

Women's Business

Sandy Leong



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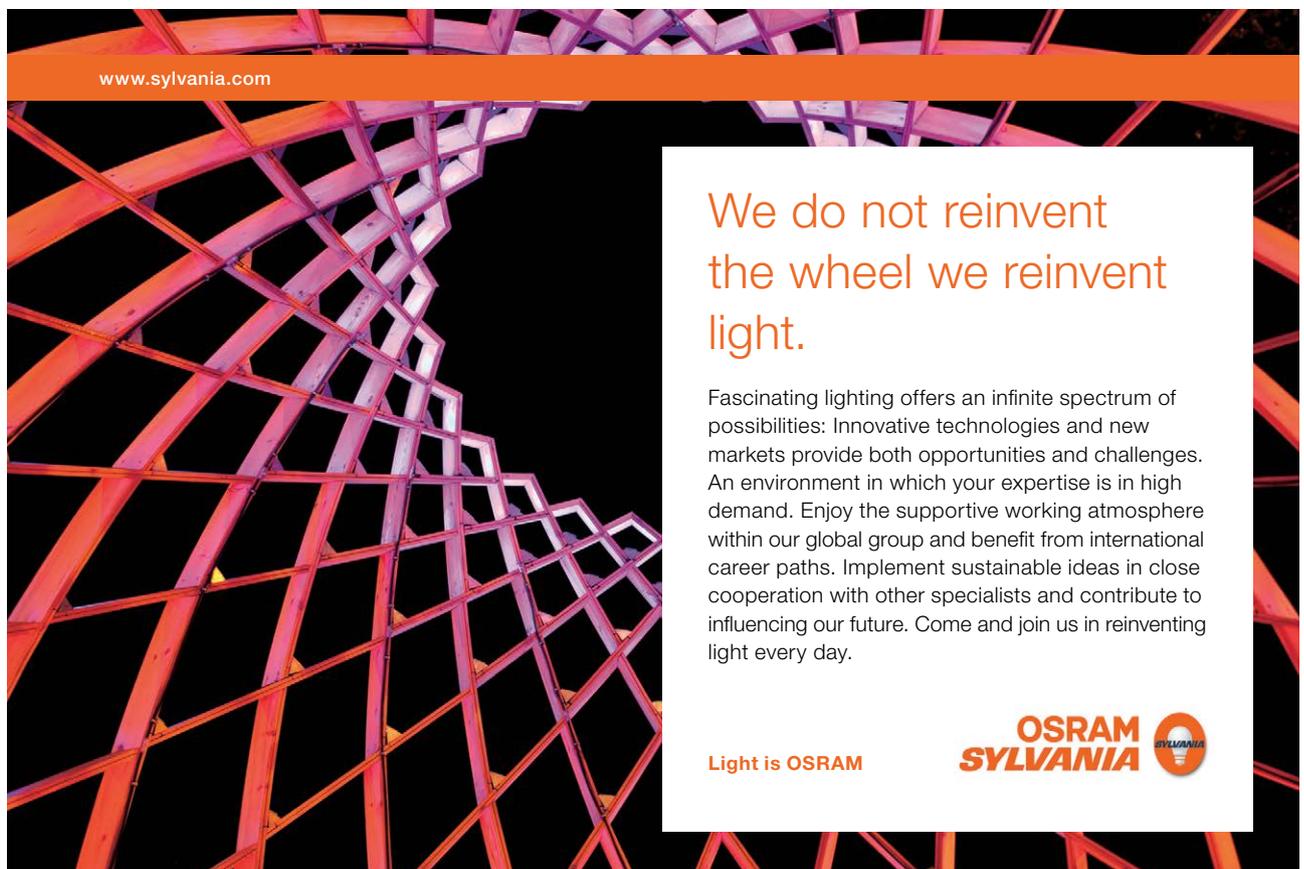
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This book is dedicated to women everywhere who have the passion to set up their own business;
and to my lovely grandmother

About the Author

Sandy Leong has been successfully running her business, Sahara Consultancy UK Ltd, a training company, for the past 25 years, started at her kitchen table in response to the problems of childcare and the need to be more flexible in her working life, and also having a passion to achieve something of which she could be proud.

She is a published author, a well-respected trainer delivering training programmes across the UK and internationally, and a sought after public speaker. She is passionate about helping and empowering people, especially women, to develop the confidence to reach their goals.

She is currently Director of Sahara Consultancy UK Ltd, the company she set up 25 years ago, and of MyTrainingResources, Chair of the Board of Trustees of a large charity and President of her local Speakers Club.

1 My Story

More and more women are choosing to start a business as a realistic alternative to working for someone else. Setting up and running a business can give you the freedom to choose to work when and how you want to, to work around childcare commitments, making it possible to be able to attend school events and sometimes be at the school gates to collect your children.

Running a business is not always the easiest way to earn a living or to contribute to the household income, but it can be an exciting and rewarding adventure. No manager to answer to, just yourself; maybe not having to be in the office at a certain time; and sometimes no commute; and all the unlimited possibilities that you can create. On the downside, at the beginning, you could be working long hours for a small return; any days that you take off for holidays, play days or even through illness will not be paid. You will be the Sales Manager, Finance Director, Marketing Manager, the IT Manager, maybe the Shop Floor Staff who makes all the products or delivers the service and the Managing Director. You will have the weight of making it happen all on your shoulders.

Can you do that? If you think you are able to do this and can concentrate on the benefits of being your own boss and how they outweigh the negatives then setting up and running your own business is something you should try.

Having your own business is a great alternative to working for someone else. Brian Tracy, the well-known author and motivational speaker says, 'if you don't set goals for yourself, you are doomed to work to achieve the goals of someone else.' This is quite right if you are going to work hard then it might as well be for yourself.

With the ever rising and excruciating costs of childcare, often making it difficult to go out to work; costs that can take most of your salary; plus the stress of getting children to school or the childminders; finding someone to look after them in the school holidays or when they are ill; along with managing a house. These are not the sort of events that make for a happy life but running your own business could improve that scenario.

But can women have it all? Yes they can if they have the confidence to take the leap into setting up a business and the staying power to make it work.

My story

I set up my own business over 25 years ago in response to the same set of issues that I have described. And maybe what you, the reader, are currently experiencing. A stressful job as a Chief Officer of an organisation, juggling long hours, evening meetings, 3 children needing attention and a taxi service to their activities and to meet their friends, and the escalating costs of childcare, not to mention the problems of covering school holidays when getting effective childcare is often the hardest.

So when my youngest child was 4 years old and the oldest was 13 years old I decided to give in my notice and leave my job and set up a Training Company. During my months' notice I experienced a variety of emotions that ranged from excitement and exhilaration at what I had done and was about to embark on to fear and terror of the consequences of what I had done. If it did not work we would be short of money. We needed my income to make ends meet, and also the fear of how I would feel with my subsequent loss of status and no work colleagues to chat to and bounce ideas around.

I worked very hard in that last month of paid employment, not only finishing up my job to leave everything sorted out and ready for my successor but also contacting everyone I could think of that might help me with the future success of my new business. I have to tell you at this point that I did not just throw my future up in the air hoping for the best. I had made a rational decision. I am a qualified teacher, I had been running some training programmes and speaking at conferences for a few years as part of my job role and had made contacts. I had worked out the minimum I had to earn to contribute to the family income to ensure we could pay the bills and had registered with a couple of schools in order to take on some supply teaching days whilst I worked on getting training contracts. I had worked out how many days of supply teaching I needed to do each month in order to bring in the amount of money that I required. Any of you that are reading this book that have worked as a supply teacher will know that this is not an easy option and therefore I knew that having to do supply teaching would motivate me to get my business going as quickly as possible to avoid this way of earning a living!

