper.

Owning your own business is a powerful way to express your professional talents and expertise. It can also be one of the most challenging journeys you undertake. So, it's time to get really clear with yourself about your "why."

There are other ways to make a living, many of which are easier and provide more stability. So, you need to really think about why you want to enter into this realm. While it's important that you have a clear vision, mission, and purpose, it's also important that your business fit your personal and professional aspirations.

Operating a business that's in conflict with your personal needs or values, or a business that lacks the potential to provide you with the opportunity to meet your professional goals, will just be a lot of bother without much reward.

I wanted to be in business for myself since my mid-20s. I was tired of working for other people and figured if I were going to work so hard, why not build something that would build a future for me? When I did a quick inventory of my skills, I decided to start a business based on my sewing skills. I figured I could have a more flexible lifestyle and pay the rent if I made clothing for other people, but soon discovered that I'm not a very good seamstress and don't like sewing for other people and could never charge people for the number of hours I spent making their blouses and skirts. It turns out that working to pay the rent wasn't enough of a motivation for me.



When I connected to my core motivations - helping people live more fulfilling lives - I was able to use skills and talents I had already developed as a journalist and apply them to helping people represent themselves more clearly so they could get better jobs. Once I realized people would pay me for this and pay me a lot more than they would for making their clothes, I never looked back.

You may have a big idea or vision that motivates you; or feel like you are on a mission of some kind; or even feel a sense of purpose about using your natural gifts. These are all good places to start. The good news is that you don't have to have it all figured out before you start and you can add, delete, and reroute once you have launched. Taking some time, however, to answer a few fundamental questions before launching will help you start your journey with a stronger sense of why you are bothering.

What are your motivations? Why do you want to be in business for yourself? What does being a Solopreneur symbolize or mean to you?

Vision: Defines your organization's future

Mission: Gives you a roadmap to refer to when you get lost in the details

Purpose: Reminds you of why you are in business.

Starting with what you have

What are your Skills, Talents, & Qualifications?

Being in business for yourself will require you to call on many different kinds of skills and talents. Most people base their businesses on their current skills and interests. Remember when I mentioned inventorying my skills before launching my sewing business? That's because it is a really good way to understand what you are starting with and what you may need to develop.

Skills alone, however, are not enough to base a business on. I am a skilled seamstress, but not a talented one. I had been making my own clothes since I was 10 years old. I also grew up with a mother who was a puppet maker and spent many weekends selling her products at craft fairs. Sewing was familiar to me. In the end, however, it was too isolating. I need much more human interaction than I could get from sewing. Sew Fine didn't tap into my talents or serve my personality.

After closing up shop, I needed a job. My first career was in journalism, and I wanted to return to writing. When I tried getting a job with a magazine or publisher, I found that I didn't have the talents they were seeking. Eventually, I was hired as the distribution manager for a small publishing company that created and distributed a directory for steam passenger trains throughout North America.

In retrospect, it's no mystery why I was

Skills, Talents & Qualifications

Since the word "skills" covers a lot of territory, let's look at three categories that may help you develop your inventory.

Skills are things we know how to do, but we may not really enjoy. They could be innate or learned. I learned to sew as a young girl because my mother was a sewer and I figured out that she would buy fabric more readily than she would buy ready-made clothing. I liked clothes, so I learned to sew. I still make things using fabric, I just don't want to sell those skills anymore.

Talents are innate gifts. We are often blind to them ourselves because they come naturally, and we are usually surprised to discover that other people don't have the same level of ease. Listening to people's stories and helping them reframe them is a talent for me. It's what made me a good journalist. I could quickly assimilate a lot of information and produce a coherent story.

Qualifications are earned. You may have a degree, certification, training, or years of experience in a field. When I started, I had very few qualifications. Now I have 30 years of experience, am certified in various tools like EQ and MBTI, and I have a Master's in Leadership and Group Dynamics.

Depending on how many years you have been on the planet, you may rely more on your talents or qualifications to start. Your skills will be useful, but I don't recommend leading with them as you develop your business.

As you write your inventory, don't make a fuss about distinguishing between skills, talents, and qualifications. Start with whatever comes to mind and write until you can't think of anything else. Take a break and when more ideas start flowing, add them to the list. Be sure to include any education, certifications, licensures, or other specialized training you have in your bag of tricks.

fired about six months later. I knew nothing about trains and was not really interested in learning about them. I did know databases and was organized, but I hated my job and it showed.

More convinced than ever that I wanted to be in business for myself, I made another attempt. I was interested in hospitality and fantasized about one day operating a bed & breakfast in the hills of Vermont. I wasn't in a position to start one and most places couldn't afford to hire me, so I looked for another way in. I wanted to understand the business so that when I was ready, I could launch my own bed & breakfast.

