

INTRODUCTION

Did you wake before your alarm and jump out of bed enthusiastic to go to work today? Or did you crush the snooze button and groan?

Having the freedom and flexibility to control and love your life while thriving in your work is within your grasp. Building this life is worth the time and energy it takes to get there.

If you currently feel professionally unfulfilled, want to find yourself, or struggle to get up and go to work each day, read on.

I've been in your shoes. I know your pain.

You've followed the career path as directed, taking one step and then the next. You've let the organization you

work for dictate the terms of your employment and your professional success or failure. You are an expert in your field and great at what you do, but you've discovered that this organization's philosophies or approaches aren't really what you want. This internal conflict may arise around work-life balance, responsibility, growth potential, or one of a million other concerns or differences. Perhaps your parents wanted this path for you, or it happened to be an area you were naturally good at but you didn't really like. Maybe a friend told you, "That position pays well," and lacking another direction, you chose this path. Or you thought, "I don't know what I want to do, so this sounds good enough," and now you feel stuck. Maybe you want to try something completely new and different. Maybe you love your actual work, but you're in an environment you nearly despise. You hate sitting in the cube every day, and you feel undervalued. There's a glass ceiling you can never break through.

Welcome to office hell.

Everyone who lives it has their own version of office hell: it is the place you dread walking into every Monday through Friday, sometimes Saturday and even Sunday morning. You wake up and hit the snooze button because the last thing you want is to go into work.

Take a breath. Don't worry. There is a way out. The reality

is that we live in the most amazing and abundant time ever, and our success is only limited by our own thinking. We have never lived in a time when it was safer and easier to become a thriving, successful solopreneur.

I can hear some of you sighing and thinking, “Oh boy, this is going to be one of the New-Agey *you can do anything you set your mind to* books: all flash and no boom.”

I do have a very positive attitude, and I do believe you can do anything. However, this book is *not* fluff. It will provide you with very specific steps, activities, and tools that you can use to be successful on your journey to becoming a solopreneur.

I know many people who look, from the outside, like they are living the dream. They make a ton of money, own just the right house and car, and take amazing vacations, yet they hate going to work. I have heard extremely dark stories of the dread people feel when stuck in office hell.

Long before you hit that point, consider a transition to an environment of freedom you can control. You may want to move to a new company or go back to school to get a new degree or trade—to do something, anything, different. You may daydream about being your own boss. You may be one of many professionals and technicians

in every industry and trade who want to be in charge and not have to work for—or work with—others.

Like them, you want to run your own business as a *solopreneur*.

WHAT IS A SOLOPRENEUR?

A solopreneur is a business owner who works and runs their business solo—as in, mostly by themselves. They want to be accountable for themselves and their business without *having* employees or *being* an employee. It's one of the fastest-growing segments of the workforce because of the lifestyle and flexibility individuals can enjoy while solving a specific problem or filling a need. Times have changed, and a solopreneur life is not only possible, but it is embraced by millions. According to Quartz, it is estimated that 40 percent of America's workforce may be freelancers in one form or another by 2020*. The number has only continued to climb.

Examples include:

* Jeremy Neuner, "40% of America's Workforce Will Be Freelancers by 2020," Quartz, March 20, 2013, <https://qz.com/65279/40-of-americas-workforce-will-be-freelancers-by-2020/>.

Accountant	Architect
Attorney	Business Coach
Life Coach	Financial Planner
Counselor	Advertiser
Graphic Designer	Internet Technician
Therapist	Psychologist
Hairdresser	Massage Therapist
Aesthetician	Author
Contract Engineer	Tattoo Artist
Plumber	Jewelry Designer
Real Estate Agent	Loan Officer
Consultant	Chef
Pilot	Interior Decorator
Yoga Instructor	Fitness Trainer
Pilates Instructor	Chiropractor

...and many more. These are just to name a few.

Solopreneurs work on their own terms. Because of the current tax structures and challenges with providing healthcare, it may be cheaper for a corporation to contract with an outside “hired gun” at a higher rate than an employee. This strategy can often save an organization money in total employee costs, even though they pay a contracted solopreneur at a higher rate than they would pay an internal employee on salary. The company doesn’t have to pay into your retirement, workman’s compensation, insurance, or vacation time. As an independent

solopreneur contractor, you can typically earn a higher wage and use the financial advantages to write off your own healthcare with tax-free dollars. *(Note: I am not giving you legal or tax advice. Please consult with an accountant and attorney for specific benefits and details. Really, I am not kidding here, my attorney friends would have an aneurysm if they thought I was giving “legal” advice. I prefer to think of it as “life” advice based on all the lessons learned from the things I have done wrong and much that went right.)*

Recent years have seen a massive increase in the number of people joining the solopreneur movement. Technological advances provide solo experts the tools to research and build successful businesses. You now have the ability to professionally communicate, transfer information, and market yourself to others seamlessly across the country. You can be an absolute guru in a very small niche and still get in front of the tribe of people that value your skills, anywhere in the world.