The first Monday of my new life came and I took the children to school, came back and put some washing in the washing machine and tidied the house, then I went to my newly created office, a desk that one of the children had had, and now had a better one and a filing cabinet that was at this point more or less empty, in a spare bedroom. As I sat there I began to wonder if I had made the right decision, no one to talk to, no one to bounce ideas off, no office banter and chatting about the weekend. But there was no going back; the organisation I had been working for had already filled my job, so there was no option of changing my mind.

At the end of that first day I had lost count of how many different emotions I had gone through, but they ranged from panic, loneliness, elation, excitement, fear, just to name a few. I stood at the school gates later on that day still wondering if I had done the right thing and how I was going to manage to get this business going.

A few weeks later, after a lot of hard work contacting people, writing training proposals and a few days of supply teaching, I got my first contract to provide some training programmes. Then I knew I had made the right decision, my euphoria was all consuming (the only problem was that there was no-one to share my news with) when I received that important first telephone call confirming that I had the contract.

Later that day, I went to collect my children from school and chatted to my recently made new friends at the school gate, it confirmed to me that I had made the right decision. No more problems with childcare in the school holidays, I had blocked out the school holiday dates in my diary, intending that those days would be working at home days for development and administration, whilst supervising the children's comings and goings and activities in the garden and taking days off for the occasional excursions and outings. So working on average 3 days a week running training programmes in term time and working from home in the school holidays the whole family fell into a comfortable pattern.

I am still running my business 25 years later, with my grown up children all having left home and with no need to book out the school holidays in my diary, but a habit that was surprising difficult to break!

That is my story. What is your story going to be? Maybe you do not have the issue of childcare responsibilities, but other caring responsibilities, maybe you would just like the freedom and excitement of running your own business. Whatever your reasons, it is an exciting journey on which you are about to embark.

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2 What is Your Story Going to Be?

Although a few people who set up a business have a lucky break because they were in exactly the right place at the right time with the right idea in their head; it is so uncommon that it is almost a fairy story. The vast majority of people who succeed in business do so by sheer hard work and determination. I am sure you have heard the saying, 'it is a funny thing, the harder I work the luckier I get'. It is very true.

I have had friends say to me over the years that I must be a lucky person. My answer is always the same, no I am not lucky, I never win a raffle and the National Lottery manages to elude me whenever I remember to buy a ticket, I just decide what I want and go for it. They do not see the hours of time and the effort that goes into reaching my goal. They just hear the bit at the end when I tell them I have got this or I am going to some place I wanted to visit. Sometimes it has been so long since I mentioned my idea to them that they have forgotten about it, but I have stayed at it persevering until I have got what I wanted.

As a woman you will be used to juggling multiple priorities so a couple more will not make too much difference! Setting up and running a business will test those skills to the limit, but if you want it and the change in lifestyle that it could bring I am sure you can do it.

It is a good idea to think about your motivations in wanting to start your own business. Why do you want it? Do you want to be your own boss, in control of your own destiny? Do you want to be able to fit your business around your other commitments? This is often the main reason that women set up a business. If your commitments include the need for childcare it can be very expensive, and it often does not fit in with the times that you actually need it, and by the time children have been dropped off at a nursery, a childminder or a school, or both, then the commute to work, a full day's work and then the same thing in reverse, it does not always seem a great way to live your life. Feeling constantly under pressure and unable to get off the treadmill does not make for a happy and fulfilled life.

Whatever the reasons that are behind your thinking in setting up a business you need to think carefully about what business you could set up. If it is to give you more freedom and flexibility to organise your life and your family in the way you would like it to be then think about what type of business would allow you to do this.

Anything that has a fixed premise like a shop or a café where you have to be there to open it and stay there until closing time can be restrictive until you are earning enough from the business to be able to employ someone else to do that. Running a business has its' own problems but at least you are in charge of them, how you solve them and ultimately your destiny.

If you want to start a business because you have a particular passion and hopefully the required talent for it, this can be one of the most enjoyable options. It is said that to never work again you need to do something you love doing and get people to pay you to do it. It then ceases to be 'working' in the traditional sense and becomes a pleasure.

Do you want to start your business because you have been made redundant and are having difficulties in finding the kind of work that you enjoy doing? Whatever your motivations are make sure you fully assess these so that you understand your own needs and wants before you start to set up this business that you will have to nurture and grow rather like a child. It will be your baby and you need to give it all the love and attention that you can.

Think about what it is that you want; what it is that you want to be and what it is that you want to have and what you want to do to get these. Take the first one, 'what do you want to be', and think about it. Do you want to be your own boss? Do you want to be a caterer, a restaurant owner, a dog groomer, a trainer? The possibilities are endless. Think of what it is you want to be and see if you get excited at the thought of it. The best and easiest way to succeed is when you are passionate about something. If an idea comes into your head and you think that that would do, or you think that would be hard work, then think again, if you are not fully committed to the idea in the first place then you are right, it will be hard work. The next question to ask yourself is, 'what do you want to do? Do you want to open a shop, sell via the internet, open a café, set up a virtual office, or make children's clothes? Again the list of possibilities is endless and of course fits in with the answer to the question, 'what you want to be?' If you decide you want to be a baker as the answer to what do you want to be and the answer to what do you want to do is to work from your home and not set up a shop, then you are part of the way to deciding how your business might look.

The next thing for your consideration is – what do you want to have? This can be in terms of how much money you want to have to fund the lifestyle that you want to get from your business. Or it can be in terms of the size of the business that you want to create, that will also influence how much money it will make.

Whatever your answers are to the three questions, you need to use them to decide on your end goals. Before you go any further, spend 5 minutes, or more, visualising what you are going to create. If you can get a picture in your head of what your business and you and the family will look like then you are well on the track to beginning to create a successful business.

Put this book down, find somewhere quiet and comfortable and sit down. You may have to wait until the children are in bed! When you are comfortable close your eyes and visualise your business idea. Bring a picture to your mind of what it will look like when it is up and running and successful. Visualise yourself in the business. Where is the business? Is it in a shop, at home, on the internet or other places? What is there? What equipment is there at your place of business? Is it computers, kitchen equipment, sewing machines or something else? And what are you actually doing? Are you sat at a computer, or do you have an apron on whilst you are baking, are you sat at a sewing machine, or are you talking on the telephone? The answer may be yes to several of these. What are you wearing? Is it appropriate to the business that you are running (in your head)? Where are the rest of the family? Are the children sitting doing their homework at the kitchen table whilst you are working; is your partner helping you? Are they involved in any way at all? And lastly what does it smell like? A strange question maybe but we should use all our senses when we are visualising something.

When you have got the picture firmly in your head, open your eyes. Think about how you are feeling. Excited? Cannot wait to get started? That should be the consequence of your visualisation exercise. If you have had trouble in developing a clear picture in your head do not worry about it. Spend some more time thinking about your business idea, talk to your family and friends until the idea crystallises in your mind and then do the visualisation exercise again. It can take several attempts to get a sharp picture in your mind and lift any fogginess.

When you have the picture, take a large piece of paper and draw what was in your head. It does not matter if you can draw or not, stick people are fine, this drawing is for you to capture what you have visualised. When you have completed it stick it somewhere where you will see it every day to remind you what you are going to do. I used to have mine pinned onto the fridge. Those fridge magnets have to be useful for something else other than shopping lists!