I decided to research and write a guide for bed & breakfasts in Vermont. After some competition research, I discovered there was no directory of all the B&Bs in the state, so I launched Read Communications, and published Vermont's Most Complete Book of Bed & Breakfasts.

This was all before the ease of desktop publishing. While I was good at selling the idea to B&B owners, collecting the information, and distributing the book, I really did not like it. I quickly fell out of love with the hospitality industry and found most of the work associated with compiling and selling the book tedious. After the second edition, I closed up shop again.

Technically, *Read Communications* didn't die with the book. I still publish under that name, but the only remnant of the book is the few copies of the second edition that I keep in my bookshelf to show people the first book I published.

Both of these businesses tapped into skills and interests; in the end they didn't keep my interest because they didn't employ my real talents or suit my personality. If you don't know what your talents are or what will suit your personality, take some time to understand yourself.

Accessing your Superpowers *Where do you naturally excel?*

Just as all skills are not equal, neither are all talents. An overlooked subset of talents are your Superpowers. Like talents, they are innate and usually invisible to us, but they reign supreme.

I didn't understand why people complimented me on my ability to command the attention of a room, for example. I thought everyone could do that. It turns out that not everyone can.

Superpowers are not completely unique to us, but combined with our personal experiences, they are what makes us distinct among all the other Superheroes out there. Being in business for yourself is a lot like being a Superhero, but that does not mean you have to have the same Superpowers as all the other entrepreneurs. Identifying *your* unique powers is key to building a company that *you* can launch and grow.



Wonder Woman is one of my favorite examples for this. Among her many skills, she is an excellent horsewoman and archer, and she can run and jump with the best of them. Among her people, the Amazons, these are commonplace skills. Among other peoples, she stands out as incredibly talented.

Like our other talents, however, Superpowers can be hard to name. Remember, for Wonder Woman's Amazon people, it is totally banal to be an accomplished

horsewoman and archer. It's only after she leaves her island and joins the Justice League that being the immortal daughter of Hippolyta and Zeus becomes her true Superpower, thus making her unique among all Superheroes. Because of her immense knowledge and exceptional perceptiveness, Diana Prince is the wisest and most emotionally intelligent member of the Justice League.

Swimming in the ocean of ourselves, we can live for years without recognizing our Superpowers. I remember being in awe other people's ability to lead groups and workshops in fun and engaging ways. I had a great desire to teach and lead groups but didn't think I had the abilities. While sitting next to a friend in a 2-day MBTI workshop, my friend spontaneously leaned over and said, "You could be doing that."

"Really?" I said in shock.

"Really," she said looking me dead in the eyes.

Within a few years, I was teaching engaging workshops, using the MBTI. Until she suggested it, I didn't see it for myself.

The talents we admire in others are often qualities we possess but have not yet fully recognized.

Who are some of the people you admire? What qualities do they have that you think help them be successful? If you were to interview them, what questions would you ask them about their "secret to success"?

If the idea of identifying your Superpowers seems mystical to you, you may want to learn more about your Personality Type, or MBTI type. Knowing your Personality Type can provide insight into your talents and Superpowers.

Bringing Benefit

What difference do you want to make?

Uniting your skills, talents, and qualifications with your motivations will lead you to the next step – determining what difference you want to make with your future clients.

Your talents, Superpowers, and qualifications provide valuable clues about the services you may consider offering; they are the building blocks of your services. You may be a naturally talented facilitator or have earned a qualification through education, training, or licensure. You may have a background in management, be a certified coach or project manager, or have a graduate-level degree in business or policymaking. These are all elements that will eventually define your services.

Beyond all your personal virtues, however, your clients will eventually want to know what difference you will make -- that is to say, what kind of benefits or results you can produce as a talented facilitator or certified coach. They will wonder how your project management skills are a better fit for their needs than another consultant's.

Writing, for example, is one of my Superpowers, but I don't want to write technical manuals or ghost write books. I want to use my abilities with language to help people lead better lives. Writing is the basis of much of what I offer, but the difference I make is that I help people get clear about who they are and get on with being their wonderful selves.

Do you want to address the power dynamics between managers and their employees? Do you want to transform your industry to meet future challenges? Maybe you see yourself supporting emerging leaders or helping people become more competent in a technical arena. This goes beyond listing possible services; this is articulating the benefits your services will

bring to your clients. How will their lives, teams, business, or boards be improved as a result of hiring you and your set of talents and qualifications?

If you are struggling with this, look back at your motivations for wanting to be in business in the first place. Beyond wanting to work for yourself or build your own empire, you are likely motivated to make a difference in some way.

In the beginning, I wanted to help professionals represent themselves better so they could get better jobs and improve their lives. This led me to creating resume, job search, and career planning services. Over time, this same benefit led me to create a 350-page workbook to support my clients through the process, get more training and certifications in various tools, and teach people how to launch, grow, and prosper as entrepreneurs.

