

10 TIPS FOR SELF-EMPLOYMENT SUCCESS



- 1. Understand self-employment.** Lots of people think they'd like to be their own boss, but there's more to self-employment than that. Before embarking on self-employment, become familiar with [government regulations](#) and types of business structures (e.g., sole proprietor, partnership, corporation, or cooperative).
- 2. Know what it takes.** The successfully self-employed have many personal characteristics in common, including people skills, self-discipline, resiliency, persistence, and passion. Complete the brief [Entrepreneurial Characteristics checklist](#) to see how your own style compares.
- 3. Put supports in place.** It's hard work starting and sustaining a business and will take significant investment. Ensure that the most important people in your life (i.e., family and friends) understand how you becoming self-employed may impact them – and get their support. Also, build a financial cushion – cash flow in a business is significantly less predictable than paydays as an employee.
- 4. Do your homework.** A good business idea isn't enough to fuel self-employment success. Engage in ongoing trend-spotting – what social, economic, or environmental trends and changes will impact your type of business. Who is your competition for market share? How do you add value?
- 5. Be strategic.** Although the successfully self-employed are flexible and resilient, they also have a vision for their business (they know where they're going), a mission (they know what they're doing), and a plan (they know how to get there). They also ensure that all their business activities align with their personal values (they know how to accomplish their goals without compromising what they believe in).
- 6. Brand your business.** Know what sets you apart from others doing similar work. Develop a consistent style, look, and "feel." Just like McDonalds, Nike, or Coke, current and potential clients or customers should recognize your logo, business name, and professional image, and know exactly what quality of service to expect from you. Know what you want to be famous for. If a future customer asks for a reference from past customers, what do you want them to say? That's the "brand" you need to create . . . and continually manage.
- 7. Do the Math.** Although you may choose to use a bookkeeper or accountant to ensure your financial records are in good shape, it's essential that you understand the financial realities of self-employment. Get familiar with the tax laws that impact you (e.g., Do you need to collect GST / HST? What expenses can you "write off" – and what does that really mean? What deductions do you need to make from employees' pay cheques – and where do those deductions need to go?). You may need to do some benchmarking to ensure that your fees and prices fit with what people are paying. Negotiate contracts carefully; be clear about when you can expect to get paid for projects or expenses and what documentation will be necessary to support your invoices.
- 8. Manage the details.** The successfully self-employed typically wear a lot of hats – one moment they may be managing a project, the next they may be dealing with a bank about extending a line of credit. They juggle "doing the work" with "managing the process." Sole proprietors play the role of administrative assistant, marketing manager, purchaser, and collection agent. Some hats will likely fit you more comfortably than others – develop the basic skills you'll need to wear them all as necessary.
- 9. Get the help you need.** To free up time to focus on your business, consider accessing help for tasks at home and work. Some of these supports may be paid for (e.g., hiring a dog walker, housekeeper, or nanny at home, or a part-time assistant for your office). Other supports may be free (e.g., family members taking on additional roles at home or within the business; students needing practical work experience).
- 10. Monitor progress.** Self-employment isn't static – your business will be constantly changing, and so will you. At regular intervals, revisit your business and life plans to ensure you're on track. Make necessary adjustments – and, when you're ready, plan a gracious exit. The successfully self-employed know when to strategically continue with business as usual, grow, or move on to something different.



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