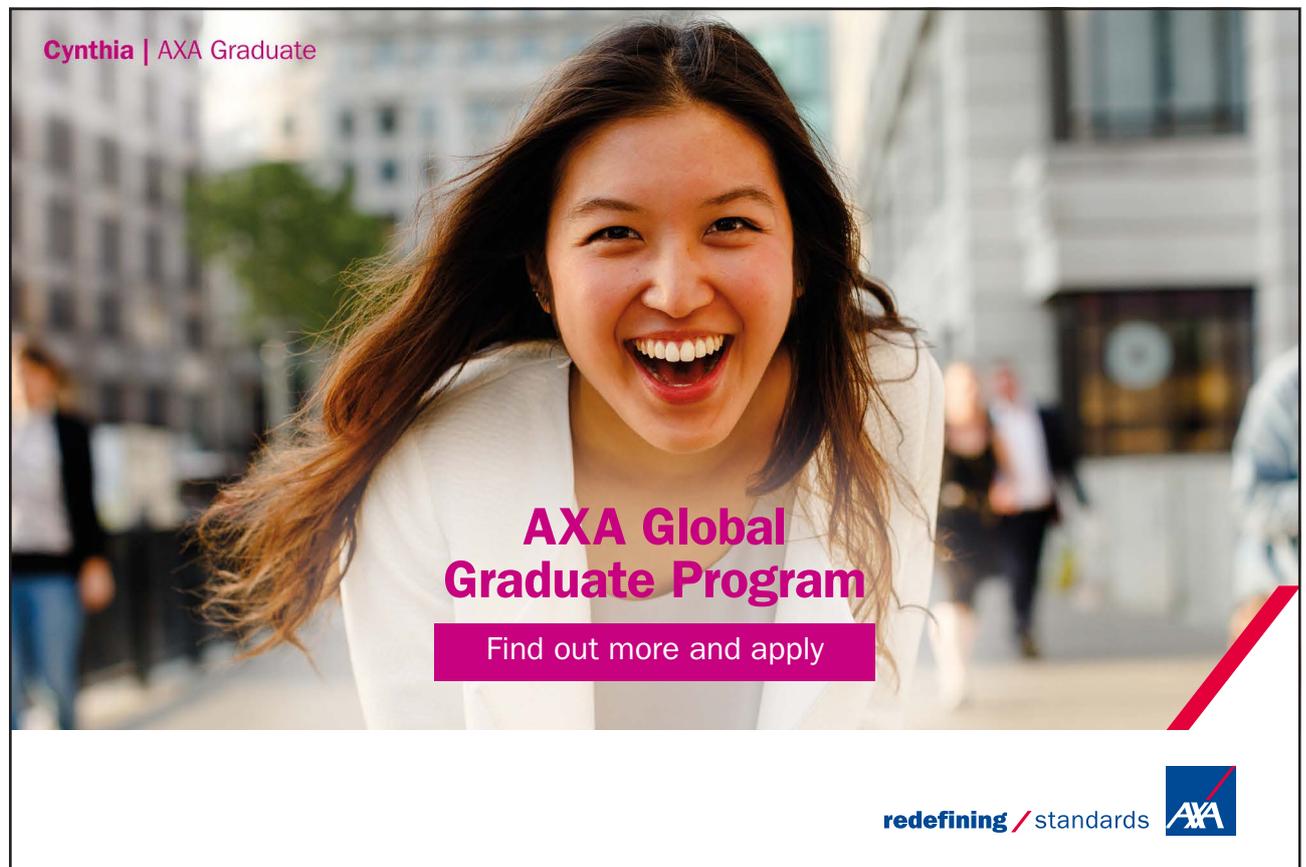
Every time I went into the fridge I saw it – and with a family you go into the fridge lots of times in a day. When it gets buried on the fridge door by children's artwork move it somewhere else. The trick is to never allow it to become part of the scenery, something that you do not notice. Move it to the back of the toilet door for a couple of weeks, pin it in the bathroom, anywhere where you will keep seeing it.

It is a good idea to get it laminated so it will not get too dog eared and crumpled. I have still got my original visualisation drawing from when I was first planning to set up my business. Now it is framed in my office along with other personal achievements like a photocopy of the initial cheque I got for royalties on my first book. Just for me to look at. It constantly reminds me of where I started and what I have achieved and motivates me to continue with other goals that I have set over the years and I will continue to set myself.

After I had visualised the business that I was going to start I decided to make it feel more of a reality by choosing a name for it. A friend and I spent a couple of hours thinking of a name that I could use. We wrote down everything we could think of both the serious and the silly ideas until we came up with one that seemed to be just right. She was not part of the business just a helpful friend. I used an idea for a name that she came up with.

Once you have got your business idea firmly in your mind think of a name that will be attractive to your potential customers. Check it out on the internet to see if anyone else is using the same name and particularly if it is possible to purchase a website domain name that is your business name, for example if you want to call your business Hey Diddle Diddle and you are selling handmade, unique clothes for small children you will probably want a website domain name something like www.heydiddlediddle.com or www.heydiddlediddlechildrensclothes.com

Before you go ahead and decide on your name check that these domain names are available to purchase. If they are not then you will have to think again, as it really is necessary to have a website presence if your business is to be taken seriously.



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3 Starting at the Kitchen Table?

The kitchen table is a great place for a woman to start a business. It was where I started planning my business before I moved to a spare room in the house, then to premises and then back to a purpose built office at home, next to the garage, when we moved to where we are living now, about 14 years ago.

The kitchen table is the heart of the home; it is where it all happens. When my children were small they would play at the kitchen table, or under it, whilst I cooked, answered the telephone or squeezed on the end to work on my business. As they got older they did their homework on it. I still have the same table as my desk in my office, for sentimental reasons as much as anything. It is a pine table, which was fashionable in its' day, but because of the soft wood and my careless children it has the imprint of their homework etched into the top. I love using this table to work on even today when the children are all grown up and I could have a nice swish desk in my office.

The kitchen table makes you accessible to the family who want attention – which is not always a good thing! But it does mean that you can put something in the oven for dinner and tend it whilst you work, and you can put a load of washing into the washing machine whilst creating the next big thing in business. Women have a great advantage with their abilities to do not just a couple of things at a time, but at least ten! Women should play to their strengths and as far as I am concerned take over the world! You will want to move your business away from the kitchen table as it grows, you may need a larger space, somewhere to store your products and paperwork, and somewhere where you can get some peace and quiet, but it is a great place to start.

Multi-tasking is always said to be a woman's strength but there are other skills and attitudes that you will need to be a successful business woman.

Think about a woman whom you know who has in your eyes become successful and think about what traits she demonstrates. Take a piece of paper and write them all down. Of the successful women I know the main one is always self-belief. To succeed in business you have to believe that you can do it. The second one is the determination to succeed; that is the ability to not take no for an answer, to view everything that goes wrong as a learning opportunity to do it better or differently the next time. If you have these two abilities then you are on your way to succeeding. If you do not have them then you can start to cultivate them.

Most successful business people have had their share of failures along the way. Business that they set up that did not work at all. The ones that did not make enough money or others that met up with some bad luck like the road being closed and traffic diverted away from their shop, for a long period of time reducing their takings and making them not a viable business. The enterprising may have set up a website and sold via the internet to keep up the necessary volume of sales, others may not have been able to do that because of their product. Whatever the problem is the key is to learn from it and not see it as a failure.

To start and run your own business you need to have or to develop self-belief. It is no good setting out on a new venture thinking that actually you do not deserve to have this and you will be very lucky if you manage to make it viable. You need the self-belief that you 'deserve' this and have the ability to make it happen. Of course we all wobble on the way. I have certainly had my moments when a big contract for training has not been booked and I did not know what I had put in my proposal that the company did not like, or when the company with whom I had a big contract to deliver a great deal of training decided to employ their own in-house trainers and wiped 25% off my bottom line almost overnight.

The only way to deal with these setbacks is to think... 'so how can I make sure this does not happen again?' What systems or procedures do I need to put in place to mitigate the chances of this happening again?

But where does self-belief come from? Your beliefs come from a number of sources during your life time. A lot of them start when you are young, maybe at school. They come from your peers, from your teachers and from your parents. Later in life they can be reinforced by the people you have around you.