The benefits may not be so clear in the beginning, so start by listing some services that you are thinking about offering. From there, think about what difference those services will make to the people who use them.

Writing resumes is a service; helping people tell their story so they are hired for jobs that are a better fit for them is a result, or benefit. What difference will your services make in the lives of your clients?

Finding your People

Who are yours?

Simply put, your people are your first clients and customers. They naturally attracted to your services, need your solutions, and see you as the person to resolve their challenges.

If you thought that everyone is your customer, by the way, think again. While you may be a lovely being, offering incredible services, not everyone needs the kind of results you want to produce - at least not all at the same time.

You may want to serve private individuals, business owners, or executives. The kinds of benefits you provide will be a key indicator. When I started offering job search coaching and career counseling, for example, I wanted to serve professionals who were seeking better jobs careers. This meant that my first customers were primarily college educated adults.

So instead of marketing to anyone and everyone, I focused on a subset of the general population: adults with college degrees seeking professional positions.

You may want to start by stating who you don't want to serve as a way to back into your customer description. I instinctively knew that teens and college-age students were not my people. This is partly because I don't relate to them as well as I do with adults, but mostly because the kinds of benefits I wanted to provide are not a priority for people that young. Until folks have been on the planet for at least a quarter century they don't have enough experience to answer the kinds of questions I ask.

This is not meant to exclude people of any gender orientation, skin color, spiritual expression, or other affiliation, but rather it's intended to help you focus on who you think you can help the most at the start. I don't dislike teenagers; they just are not that interested in the kinds of services I offer. In reality, they don't have enough life experience to know how to answer questions like "who are you and what does it all mean?" Someday those questions will be important to them, and I will be glad to have that conversation when the time comes.



Your people, by the way, may include small businesses, government organizations, non-profits, or individuals. Who do you think would benefit from your services? How would you describe them? What are their habits, frames of reference, or interests? Why would they be attracted to your services?

You are Unique *But how?*

Consultants, trainers, facilitators, and coaches, and are a dime a dozen in today's marketplace. The average person does not really know how to tell the difference between all the life coaches, leadership consultants, or strategic planners. It's your job to help people see what is different or unique about you.

If you can frame your Superpowers and benefits in a way that others can understand, you are well on your way to demonstrating what is special about you.

Knowing who else is playing in the sandbox, however, means you can help your potential clients find you and hire you more easily. When a potential client looks around, they start by searching for the services they need. But in the end, they are not hiring services, they are hiring you. When you understand how you are distinct from all the other people in your service category, you can guide people to your doorstep.

I make it a point to get to know other consultants in my area. When I meet a new person in the marketplace, I ask them out for lunch. And when a new person contacts me to network, I always accept their invitation. It serves me to know who they are, what their background is, what they are offering.

First, I may want to refer business to them. I can't satisfy everyone's needs and knowing who else is out there, makes me a good resource. The people I refer never forget that I helped them find a better fit.

Second, I want to know who may be competing for the same contract. I ask potential clients if they are shopping around and who else they are talking to. Then I let them know how my approach is different, that my pricing structure is unique, or I reference something unique about my background. When it comes to using the MBTI, for example, I am one of the few people in my area who has written books on Personality Type and I not only attend, but regularly speak at international Type conferences. I am considered a thought leader among my peers, and this helps me stand out when compared to other people using the MBTI.

When I can speak honestly and openly about my competition, potential clients make better informed decisions. Sometimes they choose me, sometimes they don't. I am ok either way because I am committed to them finding the best match for their needs and there will always be another time when I may be a better fit.

When looking at possible competitors, start by researching who is in your local market. Unless you already have a large on-line presence, you will likely begin by offering services in your geographic region. At least conduct a cursory Google search to learn who else offers the kinds of services you plan to provide.

Who are some of the consultants in your local area? Do you know them already? What is different about what you are offering?

Envisioning the Future

What compels you forward?

Having a compelling vision for the future is important because it will help pull you through the daily challenges of being a Solopreneur. It can be lonely and overwhelming in the beginning. There are so many decisions about the logistics and systems you need to get started that it's easy to get lost in the details and lose your focus of what's most important. On any given day, you may get mired in the details of learning a new technology or be overwhelmed when deciding which on-line calendar system to use. If you have a vision for where you are headed, all you need to do is stop and look up. Your vision is always beckoning you forward.

Having a vision for yourself and your company pulls you out of the bog when you get stuck and helps calm down you when are dissipating into oblivion.

If the word "vision" does not resonate with you, consider your indicators for success. We all have landmarks or mile-markers rolling around in our heads and hearts that let us know when we are on the road to success. What are some of your ideas about what success looks like, feels like, tastes like?

I remember some of mine were being asked to speak at conferences about my areas of expertise, publishing a book, and hiring a bookkeeper and office assistant so I could be freed from some of the more odious administrative details of running my business. All those things have since happened, and more.