LIVE LIFE ON YOUR TERMS

Solopreneurs are driven by the desire to live life on *their* terms and safely transition into a life they love. Those terms are different for everyone, but it’s important to define them up front so that you can determine if the solopreneur life is for you. To begin, you will explore and define your idea of personal success, identify your moti-

vations, and assess the competitive environment in the first chapters of this book. Knowing this is key because you will be in charge. Once you know what success looks like for you, you can set your course and take the first steps toward your goal.

Motivations can be different for everyone. Some people want the ability to see every one of their child's soccer games or speech tournaments. Others want to work the usual forty to fifty hours a week but determine when those hours are. For example, someone who loves golf or riding her bike might want to work late at night. If so, he can work for a few hours in the morning, play golf or go on a bike ride, be home by 5:00 with the family, and then work again from 8:00 to 11:00 p.m.

Some people want to make more money but feel restricted in their current work environment. Although they work more hours than anyone else, they aren't bringing more money home. They know how much the company bills their time out to clients, and they can do the math, but they are salaried and feel stuck. They know the senior guys and owners are getting big bonuses that are based on their work.

Others want to work less or are stepping back into the game after being gone for an extended period of time. I see this a lot when people are looking for work-life bal-

ance or their youngest child has started kindergarten or left for college. It may be easier to create a job as a solopreneur, where they can work fifteen to thirty hours a week and earn \$30–300 or more an hour, than to find a job with the same parameters.

As a solopreneur, you choose the lifestyle and direction, define your goals and plans, and drive your success. My wife and I love adventure travel, and I can honestly say every time I pull out my device and do a little “work” from a hut in the Italian Alps or a fishing camp in Alaska, I feel like I am getting away with something. Remember, as a solopreneur, you’re the boss.

Whatever your motivation, defining it is the first step that will dictate your path. It’s important to understand the pros and cons of being a solopreneur. As soon as you stop being an employee, you have to be accountable for all that you’re doing. You may discover that all that “money” that you thought the boss held back from you was really going to overhead and expenses, and they weren’t as profitable as you may have originally thought.

Get ready to change your thinking and embrace the idea that as a solopreneur you are accountable for everything that is involved in your business.

To be successful, you need to think like an investor:

investing in your business. You need to think like a manager: managing the business. You need to think like the head of business development: driving the business. And you need to be the technician working in the business, providing the actual service.

WHY DOESN'T EVERYONE BECOME A SOLOPRENEUR?

Being a solopreneur is not for everybody, but it can be great. The following chapters will show you what it takes to be successful, the potential financial start-up exposure, time requirements, and technical skills needed, and help you determine whether you should make the shift to being a solopreneur. I will go through each step in detail; however, before you turn in your resignation, I would encourage you to have an open, potentially hard and honest conversation with yourself to determine if going solo is the right direction for you. If you can answer “Yes” to the following two questions, solopreneurship may be for you.

ARE YOU WILLING TO LEARN NEW SKILLS?

The reality is that some people just aren't cut out to be a business owner.

They may be highly educated. They may be great tech-

nicians. However, they're one-trick ponies, great at only one thing, and typically, the skills it takes to be a great technician are rarely the same skills needed to launch and grow a business. Herein lies one of the primary reasons people get into trouble when they shift to being a solopreneur. You can be an amazing strategist, therapist, financial planner, accountant, attorney, or dentist, but the skillset it takes to be an expert has virtually nothing to do with the skillset to be a business owner. To run a successful business, you will need to act and think like an investor, manager, and head of business development, while remaining a great technician.

Can you learn these skills? Absolutely. But the challenge becomes deciding whether developing those skills is the right investment of your time. Just because you *can* doesn't always mean you *should*.

In some cases, you may be able to outsource the areas that aren't your strengths. That is fine, but you will need to factor this into the amount of money you need to charge clients to cover those expenses. When you factor in the additional costs, you will need to assess the viability of your idea, define what you will be able to charge, and determine what you need to charge. These are just a few of the decisions a solopreneur has to make. You'll evaluate them later in this book.

ARE YOU *REALLY* A SELF-STARTER?

Some people may not like where they currently work or dislike the idea of having a boss, but in reality, they wouldn't get anything done if the boss didn't tell them what to do. You must answer honestly when you ask yourself, "Am I a self-starter?"

This can be another major factor in the failure of so many solopreneurs. When going out on your own, you may commit your life savings, stress marital relationships, and engage in the most challenging journey of your life. If you stink at follow-through or self-motivation, *be honest* with yourself. Some people aren't capable of pushing themselves, and they know they ultimately won't follow through to get the task or project done. *That's okay.* Embrace this discovery. Own it. Be the best technician you can, and if you hate the environment where you currently work, find a place that you will love. If you love what you do but hate your boss, no one is holding a gun to your head to stay. Start looking for a place, and a boss, that you will love.

NERVOUS ABOUT BEING A SOLOPRENEUR?

Good. It's okay to be nervous and cautious. As human beings we typically fear the unknown and change. Starting a new business is scary, and the reality is that the majority of start-ups fail. They go down in flames, some

taking life savings and trusted relationships with them. A high percentage—somewhere between 30 to 50 percent—of companies fail within the first five years. What most people don't talk about—and what I firmly believe—is that 50 percent or more of the remaining businesses flatline, stagnate, and, at best, bump along solely based on the owner's determination and stubbornness. Surviving is not thriving. This is no way to move forward; life is too short to just survive. You deserve to thrive, and I will show you how.