Your beliefs come from your environment, where you grew up, your family and the attitudes and aspirations of those around you; from past events in your life, sometimes major events such as a divorce, a bereavement, success and/or failures; sometimes from smaller events that perhaps seemed insignificant at the time but left a resonance with you and what you believed about yourself.

Although you cannot change anything that happened in the past you can change how you perceive it and by doing this create new beliefs. Some beliefs that you will be holding about yourself will be true, for example, I am no good at running, I was alright at school but I will never make a runner. I have tried jogging but I struggle with both the interest in it and the ability to do it. This is a reality. It is not lack of self-belief.

However some beliefs you hold are because people have told you so and you perhaps have never been in a situation where you could try it out and try to improve at it. So you continue with the same belief and avoid any situation that would make you have to test this belief.

But you can always change any beliefs that you think might hold you back from setting up your business. If you feel that you are not very confident, spend some time looking situations where you have evidence of being confident. Maybe you have gone into school to sort out a problem concerning your child and came back out again thinking I handled that well. Talk to your family and friends and ask them to tell you when they have seen you acting confidently. Hold on to all the positive things people say to you. We often dismiss those with a 'oh it was nothing' but hang on to anything negative that is said to us.

Self-belief and determination underpin the setting up and running of a business but it is useful to give yourself a bit of a skills check as you do need to have a grasp on your reality; what your strengths and weaknesses are. First of all run a check on any self-limiting beliefs that are going to hold you back. I am not great at administration, this is not a self-limiting belief it is reality! Although I have over the years made myself better at it, it is still something I am not great at. I have a bit of an haphazard filing system; it can take me ages to find the piece of paper that I need; and I have reputation in the office for looking in the waste paper bin, in case I have thrown it away. (I do sometimes find what I am looking for in the bin). I can however do all the other stuff that is needed to run my business very well and pay someone else to do the administration.

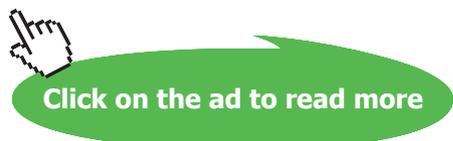
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4 Give Yourself a Skills Overhaul

When you have your idea for your business you are almost there. You have thought about what you would like to do, visualised your success and considered any self-limiting beliefs that may hold you back. The next thing to do is to consider what you are good at and what areas you will have to get either more information about or develop your skills.

One of the best ways to do this is to conduct what is known as a SWOT analysis on yourself. SWOT stands for Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats. Take a sheet of paper and divide it into 4 quarters. In the top left hand quarter write Strengths as a heading, in the top right hand quarter write Weaknesses, in the bottom left quarter Opportunities and in the bottom right quarter write Threats. You now have a way to analyse what your strengths are, what your weaknesses are, what are the threats to you setting up and succeeding in your business and what are the opportunities that you might grasp along the way.

Take some time to fill in each box on your sheet of paper. You can either do it alone or get someone who knows you well to discuss it with you. Make sure that you do not suffer from false modesty when you fill in the Strengths box. I have seen many people complete this exercise and write very little into the Strengths box but manage to fill up the whole of the Weaknesses box. Take your time doing it, you do not have to finish it in one go; it is something you can come back to, until you are happy that it is complete.

When you have finished it, sit back and have a good look at it. Consider how your strengths are going to help you in setting up, developing and running your business. Take a hard look at the weaknesses you have identified. Are they really weaknesses? Will the ones you have identified stop you in any way in the setting up of your business? Which ones on your list can you do something to minimise or improve them? If it is a lack of knowledge then find out where you can access that knowledge, who you can ask or what you can read. If it is a particular skill that you feel is missing this is the time to think about how this could affect the setting up of your business. Is it something that is crucial? If it is you might consider looking for someone to work with who has the skill that you are lacking; or booking yourself onto a course where you can develop the skill.

Then take a look at the Opportunities that you have written down and think about how you can make the most of them. For example if you are thinking of baking and selling cakes then what opportunities might there be to get you started? It could be selling them at the school fete, offering to bake a birthday cake for a friend to get people to know how good you are and that you are available to bake them for other people. This box is something that you will be able to add to as you start to develop your business idea and start to network with other people.

The list of Threats needs careful consideration. These are things that might stop you setting up and developing your business. First have a look at what you have written and decide whether they are real threats or things that you fear. Real threats are things like not having enough time, competing demands from the family and the business, not having enough money to start up or support yourself / contribute to the family income whilst you are developing the business.

Some are real threats you can overcome and so it is much better to identify them at the beginning so that you can deal with them. When you have considered the Threats that you have identified, make a list of the solutions to them. For example if you think you might not have enough time, look at your daily routine and decide what you can ditch... it is said that a house is not a home until you can write 'I love you' in the dust on the furniture! I love this quote which can sometimes put the need for cleaning your house into perspective. I am not suggesting that you give up cleaning to find some more time but you can do less or develop a rota of little helpers to enable you to find more time.

Time is always going to be an issue. Think about this. If you got up an hour earlier every day that would be a gain of 7 hours, a working day is normally from 9.00am – 5.00pm with an hour for lunch which makes 7 hours, so just by getting up 1 hour earlier each day, or watching 1 hour less of television you can gain an extra day!

Now go back to your original business idea and re-consider it in light of the SWOT analysis. Do you still think your original idea is the best one for you to pursue? This is the time to consider modifying it in light of the strengths and weaknesses that you have identified and also the threats you have identified.

If you cannot find a way to get around some of those and they are real then maybe you need to consider a different model for your business. For example if you were thinking you would like to open a shop but in your threats you have listed lack of childcare as being a problem then maybe you could sell the same products via a shop on the internet rather than having a physical presence on a high street. This would lessen the threat of the problem of lack of childcare.

5 Getting Started

The only way to set up and run a successful business, particularly in the early years is through hard work, determination and having a passion for what you are doing and it helps if you have your partner and children on board too.

Children love to be involved in the adult world so you should cultivate their enthusiasm for your business. My younger daughter still talks with fond memories of when she was small, about the amount of paper she has stapled together for me. As I run a training company there is always the need to collate and staple large quantities of handouts. I used to lay out the sheets of paper on the lounge floor, tell her which way round to work to pick up from each pile, supply her with a stapler and then go into the kitchen to cook dinner whilst she collated and stapled handouts for my next training course. She loved doing it and even at 8 years old she was better at it than me! The end product was dinner on the table, a happy child and paperwork ready for me for the next day. A win win situation all round.

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If you have children in your house then you do need to think about how and where you will run your business if you are setting it up on the kitchen table so to speak. Some of you will have a spare bedroom to set up as an office or workspace, or maybe you can turn a corner of the dining room into a suitable workspace, or the kitchen table, or as a friend of mine did, put a desk under the stairs in the hallway. What a great idea.

Although the kitchen table is a great place to start, having to clear your stuff away in order to eat a meal can eventually become a bit of a nuisance. You maybe will not need too much space to begin with, a small desk or table tucked away somewhere, a computer and perhaps a small filing cabinet or you could keep all your documents on the computer and have a paperless system.

I would recommend a laptop computer, because from experience I know there will be times when you will need to work and supervise children at the same time. I used to take my laptop to the park when I took the children to play there. You only need to look up occasionally and say 'well done' every so often to be thought to be present. (not with toddlers of course!). And you can take it into the garden or sit and watch television with children, keeping them company whilst working at the same time.

My friend who had 2 boys who liked to go to a climbing wall at a nearby leisure centre would book them in for a 2 hour session when she had a lot of administration to do for her business, in the school holidays. She went with them, took her laptop and had 2 hours in which to get loads done. A clever ploy and the boys thought she was the best mum in the world when she did that!