In the middle of it all, I rarely felt like I knew what I was doing. I was often running scared and got sidetracked every day. I met some of them sooner than others and most looked differently than I had anticipated, but I have set and passed many mile-markers in these past decades.

I knew, for example, that I wanted to write and publish a book. I figured there was at least a book inside of me, but I did not yet have a clear focus. When I got clear about my vision, the ideas started flowing.

After coaching people in developing and changing careers, finding their best fit in terms of employment, and helping people launch businesses, it became clear to me that many people were suffering in unsatisfying careers because they didn't understand themselves and seemed unable to effectively obtain jobs that truly suited them.

At the time, I was using some off-the-shelf materials with my career and employment clients and was unsatisfied with them. They were too detailed in areas that didn't matter and not "big-picture" enough where it did matter. I started by adapting some of the materials and by the third edition I had completely transformed the exercises and information into my own.

While I was already working in the field, it was that insight about the source of suffering that helped me connect to my vision. It became clear that I wanted to help end the concept of unemployment and underemployment. ***My vision was for a future where everyone would be able to fully express their Superpowers while making a living and creating a better world for all.*** It is my belief that if people actually understood themselves, they would be motivated to leave unsatisfactory jobs and find their best-fit careers. Writing a book to help people achieve this while also including tools to help them get suitable jobs was a clear expression of this vision.



An important aspect of why people don't understand themselves, by the way, led to my second book. Since I used Personality Type with all my clients, I started noticing some patterns in how different Types recounted their accomplishments. The ones whose Personality Type fit the dominant cultural norms saw themselves as leaders while those whose Types were the most misunderstood by the dominant culture never did.

A large part of what I do is help people tell their stories better, but if they can't see themselves as the leaders that they are, they probably won't apply for higher lever positions, advocate for raises for themselves, or be selected to lead teams and projects. Since we have a fairly narrow ideal of what leadership looks and sounds like, the majority of people are passed over when these opportunities come up. I wanted to help people tell their stories better and educate the world about how different styles of leadership can be equally effective.

Again, I was using off-the-shelf materials for Personality Type training and coaching, and I kept having to amend them. At first, I just made some drawings and sketches to demonstrate how different Personality Types lead, then I created a one-page handout, and soon it grew to a few pages. Before I knew it, I had enrolled in a master's program so I would have some structure to do the research. In 2014, I published the first edition of *Leadership Styles*; in 2017, the second; and in 2021, the third.

In the midst of all that writing, I was still running my business, taking care of the daily operations, and having a life. About half-way through my master's program, I nearly became divorced. I took a year's break from my studies to mend my marriage. You see, life kept trying to derail me, but my vision for a world where people are able to fully express their Superpowers helped me put one foot in front of the other on those days when little else seemed to make sense.

These days, my indicators, aka goals, include writing books and developing courses that help people discover their Superpowers. They also include more personal lifestyle goals. I have a lovely home and gardens, my husband and I produce 60-70% of our own food, and I have a few grandchildren. I want to maintain my health and well-being so that I can enjoy this life. My indicators also include having a schedule that supports my lifestyle while still generating an income. I am still compelled to create a future where everyone would be able to fully express their Superpowers while making a living and creating a better world for all, I've simply shifted how I am expressing my Superpowers.

You might be thinking that my vision sounds unattainable, and you would be correct if you were thinking in human scale. It could potentially take many lifetimes to create a future where everyone would be able to fully express their Superpowers while making a living and creating a better world for all. Each time I see the light switch on in a client's eyes; or support a team in functioning at a higher level; or coach a company owner in building an effective leadership team because they are all tapping into their Superpowers, I'm a little closer. In the process, I know I have inspired others to help create a future where everyone will be able to fully express their Superpowers while making a living and creating a better world for all.

What is your compelling vision? Five years from now, what do you hope to have accomplished, produced, or achieved in your business and personal life?

Serving your needs

What kind of rewards will make it all worthwhile?

Ultimately your business must serve your needs first and foremost. If you are not being rewarded beyond an income, being in business is probably not worth all the effort. Yes, effort. Being in business has many wonderful rewards, but to get them you will have to tap into undeveloped skills, stretch outside your preferences, and overcome yourself daily.

The magic is in creating a business that delivers the rewards that matter while accessing your Superpowers more than half of the time. If all that tapping, stretching, and overcoming are relegated to a third of your effort, you will more than likely have the energy for it all.

As I have said before, I was initially motivated to be an entrepreneur because I didn't want to work for other people. The truth is, I was a terrible employee. In fact, I was fired three times in two years! After my first two attempts in business, Sew Fine and Read Communications, I questioned my ability to be a successful entrepreneur and hid out in some dumb jobs. I worked as an office manager, sold advertising for a newspaper, cleaned houses, waitressed, and did a lot of administrative jobs through a temporary employment agency. I was capable of doing all of them and even enjoyed aspects of them. When the temp agency said they would not place me in another company because I made personal calls during work, I hit a low.

