

# Lessons Learned from Five Years in the Self-Employment Trenches

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- **Something about me . . .**

STC Region 4 Director-Sponsor

Past President, VP, and Competitions Manager for Southwestern Ohio Chapter

Started my own business in 1995

25 years+ as a technical communicator in corporations, government agencies, nonprofit institutions, and now, as an independent

BS-Univ. of Michigan; MS-Univ. of Wisconsin; MBA-Xavier Univ., Cincinnati

Brought up in New Jersey (my h. s. overlooked the back side of the Statue of Liberty)

- **Why I Did This**

Proximity of Events

Proximity of Support

Curiosity: Better or Worse?

Self-Interest

"You're gonna make it on your own."

- **When Starting Your Own Business:**

-Pay Attention to:

People and Your Relationships with Them (People do business with people, not other businesses.)

-Don't Worry So Much About:

Hardware and Software (Buy what you need when you need it.)

Accounting: find a good accountant

- **Problem Areas Everyone Talks About**

Setting Rates

Dealing with Money (incl. Taxes)

Rounding Up Your Consultants

Managing Time

Finding Clients

Preventing Isolation

Getting Paid

- **Setting Rates**

-Set One Hourly Rate; despite the project, the client stills gets your services

-Half what you make goes to taxes

-Discount Hours, not Dollars

-Find Out What Others are Charging in Your Area

-Don't Undervalue Yourself

- **Rounding Up Your Consultants**

-Graphic Designer/Illustrator

-Proofreader

-Accountant

-Back-up sources

-Lawyer

-Writing specialists

- **Finding Clients**

-Referrals from People You Know

-Referrals from Other Communications People

-Everyone is a Potential Client

-Six Degrees of Separation

-Periodic "keep-in-touch" postcards, emails (direct mail)

-Advertising: targeted, maybe

- **Getting Paid**

- Contracts: Yours or the Client's
- Letters of Agreement
- Invoice, invoice, invoice
- Follow up, Follow up, Follow up
- Keep Track of What's Come In
- Simple ways may work best
- Don't rely on 1099s

- **Dealing with Money**

- Inconsistency: that's the way it is
- 30, 60, 90 days to pay: that's the way it is. If your family obligations require greater consistency, rethink.
- Separate Business Checking Account
- Budget
- Estimated taxes, self-employment taxes=total Social Security tax (14% of your net income)

- **Managing Time**

- Routine is Important, but so is Flexibility
- The Client is in Charge; the Deadline Must be Met. But, point out an unreasonable deadline
- The Day has 24 Hours, not 8, and setting office hours may not be possible. Clients come to you because they need additional help.
- What Works Best For You?

- **Preventing Isolation**

- EASY: Join STC! Take Advantage of All Services
- Take on a Chapter Job! It keeps you in touch; it puts your name out there!
- Get away from your desk for a bit of time everyday, if you can: the gym (?)—I'm bad at this.
- Don't tie up your corporate friends on the phone.
- Exploit social outlets other than work-related ones: what did you do when you worked 8 to 5?
- Classes and workshops on things of interest to you
- Volunteering—other than STC

- **Other Concerns Before Making This Decision**

- Your Personality—Can You Handle juggling, The Unknown, Time Requirements, Discipline, The Need to Focus
  - Tax Considerations: Additional record keeping, More Forms, Deductions
  - Professional Development: Even more than before, you are now responsible for your professional development
- While costs are deductible, there's no such thing as the 100% bracket

- **What I Miss about Corporate America**

- Benefits
- More of a standard schedule— sometimes
- Camaraderie
- Availability of resources
- Not having to run to the Post Office
- No Cats on the Keyboard

- **What I Don't Miss About Corporate America**

- Having to be Somewhere Everyday at a Specific Time
- Office "Politics"
- Dealing with Difficult People a Lot More
- Less Variety
- Less Flexibility
- Working for Someone Else
- Not Having Cats on the Keyboard