You will also need a telephone and a good internet connection. It is quite acceptable now to use a mobile number for your business but you might consider having a separate telephone number and therefore telephone for business and social calls. Although with number display you can usually take a guess at how you should answer the phone when it rings. The last thing you want to do is appear unprofessional to a customer by answering the telephone in the same manner as you would answer it to a friend.

If you do decide to use the same telephone to start with I would suggest when your business grows and you have a telephone dedicated to business then you keep the number you started out with for customers. It is much easier to direct family and friends to a new number than customers. It is also useful to have a separate number for your business because this allows you to put on an appropriate answerphone message when you do not want to be contacted perhaps in the evenings or weekends, depending of course on the nature of your business.

The other thing that is a must is a website. There is a perception that if a business has not got a website then it does not really exist. So factor the cost of this into your start-up costs. It is best to buy one that has a package that enables you to change the content yourself; this is called a content management system. Websites need to be dynamic and have up to date information. Nothing puts customers off more than a website that is still proclaiming offers in July for a promotion that ended in May. If you have older children who are tech savvy then this can be a great way of involving them. A weekly update of the website is something they might enjoy doing. I am a great believer in getting children involved and giving them a little bit of responsibility.

I used to sell the idea of helping me with the business or putting up with me being a little distracted, to my children, in terms of the benefits that it would bring for all of us. One year, at the end of the school summer term, I got a piece of work to write 10 training manuals. It was well paid but would involve me writing all 10 of them during the school summer holidays. It could not have been worse timing.

The family wanted a trip to New York, (why is it all children over the age of 12 years seem to want to visit New York?). So I decided that I would tell the children that this piece of work would pay for a trip to New York later in the year, (which it would – it was the truth) so I asked them if they could help me by leaving me alone for half days to enable me to complete the writing; help to make lunch and help to keep the house clean and tidy over the 4 week period that it would take me to write these manuals? Of course the answer was a resounding yes. The writing was completed on time and we went to New York in the October half term. A positive result all round!

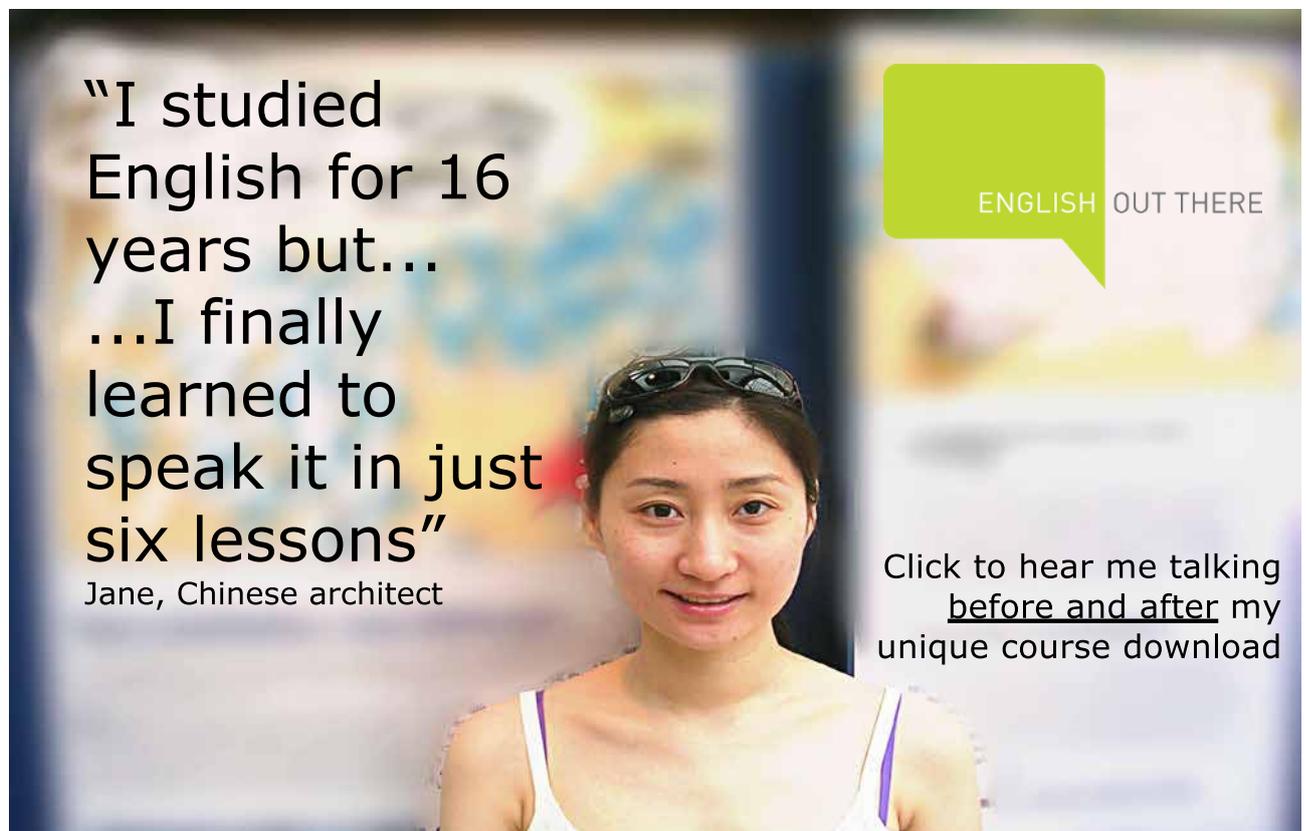
Besides thinking about where you can work and what type of computer would be best you will also need to think about the other equipment that you might need to start up your business, however what you will need and how much will depend on what business you are going to be running. Take a moment to list everything you will require, include on the list what you have already. Once you have done this you can make an estimate of how much it will cost you to get all the equipment together that you will need to start.

If you do not know the cost then this is the time to research it and to come up with a realistic figure. You will also need to purchase stock if you are going to be selling a product or materials if you intend to make a product. The tricky thing here is deciding how much you will have to buy in order for it to be viable to start the business. My advice would be to buy as little as possible to begin with and run a product focus group with family and friends to see which they like and what they would buy before you make any major investment.

6 Who are Your Customers?

So, you have visualised your business idea, examined your self-limiting beliefs, analysed your strengths and weaknesses, and identified your opportunities and the threats that might stop you succeeding in what you want to do. You have considered the physical environment of where you might set up your business and what basic equipment you will need to get started. You have thought about how you might get your family involved and the benefits of doing this. Now you need to think about who your potential customers will be and how you can get your product or service to them.

How will your business idea make money and how much? Who will buy the product or service that you are offering? Who needs the product or service? Where are your customers and how will you sell to them? A short paragraph of questions but the work you put into answering them will make or break your business.



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Let us consider first, who do you think will buy your product or service? Have you done any market research that tells you there are people out there who want what you are going to be offering? It seems, in my experience of working with people who want to set up a business that they often do things that are timely in their lives. For example, mothers with young children start a business that has something to do with small children, often solving a problem that they have experienced. It is always an advantage if you are already mixing with people who might be your potential customers because then you have a ready audience for your product or service. You can try out your ideas and discuss with them new ideas and the all-important price point. That is how much people will be willing to pay for your product or service

Having a ready group of people to whom you can ask the question, and get an honest answer, what would you be willing to pay for 'this' is like gold dust. Many businesses have failed because the business owner got the pricing wrong. Too expensive and no-one will buy, too cheap and people will not buy because they will perceive the product or service as poor quality.

Make sure you really listen to what your potential customers are telling you. It is easy to be so passionate about something that you are deaf to any negative feedback or even positive suggestions.

If your business idea is not one where you have a ready audience to talk to, then you need to go out and find one. Never start a business just because you think it is a good idea! Do your research as to what other business are out there that are offering the same or similar product or service. Take a long hard look at them and see what they are doing and how they are doing it. Search the internet or take a walk down your local high street or around a market. If you cannot find anyone who is doing the same business as you are thinking of setting up, do not be too elated. If you cannot find anyone else doing something the same or similar it might be because it is not such a good idea. Maybe others have tried it and it has failed or your idea is so whacky that it will never work.