I could have gone down many rabbit holes with that kind of track record, but when I was honest with myself about what had happened, I had gotten myself fired because I was too chicken to quit. I was terribly unhappy but didn't have the courage to do anything about it. When I decided to get serious about being in business for myself, I saw it as an opportunity to create a life worth living.

No longer would I be hired or fired at some manager's whim based on another person's idea of how I was supposed to spend my days. I did not want to have to be at the same place at the same time every day and I didn't want to work for people I didn't trust or like.

I wanted to set my own hours, do work that was meaningful to me, and, if I was going to work so dang hard, I wanted to build something that belonged to me. In short, I wanted to own the results of my intellectual, emotional, and physical hard work. Yes, I was motivated to make money, but I knew there had to be something more I could do than just earn an income.

When I connected with my motivations, I started creating the life I wanted and discovered the business model that fit into my life. I wanted a flexible start time, to work with clients and co-workers who I liked and respected, to be able to create, write, and speak my mind. And if I were going to do any administrative tasks, they would support the functions of my own office.

What kind of a life do you want? Reviewing your motivations may help stimulate some ideas. What changes to your schedule, where you work, or how you work are you seeking? What kind of people do you want to be around? What will you fill your days with that will make it worth taking the risks of being in business for yourself?

A year from now, how will you know if the effort you have put toward building your business was worth it?



Making a Living

How much do you need to generate?

Reality check – you have bills and need to be able to pay yourself! Underneath all the other rewards, making a living from your efforts is essential. If this is the place where you stare into the headlights like a deer, take a moment and just breathe. We are looking at round numbers here. No need to develop a detailed outline of your pricing with weekly sales goals.



Your business may be a source of supplemental income or to be your sole income. This may be a side gig for you or a part-time endeavor. All of that is fine but getting an idea of how much income you want to generate will make a difference later when we look at what you may need to charge for your services.

If you are leaving a full-time job, start with replacing your current income. Or look at your living expenses and come up with a round number that will allow you to pay your bills. If this is a part-time or side gig, you may have modest expectations. No matter what level you are planning to play at, start putting some numbers on the page.

When I started my business, I was only 26 and had never made much money. I wanted to generate enough income so I could quit my part-time job. It was a low bar, but it gave me something to work toward. Later, the numbers got bigger, but I already knew I could generate sales. When I decided I wanted to generate more, I looked at the services I was offering and made some changes. But I am getting ahead of myself.

If money and budgets make your skin crawl, take a couple of deep breaths, and set this aside for now. You can circle back when you have more information.

If you are comfortable with the numbers, then have at it. No need to get too specific right now. We are still talking round figures.

What kind of income do you need to generate in the beginning to make it worth your while? How much money would you like to be making in three to five years?



Why I thanked the Man who Fired Me

It was a low moment in my professional life the day I was fired from a temporary position and then was told by the temp agency that they would not place me again.

I mean . . . I did make some personal calls, even after my supervisor told me that he could hear me talking to my friend. He was, after all, in the cubicle right behind me. But it wasn't like I didn't do the job I was hired for. I had worked through the very long list of calls, updated more files than they imagined possible in the short time I was there, and kept track of my results because it gave me something else to think about besides making calls all day. You try calling hundreds of mechanics and owners of small planes to collect information about the last time they had one of three procedures completed on their engines and tell me you would not have wanted to do almost anything to relieve the boredom!

He called me into the conference room before lunch to tell me that his manager was pressuring him to fire me because I was still making personal calls. I asked for one more chance and went to lunch committed to turning over a new leaf. By the time I returned, he made it clear that I needed to leave immediately.

"No worries," I told myself, "The temporary agency will have a new assignment for me by Monday." No need to tell my boyfriend, whom I had just moved in with three months prior. He would never have to know.

"No, I'm sorry," she politely but firmly stated, "We can't place you again."

Apparently, there had been other complaints about my personal call habit.

I was in full on panic. How was I going to explain getting fired from a temp agency? The only thing to do was get a job before the end of the day. "That's right," I

told myself, "I will get a new job so I will have good news to share tonight."

I managed to convince the tired restaurant manager at a local run-down family diner-type place to not only interview me but hire me on the spot. But the only position he had open was hostess position that would require me to work the lunch and dinner shift with a weird 3-hour break in the day. I had worked as a waitress and had a low opinion of the hostess position, but I grabbed at that offer like it was gold bullion.

About six months later, my former supervisor from my last temp job walked in. This restaurant was only about 5 minutes from his office, but he had never ventured in before.

"What is he doing here now?" my mind screeched. Shame overtook my good judgement.

After being fired from temporary work, I felt like I had sunk to a new low as a hostess at Lums. There was no way I could show my face in that dining room. Remember, I was the hostess and was supposed to greet people, but I managed to hide in the back for the excruciating 45 minutes he occupied a table.