The best business idea is one that makes a better job of doing something that someone else is already doing, quite successfully. Then you can think about how you can do it better. Can you offer a better customer experience, can you do it at a better price, and if it is a service can you offer one that is timelier.

Think about why someone would choose to buy your product or service instead of someone else's. Will yours be of the same quality but at a keener price; can you offer an extended warranty; or can you provide a service that is quicker to deliver? When I buy anything off the internet I always look for the company who will deliver more quickly and choose that supplier when there is a choice of companies with the same product, as often I would like to get what I have bought more quickly. The only time I will wait longer is if the price is much lower or the postage and packing is free!

Before you start your business go out and find people who you think will be the sort of people who will buy your product or service and talk to them; give them free samples then listen to their feedback. Try and set up some focus groups to show off your products or demonstrate your service. You can ask your friends to invite their friends to their houses to give you the opportunity of demonstrating your products or service; lay on some light refreshments, give the host a free sample, and print some money off vouchers for your product or service as a way of thanking the people who have attended for giving you their time and their opinions and you not only have some really useful feedback you may have some potential customers too.

A friend of mine wanted to start up a catering business supplying buffet lunches and sandwiches to companies for their business meetings and training courses but had no contacts to start with. She got on the telephone to a selection of local companies who she thought were big enough to use the service she was intending to provide and asked if she could send a free lunch, for them to sample, to the manager or to the person who booked the training sessions and lunches.

Most people will be interested you if you are giving away something of value for free. She was not asking to supply a whole training course but to feed the decision makers and gate keepers. Of course most of the companies she approached said yes. She delivered them a free lunch, on the date and at the time they asked for it and after that exercise got enough orders to start her business. She also got the opportunity to ask them what type of lunches they would prefer and for whom, what their budgets were and how often they might need a lunch. Invaluable information when you are starting a business. She was able to take all this information on board, adapt her business plan and be up and running fairly quickly. She repeated this technique in different areas around where she lived until her order book was full to capacity.

Someone else that I know was thinking of setting up a business cleaning domestic ovens. After all it is a horrible job that most of us avoid doing. But with no customer base she was at a standing start. I suggested she printed some flyers and then rang a few friends and acquaintances, and enquired about the condition of the inside of their ovens and offered to come and clean them, for free, in exchange for them taking some flyers and passing them out to neighbours, friends and work colleagues with of course a positive and personal recommendation. Do you think this worked? It certainly did she had 20 orders after the first month and went on to make it into a viable business. Of course the ovens had to be really clean when she left the house because doing a good job breeds more personal recommendations.

Someone else I have worked with recently was thinking of setting up a small business cleaning patios and thought she would deliver some flyers to see what response she would get. We discussed who might want their patios cleaning and who could afford it, also what distance from home was viable in terms of travelling time and the cost of petrol. We got out a map of the area and identified where the bigger houses were as they were more likely to have patios, they were also more likely to be inhabited with people who were cash rich but time poor so they would be more interested in having someone come and do the cleaning for them, and we identified this area within a 10 mile radius of the persons home, thereby not taking too much time to get to a job and therefore not eating into the fee that she would charge.

So have a think about who could be your customers. Who do you think will buy your product or service? To whom are you specifically aiming your product or service? Never answer this question with the phrase; 'well really it could be anyone'. Nobody has everyone as a potential customer. Even the big supermarkets segment their customer base and target different types of people. You can often tell with the offers they put on who they are targeting. Buy 1 get 2 free is for families. You would not want that much of anything if you lived alone! An offer of spend £20 in one shop and get £3 off would be aimed at people living alone or maybe the elderly.

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Try and get a profile of a person who you think would like to buy your product or service. When you have got this think about where you might find these people. It may be there is more than one profile, work on each one and then decide where these people are and how you can get to them. Think about them in terms of age, gender, lifestyle, disposable income, where they live and their shopping habits. Take a piece of paper and make your list as detailed as possible.

Once you have made an educated guess about your potential customer base you are ready to consider how you are going to get your product or service to them.

How do you think these potential customers would most prefer to access your product or service? Via a physical shop, on the internet, maybe through one of the sites where you can sell your own products, like Ebay or Amazon; through your own internet shop, at a market or at craft fairs, or car boot sales, or in people's homes party plan style, or to place your items in other people's shops; or to advertise your services via your website.

Where and how you start up will impact on the amount of money that you will need to invest in the development of your business. It seems to me that if you want to start a business that fits around caring responsibilities then selling on the internet can be the best way forward. Whether you set up your own website or sell through established websites it usually means that you can work almost whenever you are able to. It means that you can fit it in around the school run and continue when children are in bed. It also means that you can often attend the school concerts and sports days!

I have developed an income stream from selling training materials through a website. I love sitting in bed at night and watching the orders ping into my email box, or being on holiday and checking my emails to find orders, meaning I have been earning money whilst I have been lying on the beach! It also means that I can fulfil the orders at my convenience, although we do promise to send out all orders within 48 hours of us receiving them. But I can still do this in the evening if I have been busy enjoying myself during the day.

However you do have to consider whether the internet is the best place for you to sell your product. As you have already thought about who might buy from you then you need to think about if shopping on the internet would be the favoured place to shop for your potential customers.

If you are offering a service then you will need a website to make you a credible business even if you are not intending to make all your sales via your website. Potential customers are very likely to check out your business on the internet. Most of us are accustomed to looking for a business we have just come across on the internet often to see what it sells or the full range of services it provides.

A couple of months ago I won a prize in a raffle, a voucher for beauty treatments at a small salon in a nearby village. The first thing I did was to go onto the internet to see exactly where the shop was, what they offered and their price list. I was very disappointed to find that they did not have a website so I could not easily get the information I was looking for. As yet I have not redeemed my voucher because I have not got round to ringing the shop to find out the information I need to book an appointment, so another potential customer has possibly been lost. Access to a business needs to be as easy as possible for a customer.

Having a website will not be enough to make sales either of products or services. You need to work on the website, develop your knowledge of search engine optimisation, which appears to be something of a dark art! However it is worth trying to get some advice on this or enrolling onto a course to learn something about it. This is the way that you get your website to appear higher up on the page when people search for a particular product or service.

Setting up a website and not shouting about its' presence is like opening a shop on a very quiet street and not putting an advertisement in the local paper but just sitting in it quietly, not making a noise, wondering why you have no customers.

You will need to find a way to alert people to the fact that your website is there. Put the address on your business cards, on your email signature, create flyers, press releases or advertorials; find ways of getting the website address out there. Then potential customers can search for your name and find you easily.

Whatever business you start a marketing plan is essential. A business only succeeds when customers come to it. So before you start your business think very carefully about how you are going to attract customers.

A marketing plan will help you decide which customers to target and how to reach them. Marketing in itself will not guarantee sales but a good marketing plan will ensure that your potential customers know that you are there. A marketing plan should cover a period of a year and include details on what your business is about and your key business objectives; who you think your potential customers are and what resources you will need to bring your business in front of them and the cost of doing this. So for example if you decide to give out brochures at networking events then the cost of the brochures and the networking event would be in your marketing budget. It should also include a month by month breakdown of the marketing activity that you are intending to undertake.

This is a really useful document to write as firstly it makes you think about your business objectives and to write them down you need to understand exactly what they are. It also makes you consider the amount of money it could take to put your business in front of potential customers and the length of time it could take before you have enough customers who know about your business and are likely to make a purchase.

7 Selling Your Stuff

Once you have made an educated guess about who would buy your product or service then you are ready to consider the question what will be the best way to get the product or service to them.

If you are setting up a lifestyle business around children and family commitments then using the internet to sell a product is often the best option because you can fit it around your other commitments and often do not have to leave the house to complete a sale! This is why selling on Ebay has become so popular as people can make an income without any overheads and work on it at a time to suit them.

The idea of selling via the internet may not suit your business idea. Each business option should be examined carefully in light of where you think your customer base is and what their shopping habits are. That is what they will find most convenient and comfortable when purchasing a product or service.

Take a piece of paper and divided it into 4 columns, head the first one – place, the second advantages and the third column disadvantages, the fourth column, potential customer profile. Then get creative and list all the places where you think might be a good idea to sell your product or service. Once you have done that list all the advantages and disadvantages next to each one, including whether you think the potentials customer profile(s) that you developed would buy from these places.

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Here are some ideas to get you started. On Ebay or another large websites have many advantages to anyone thinking of setting up a business because it gives you the opportunity to try out the product and see if there are customers out there who would like to buy it. Sales via Ebay make for a high proportion of what is sold over the internet. It is a safe way to trial a business idea. Your profit margins could be lower as you will have to pay commission and listing fees, but it could be worth starting here, in the long run.

A market stall could also be a good way of trying out a product to see how well it sells as you can rent a stall on a casual basis. You could decide to do an 8 weeks trial and see if you have sold enough to convince yourself that there is a market for your product. Then you can decide whether to continue on a market stall or look to rent a shop.

Craft fairs and/or having a stall at summer and winter fetes or such like can work if you do not want a regular income from your business as these tend not to be happening every week. Again they can be a good way to trial a product.

Putting your products in other people's shops can also be a less risky option. You place your items in a shop with an agreed commission to the shop owner on each sale made. There is no cost to you except producing the goods and no risky overheads. If they sell well you can consider the next step of where you can sell them.

Selling in other people's homes can also be a good way of starting up a business. Get your friends, neighbours and acquaintances to invite their friends round to their houses one evening or during the day and provide coffee and cakes. You can motivate people to do this by offering them a free gift from your stock. These sorts of events work well with products that can be tried on, whether it's jewellery or clothes.

Or what about selling your items at a car boot sale? These now seem to cater for selling a wider range of products than just the contents of your attic that you want to get rid of. There are opportunities to sell cakes and coffee to hungry carbooters and possibly other things too. You would need to go and visit a few in your area to get a feel for what is being sold and more importantly what is actually selling.

You could set up your own website with a shopping cart in order to sell your products or services. If you buy a website that has a content management system they are surprisingly easy to input and you will be able to manage uploading your products or descriptions of your service onto the website. Add to this a shopping cart facility that most of them come with, sign up to PayPal or some other payment system and link this to your website. You will then have a way of selling and taking payment in almost any currency. You will need to have a look at the distance selling regulations if you decide on this option.

Perhaps you will need a physical presence for your business, a shop or a building to set up your café or tearooms or other business idea. This is where the risk gets much higher as you will probably have to take on a fixed term lease. If this is what you want to do, it is best to get some legal advice before you sign any contracts and also look into any selling regulations that you might need; for example insurances and any legislation.

8 Your Bottom Line

This is not anything to do with the question – ‘does my bum look big in this?’ It is all about working out how much profit you can make and therefore what your income might be.

It can feel a bit like a guessing game doing this exercise but it is really important that you work out some figures before you invest any money in your business to see if your idea is really viable in its' present format.

One of the first things to think about is how much do you need to earn? This might be to either pay the bills or make a contribution to the household expenditure. You need to look at it as what is the minimum you could survive on and how long you can manage on very little or even nothing. This is important because no business starts generating money instantly. What your income is, that is what you will be earning will be less the cost of producing the goods, buying them, or delivering a service and less tax. Your tax liability will only start when you have earned enough to put you in the tax bracket. However you should do all your calculations taking into consideration the tax that you will have to pay. This makes the sums in terms of profit much more realistic.



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Get a pen and paper and make a list of your outgoings that you need to cover over the next 6 months. Break these down to a monthly or weekly figure. Now put these on one side and think about the amount of money you will have to put into your business to start it and then what you might earn from it in the first 6 months.

First of all think about your fixed costs; if you are starting up at home and using your kitchen table these will be considerably lower than if you have decided to rent a physical premises. If you are thinking about renting, for example, a shop, then you will need to list the possible rent and business rates, heating and lighting, telephone rental and insurance cover. These will be an on-going fixed cost. There will be start-up costs involved in getting the lease signed over to you. These costs need to be researched before you can complete this exercise.

If you are using your home then you will incur extra costs above your normal household bills, for example, electricity if you are going to be baking cakes, or using a sewing machine. Think about what these costs might be and write them down.

Other costs will be the purchasing of any equipment that you will need in order to start your business. These are one-off capital costs that will usually need to be replaced at some point in the future. The initial purchases can be seen as part of your start-up costs.

The next costs to look at are the variable costs. These are the materials or stock that you have to buy in order to provide the business and will be on going. When you have sold out of something then you will have to buy more. These costs will also include things like petrol if you are delivering a service at a distance from your home.

If you have a pot of money with which to start up your business, list all the start-up costs and see if you have enough money to be viable. This can include not only the equipment (capital costs) you will need but also some stock in order to start and maybe funds to pay some bills whilst you are developing the business.

If you have not got a sum of money, work out how long it will take you to save the amount you need or think about where you can borrow it from and how you will repay it. You can still be working on your business idea whilst you are getting money together to enable you to start.

When you add up your fixed costs and variable costs you can see how much it is going to cost you to run the business on a weekly or monthly basic. If you are working from home it may look something like this. For example someone setting up in business to bake cakes and sell them at a Saturday Farmers Market and also bake cakes to order for celebrations and events.

Start-up costs: a selection of baking tins, business cards, flyers to give out at school to friends and family, enough flour, sugar, butter etc. to make 20 medium cakes for first market stall. You will need to purchase your website when you have trialled your product, so factor this into your start-up costs.

Fixed costs: cost of renting a stall on the Farmers Market to sell cakes, little others if working from home

Variable costs: extra electricity for baking cakes estimated at 20% of current bill; petrol to get to market stall/deliver cakes, on-going purchasing of ingredients to make cakes,

To see if the business is viable and to get an idea of how much profit you would make, add together the fixed costs and the variable costs for a week. Make an estimate of how many cakes you think you could sell each week at one farmer's market and how many you would sell as a direct order from an individual for a birthday, wedding or other celebrations. If you think you would sell an average of 20 cakes on the stall per day and 2 from orders then you can add up how much money you will take each week.

Then take the income you think you will achieve away from the expenditure you have to make in order to produce and sell the cakes and you have a rough idea of how much you will be making per week (your profit). Take 20% away from this for your tax bill and around £3 per week to pay your National Insurance bill (if you are in the UK). You have of course not allowed anything in there for your time. Costing in time is something that a new business would find difficult to do. This can test your dedication, especially if you are accustomed to earning a salary and being paid for your time.

This can appear to be a difficult exercise because it does rely on a certain amount of guesswork for the sales figures. Do not be too optimistic with them. Better to underestimate and then be pleased when you achieve better sales than put the figure too high and be disappointed or worse still struggling to pay the bills.

You also need to take into account any seasonal differences that might affect your business. In any business there are times that are busier than others. Everybody knows that trading in January is always poor in the UK. The summer is a great time if you are selling ice cream but not so good during the winter and crafts sell better in the summer and on the run up to Christmas. Think about what you are selling or what service you are providing and decide which will be your busy and less busy times and allow for this in your sales predictions.

So now you are a little bit more certain about whether your idea 'has legs' as they say; that is whether there is a chance of it working. I have worked with people who believe in their business idea so much that they have found a way to raise the cash to start up. One person I know sold her car and bought an old one in order to have the capital she needed to start her business of making clothes for toddlers. That worked fine, but had she been setting up as a mobile hairdressers it may not have been a wise move.