"Well, that was clever of you," I muttered, feeling proud of dodging that bullet.

When he walked in two weeks later, I knew I could not hide again. It was time for me to confront this demon (not him, my own shame) and vanquish it. I believe that we are not given challenges we are not capable of handling, so I knew I had to at least say hello.

"Hi, remember me?" I said as cheerfully as possible.

"Ah . . . yeah," he said cautiously. "How are you?"

"I'm great, actually," I assured him. "You probably don't know this, but after I left your office, the agency refused to place me again."

"Oh, sorry about that," he said nervously.

"No, it's ok. I wanted to thank you for firing me that day. I wasn't happy and needed someone to kick me in the ass so I would make some changes. I had to take a hard look at my life and make some better choices. In addition to working here part-time, I have started two businesses and am happier than I ever was doing temp work. So, I wanted to thank you for firing me. It was the best thing that happened to me this year."

I never saw him again.

You see, even though I got that hostess job on that fateful day, I knew it was a temporary reprieve. This was a huge wake up call. I hated doing administrative work. I wasn't doing any freelance or creative writing in my off time, and ultimately, I had to confront the fact that I was hiding out. After securing a regular, although paltry, paycheck as a hostess, I started talking to people who knew me. I asked them what they thought I could do; what talents did they see in me I could put to good use. I felt like I had potential to do almost anything but needed perspective.

I worked at Lums for exactly one year and when I left, I walked into a full partnership in the consulting company I eventually came to own 100%. In and around my weird hostess hours, I made appointments with clients to help them with resumes, cover letters, and job search. I built a respectable little intrapreneurial enterprise within that firm and proved to myself and everyone else that I was good at something that I liked to do – helping people. When one of the business partners left the firm about 10 months in, the last standing partner offered me 50% ownership of the firm. Within weeks, one of the largest outplacement contracts we had ever won started, and I never looked back.

I eventually married my business partner, and we built the business together until we couldn't. Ten years in, we decided that being married was more important than being business partners, so we separated our business assets and managed to stay married. For the next 15 years, we were both able to grow professionally and personally as separate people, becoming each other's greatest fans in the process.

I am grateful to this day that I got fired from that awful temp job all those years ago.

Filling in the Gaps

What skills and talents are missing?

When you launch your business, you may feel like you are wearing a hundred different hats. This is normal, by the way. But if you step back for a moment, you can toss those hats in to three basic rings: Marketing, Operations, and Finance. For example, setting up your technology is part of operations, figuring out your services and setting prices is marketing, and setting up your business bank account is part of Finance. Most entrepreneurs are naturally talented in one of these arenas, skilled in another, and sort of a dullard in the third.

Marketing made sense to me in a way that is hard to explain. All the tasks related to developing my services, getting the word out, and enrolling people to engage with me were as easy and natural as drinking water. Operations is a pretty strong skill because I like to be organized and that energy naturally lends itself to setting up office systems. I am not always great, by the way, at maintaining them and often reinvent something because I forgot the system, I created the first time. But remember, this is in the skill area for me. Finance has always been my Bozo area. I understand it and am capable of entering transactions, making deposits, and paying bills, but these are pretty low-level tasks and I resist doing those.

When I became a partner in the small consulting firm where I was subcontracting as a resume writer, my business partner trained me in his very basic system and informed me that if was going to be a part of the business, I had to know how to manage the finances. He knew that this was a weak area for me, but he wasn't about to let me be oblivious.

Over the years, I have developed a lot of skills in all three areas. Some I knew about from the start and many I never knew I would need.

On a side note, when I learned about my Personality Type, it helped me understand more about my Superpowers and Bozopowers.

If you reviewed your list of skills, talents, and qualifications in which category would the majority of them fall? Are you stronger in Marketing, Operations, or Finance? What do you think would be beneficial to strengthen?

By the way, you do not need to be masterful at a skill to claim it. There are plenty of tasks I bumble through every day, but I can do them. I am not asking you to rank or evaluate your skills, just to say if you have them or not.

If you are curious about the correlation between your Personality Type and your Superpowers and Bozopowers, take a look at the Appendix for more on Entrepreneur Styles.



Opting In: Defining Business on *Your* Terms

Since long before there was a thing called a gig economy, a side-hustle or a coronavirus pandemic, people have been providing all sorts of services on a part-time basis to the general public. We used to call them freelancers and contractors. Some people offered up services as a way to make a little extra cash between permanent jobs, others “opted out” of corporate life to raise families and provided a professional service to generate income, and others called themselves artists and crafters.

There is an interesting double standard, however, depending on the gender of the person who chooses to start a business.