However if you have the tenacity and courage to make a sacrifice in order to start your business it can bode well and demonstrate your belief in your idea and your commitment to it. I have often heard people say they would like to start this or that business and would do if they had the funds. But they made no effort whatsoever to try and raise the sum required.

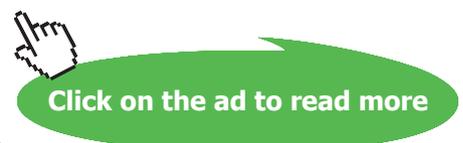
All this of course depends on your personal circumstances and the level of risk you are willing to take. Sometimes if you have not got the funds then you have to be a bit creative about raising them. Maybe you could form a partnership with someone who has some money and you have the skills; maybe you could sell a cut of the business for an investment or maybe you could even get a loan to start up. For any of these options you will require a sound, well thought through business plan and real self-belief in what you are going to do.

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9 Writing Your Business Plan

Writing a business plan is a very useful exercise to clarify your thinking and put down in one place all the things that you have thought about whilst reading this book, ready to start your business.

A business plan should contain the following headings; an executive summary; a description of the business; descriptions of the service or product; the market place you are entering; a marketing plan; your operations and lastly but very importantly financial information.

When you read a business plan it will always start with what is called an executive summary. This is just what it says, a summary of the entire business plan. It is used as a quick tool by other people reading your business plan to get a rapid overview of the main points of what it contains. Some business plans can be many pages long and in this case it is particularly useful to have a summary of all the main points included in the longer plan.

If you are thinking of going to the bank for a loan or trying to raise money from investors whether they be friends or other people this is where the executive summary becomes a useful necessity. However, even if you are not intending to show your plan to anyone else writing the summary is also useful as it can fix the business plan in your head. The executive summary, although it is always at the front of a business plan is written last, after the plan is complete.

The first section of the actual plan, where you should start are the details of your business; its' name, address, telephone number, website and email address and its legal status. If you are working on a lifestyle business then you will more than likely decide to operate as a sole trader, however you could become a partnership if there are two of you or you could decide to set up a limited company.

The legal status of your business is something that you need to think about. What is the best option for you and for the business? Operating as a sole trader is easier from both an accounting and tax perspective, but it does mean that all the liabilities of the company are yours. Setting up a company, is an easy process and it means that any liabilities are with the company and not with the individual. However having a limited company does bring with it more demands for returns to the Inland Revenue and to Companies House, with fines if you miss deadlines. If you are intending to use the services of an accountant being a limited company usually costs more in accountant's bills than operating as a sole trader. If you are going into partnership with someone it is essential to draw up some agreement between you at the beginning.

The next section of a business plan describes your service or product, including its features and any unique selling points it has; that is the things that make it different from the products or services of your competitors? Include in this section any statutory requirements that you will have to meet for example if you are cooking from your home kitchen you will have to have it inspected and passed by someone from the environment health department. It should also have information about the research that you have done on any competitors who are offering the same or similar product or service and the conclusions that you have drawn from this.

Next is information about the market you are intending to reach. This should include information about any market research you have undertaken, either informally or formally and the resulting conclusions you have made from this in regards to your product or service. This is in terms of the need for and interest in, your product or service. Who will be your potential customers and how you will get your product or service to them.

Your marketing plan should be included in your business plan, as the next section, covering the areas already described earlier in the book.



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Then write a description about the operation of your business. Where will it be based? Is it going to be on your kitchen table, in your garage, in a spare room in your house, in a shop, or in a lock up unit and what equipment will you need in order to carry out your business. This should be in as much detail as possible.

Lastly, but most importantly, you must lay out all the financial information that you have been collecting as you have worked through this book. What your start-up costs going to be, the capital expenditure of buying equipment and on-going fixed costs of renting premises etc.

You should also include a financial forecast of how many sales you will make each month for the first year and how much income that this will achieve, taking into account any seasonal differences and identifying your outgoings each month in order to achieve these sales. These will be your fixed costs and your variable costs for each month, identified separately and then added together and then taken away from your projected sales figures to give you your pre-tax profit.

It is also necessary to explain the assumptions you have made in deciding upon these figures even if the business plan is only going to be for your eyes. If it is for wider reading then it is imperative that you explain these assumptions or it could look like you have just pulled the figures out of thin air.

When you have written your business plan you will have all the information you need about how you are going to start and develop your business. This is very useful documents and something you should revisit once a month in the first six months to see if you are on track with your predictions and to adapt it if things have taken a slight turn in another direction. Business plans are dynamic documents that should not be filed away but should be kept as a constant companion especially in the early days of setting up your business.

10 A Woman's Business – to be the Best

Women have always provided for their families, nurtured children and kept the household running whilst men merely went out to hunt or work!

My own grandmother has been a great role model to me; married to a miner, living through the Great Depression in England, in the early 1900s, when there was just no money about at all; and living through two World Wars. She was as they say, just a housewife, a woman of her day. She never had a full time, paid job, what she did was keep an amazingly beautiful house, by buying second hand furniture and bringing it back to life; baking bread and cakes and cooking the most delicious meals from next to no ingredients; sewing her own clothes and that of her 2 daughters (one of whom, my mother, who also took on the skills of her mother) and giving them the reputation of being three of the best dressed women in the village where they lived. She also supplemented the family income by working in the fields on a casual basis during the summer months, pulling peas or picking strawberries when they were in season; this on top of the hard physical work of washing, cleaning and baking.



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As a child I would go shopping with her on a Saturday afternoon to the nearby town, which was two miles away. We always walked there, she was in her '70s by then and she always said that maybe we would take the bus back home. We never did, we always walked the two miles back as well. 'The bus isn't coming just yet', she would say, 'we might as well set off and walk it home.'

Although I can't say she changed the world in anyway, she was not part of the Women's Movement, she did not invent penicillin or some other drug to save mankind, but she made me aware that women can achieve whatever they want to achieve just by her sheer determination to carve out a better life for herself and her family when others around them were affected and dragged down by the poverty of the time; by her making of her small world a beautiful place by caring about it and being very clever with the resources that she had.

Women can have the joy and pleasure of bringing up children, nurturing them to be successful in their lives and giving them the wherewithal to achieve whatever they want to achieve.

Having your own business is the ultimate expression of defining yourself. It gives you the freedom and the pleasure to design your own life, to create something worthwhile, maybe something that you can pass on to your children or something that you can sell and enjoy the profits when you have decided that you cannot take it any further.

Setting up and running my own business was the best idea I ever had. It has given me (and my family) a good income and therefore a pleasant and comfortable lifestyle; it has given me the opportunity to develop my skills in a continuous learning curve, that has not been comfortable all of the time; years of amazing and interesting experiences that have taken me to too many places to count and in the course of this I have met many varied and interesting people. It has given me the chance to be creative with the changes that I have made to my business, some forced on me by circumstances, others because I thought it was a good idea. I have developed more opportunities for myself than I ever would have thought possible when I started out on this journey at my kitchen table over 25 years ago.

My business has offered a great role model to my two daughters and to my son. I have instilled in them the belief that you can do and achieve whatever you want to do. Now my children are all grown up and laughingly call me 'superwoman' and reminisce about collating handouts for me, standing by the door waiting to go on an outing in the school holidays with me just answering this phone call or just making one more call before we go, and the times they have had to sit with me in meetings when they were small because my childcare arrangements had fallen through or as they got bigger to sit at the back of a conference hall waiting for me whilst I gave a lecture. They always say that they did not learn anything because they were not listening, but I think they were!

Are you ready for your exciting journey? Go and be the best you can and enjoy your journey as much as I have enjoyed, and am still enjoying mine.