No matter the motivations, the time interval, or the level of income generated, if the person providing the service was a woman, others often said, “she *opted out* of corporate life” and her incoming-generating endeavor was called a *hobby* or *lifestyle business*; if the person was a man, it is often said that “he *ventured out* on his own” to become an *entrepreneur* or *business owner*.

Somewhere along the line, someone decided that a large group of people cobbling together a bunch of small jobs should be called gig workers, like we had all become musicians performing in clubs. I have been a consultant for 30+ years and my entire business consists of many small and large projects that I assemble into a full-time business that has supported me along the way. I have never considered myself a gig-worker.

Still today, men are more likely to claim business owner and entrepreneur as their monikers. Women still tend to refer to

themselves as free-lancers or self-employed. Women are also more likely to maintain the legal status of a Sole-Proprietors instead of claiming a more substantial legal structure like a Limited Liability Company (LLC), S-Corporation, or C-Corporation. The women I coach say they don’t want the hassle of being an LLC; as a result, they often pay more taxes than necessary. Most men I coach rush to register their side-hustles as LLCs and claim every tax advantage possible.

The embedded message in these self-proclaimed titles is that men not only see themselves as business owners, but they are also expected to grow their side-hustle into some kind of burgeoning enterprise, like Tesla or Uber; and that women have “life-style” businesses that happen make a little extra cash on the side and they will remain solo, until they get a real job.

A “life-style business” is defined as a business that primarily generates an income that supports the owner or founder, providing the individual with a certain “lifestyle.” Other key factors in life-style businesses are that they tend to depend heavily on the founder’s skills, personality, energy, and contacts; and they tend to be home-based.

Wait a minute, doesn’t this define almost every professional service business?

Why do solo architects, accountants, and lawyers have firms while artists, bookkeepers, writers are called freelancers? I understand that architects, accountants, and lawyers have advanced degrees and certifications but if their business relies on the founders’ skills, personality, energy,

and contacts while providing an income for the founder, isn't that the same as an independent bookkeeper with an accounting degree or a successful artist with a Master's in Fine Arts?

When I asked a new client how long she had been in business, she said "about seven years." Then she qualified, "Well, I was only part-time for the first two years, so really it's only been five years that I have been full-time in business." She paused, laughed nervously, and added, "And I'm still solo, my office is in my dining room."

When a woman-owned business is referred to as lifestyle businesses, it's not generally considered a compliment.

This is a woman with a master's degree in education and a certification in coaching. Yet, she was having a hard time claiming that she has been in business for seven years and generates a reliable income that supports herself and her family. She felt like she had to apologize for not renting an office, hiring any staff, and wanting to travel the world to serve clients.

When I asked another client how long he had been in business, he said he

62% of women entrepreneurs say their business is their primary income source.

started his architectural firm 10 years ago and while he had staff in the past, he worked alone now. He added that also owns the building where he keeps his office and rents some space to other architects and designers. His main motivation for meeting

with me, by the way, is that he has barely been supporting himself for the past 10 years.

Both of these clients came to me because they wanted help redefining the terms of their businesses. She wanted to more clearly define her services because she felt scattered and wanted more work/life balance. He was burdened by owning a building and felt pressured to maintain the property. He wanted to simplify so he could have a better work/life balance.

They both wanted to increase their net income (aka what they put into their personal checking accounts vs the total amount generated via their businesses) and spend less time worrying about their business, while enjoying time with their families and friends. Both of wanted to have better *lifestyles* in the middle earning a decent income.

Isn't this the ultimate pursuit of nearly everyone who is employed, to have the perfect "work/life balance"?

When my career coaching clients list their priorities for an ideal job, "a better work/life balance" is always in the top five elements. Other elements include: the ability to work from home on occasion, more freedom to express their professional talents, to make a difference, and earn a solid income to support themselves and their families. Seems most people want to have better *lifestyles* in the middle of earning a decent income.

Seventy percent of Americans would prefer to be self-employed, and a new home-based business is started every 12 seconds. According to [Small Biz Trends](#), women are more likely to operate home-based businesses. Seventy-two percent of women who own startups operate the startups out of their home, compared to

only 61 % of men who own startups. And 68 % of women business owners are still running their businesses from home after 3.5 years, compared to 53 percent of men.

Additionally, 13% of Women-owned companies have been in business for 20+ years. Women are starting businesses at a slightly faster rate now, but they don't have quite as much longevity as male owned businesses just yet, though it's fairly close. Of male respondents, 17% have been in business for more than 20 years.

[Small Biz Trends](#) cites "one interesting finding was that 62% of women entrepreneurs depend on their business as their primary source of income. This challenges the old assumption that women entrepreneurs are more likely to run lifestyle businesses that provide supplemental income, as opposed to serving as a primary source of revenue. While this figure is lower than the 69% of male entrepreneurs who reported depending on their business as their primary source of income, it nonetheless suggests that women-owned businesses are much more than casual hobbies."

The report continues: "Just 25% of women seek financing for their business. This is significantly less than the 34% of men who seek funding for their businesses. . . financing is a challenge for all entrepreneurs, but our data shows that women are much less likely than men to both seek and obtain financing for their small businesses." Of the women who do seek funding, 31% are successful. Men were again more likely than women to be successful in their quest for funding. By contrast, 34% of men who applied said they received their funding request.

So, let's reclaim this term "lifestyle business." Instead of having to "Opt-Out" of corporate life, choose to "Opt-In" to Solopreneurism and Entrepreneurialism. And while you are at it, go ahead and register your endeavor as an LLC or other corporate entity. It's not as hard as you might think and there are many tax advantages available that will help you keep more of your hard-earned money.

May everyone be so lucky that have a business that also allows them to have a life too.

Back to the Future

What is Success?

You already have been thinking about your compelling future and what difference you want to make with clients, now it's time to envision what success looks like for you. Envisioning your future success is about seeing, feeling, hearing, even tasting your own success as a business owner. It's time to get specific.

I remember wanting to wear beautiful clothing, being able to afford nice vacations, being on stage and addressing large crowds, owning a home where I could have a garden and a greenhouse. I wanted to be close to nature and the grocery store. I saw myself walking through my garden every day, writing, teaching, and speaking publicly. I could hear the applause, smell the soil, and feel the fine fabrics against my skin.

I am happy to report that all that and much more is true for me today.

Along the way, I tapped into many undeveloped skills, stretched well outside my preferences, and overcame myself in more way than I could have imagined. Envisioning my success, having a compelling vision, and being clear about the difference I wanted to make motivated me to overcome all those demons.

Pause for a moment, close your eyes, and imagine yourself five years from now. What do you see, hear, feel, smell? Who is around you? What does your office look like? What kind of home are you inhabiting? You may want to draw a picture, brainstorm some ideas, or make a list of whatever comes to mind. No matter the method, get specific.

If you have not gotten clear about the rewards, or the difference you want to make, or even your compelling vision, you can still answer these questions. Allow yourself to imagine in full color.

Now consider the obstacles and barriers that may arise. What are they?

Envisioning your future success is an important aspect in manifesting the life you are seeking by starting your own business. I know you want more than to make enough money to cover your bills. If that is all you wanted, you would get a job, not start a business.



Bringing it all together

What are you offering and who is buying?

We have covered a lot of territory and you probably have a lot of ideas swarming around in your head. I know you don't have answers to all the questions I posed. I also know you know more than you think you do.

It's time to start integrating your ideas and bring them into form.

Without looking back at any notes, open a fresh page and allow yourself to free write. What kinds of services are you thinking of offering? Who do you think would hire you? Why do you think they would hire you?

Trust yourself. Even if all you have done is read this section without answering a single question or writing a single word. If you have gotten this far, you have done more than you realize.

So, take a couple of slow breaths in and out. Pause. And take another slow breath in and out. And write. Or brainstorm on a white board, or talk it out into a recording device, or maybe you need to act it out. Whatever your process, trust what comes from it.

No need to look back through all your notes. You know this already. Trust yourself. Let it flow!



Next steps

Are you a Solopreneur?

Now you are getting an idea of the kinds of services you want to offer, the people who may be interested in engaging with you, and what distinguishes you from others. With those three elements, you now have the essential building blocks of everything else you need to start your business.

You may be thinking that I can't be that easy, but really it is. If you know who your customers are, you just need to figure out where they are getting their information so you can get in front of them – that's called marketing. If you know how your services are distinct from others and why people will buy from you, instead of other consultants, then you have the core of your marketing message which will lead to your logo, business cards, website – this is marketing and operations. If you know what you are selling and to whom, you can look at pricing and sales projections. This will lead you into operations and finance. They are all interconnected.

Now all there's left to do is reflect and consider if being a consultant, coach, or other kind of professional service provider is for you. I have asked you to consider what difference you want to make, the rewards you are seeking, to share your completing vision, and envision your future. Now ask yourself if being a Solopreneur is for you.

If you know the Solopreneur life is for you, but you need to get a few more ducks in a row, then get those ducks in a row and revisit all of this when you can turn your attention toward it again.

If you have discovered that you are not committed to launching now or ever, this is great news too. Considering the invitation and consciously declining is a powerful step. Hopefully, this process has supported you in getting more clear

Remember, you don't have to have it all figured out before starting. Most people in consultative services businesses today didn't start by writing a perfect business plan, don't have fully developed brand strategies with detailed marketing plans, don't have all of their finances in perfect order, and don't keep their websites and social marketing perfectly up to date. And yet, they are still in business, still pay their bills, and are often really happy being in business for themselves, serving their clients, and overcoming the various challenges and obstacles that arise every day.

You too can launch, grow, and prosper as a Solopreneur without having it all sorted.

So, are you a Solopreneur?