Why do these terrible statistics happen? There are many reasons, but I believe a lack of education, research, preparation, and candid personal acknowledgment around the start-up process are the major factors. Almost never is it because someone is not a great technician. Some people don't know where they're going or how they're going to get there. Many people simply spin their wheels in frustration. Whose fault is that? I will tell you: it is that person in the mirror. Others keep throwing money at shortcomings and problems in hopes of changing, even when they shouldn't. Hope is a crappy strategy. Eventually they turn a corner or run out of money. None of these are good options. There is no need for this, and I will walk you through the steps to avoid these traps.

There are so many success stories too. Some businesses do thrive. People do what they love and help people in

ways that they love. They live their ideal life, achieve their financial dreams, and fulfill their personal motivations.

LEARN HOW TO SAFELY TRANSITION AND THRIVE

Now—take a deep breath and relax. *You don't have to be one of the awful statistics.* This isn't untrodden territory. The reality is, successful businesses have been started millions of times over, and many of these owners are available to help you capitalize on your expertise and build your business. There is a huge number of business owners who really, truly, want to help you be successful. There are experts in accounting, law, insurance, and banking whose main goal is helping you be successful. (In the second part of this book, I will cover how to build your team of advisors by finding them, interviewing them, and best leveraging their skills.)

One of the biggest challenges solopreneurs faced in the past was operating alone, in a bubble, and not knowing what they didn't know. Today, the solopreneur community is not only growing to directly help businesses and individuals, but there is an army of expert entrepreneurs and solopreneurs that exist to help other solopreneurs. This community of experts helps others like them to be successful. The tide has shifted and, even as a solopreneur, you don't have to do it all alone.

This is one of the primary reasons I wrote this book. The website aspiringsolopreneur.com was created to educate and empower others to become thriving solopreneurs. Users can find tools, resources, and an online community to celebrate the solopreneur lifestyle and support each other's growth, including the Solopreneur Success Certification Courses, Online Solopreneur Success Camps, and private coaching and advisory services.

When done right, owning and operating a business and living the path to achieving your dream is an amazing experience. Once you find your groove, it can be easy to do. In fact, it's never been easier. There are now more tools at your fingertips, immense resources for researching and vetting ideas, dozens of ways to test your concept, and clear options to safely transition into a new life—before you ever leave your existing position. I believe we are in a golden age; solopreneurship is the easiest and safest it has been in the history of mankind.

Together we will:

1. Identify your motivations and what success looks like for you.
2. Determine what aspects of your current work you love and why.
3. Assess how this need is being solved and identify your unique niche.

4. Interview others and assess the market conditions.
5. Outline a success road map.
6. Learn how to find, interview, and build a team of expert advisors:
 - A. Accountant
 - B. Attorney
 - C. Insurance expert
 - D. Banker
7. Build a success guide that contains your list of advisors, completed road map, financial viability, initial timeline to launch, and defined accountability.
8. Review and assess the plan and make adjustments if needed.
9. Execute the timeline for a smooth and successful transition and launch.
10. Create the discipline to become a solopreneur.
11. Navigate the first six months like a pro.

None of these steps are particularly difficult, but you will need to do the work. When each step is completed fully and with honesty, you will dramatically increase your likelihood for success.

WHY TRUST ME?

Entrepreneurship is what I do. It's how I am wired. Today, I spend the majority of my time working with entrepreneurs, helping them achieve their dreams through

different strategic processes, candid feedback, and education. I've had successes and failures, and it's honestly through the latter that I learned the most. My knowledge is not theoretical, my knowledge is actual in-the-trenches, getting-clobbered, and figuring-things-out knowledge. This gave me a front row seat to the transformational power of the employee-to-solopreneur move. I have the experience and the battle scars. Not only do I have this expertise, but I enlist the help of others as well. Throughout this book I will share expert interviews from the people I trust and surround myself with.

I started my first of fourteen companies when I was nineteen years old, but I actually began mowing lawns and shoveling snow when I was twelve. One way or another, I've been self-employed for close to forty years. Over that time, I have built, bought, sold, occasionally run into the ground, and owned a wide variety of companies in marketing, real estate development, retail, consulting, professional services, coaching, mortgage services, and others. When I was a business broker, I crawled inside hundreds of different businesses and got to see the good, the bad, and sometimes the ugly. I bought them, sold them, advised them, and started them from scratch.

When I started in the late 1980s, *entrepreneurship* was a dirty word. If you said you were an entrepreneur, this basically guaranteed you were never going to get a job

in the corporate world. Once you started on this path, you were on your own. I was in one of the first university entrepreneurship programs in the country. I have been alone in that start-up desert, and I believe it is my calling to ease that path for others. My goal now is to help change people's lives. I want to save people's lives, marriages, and money, and empower them to live their dream and find success on their terms. I want to empower and help people to thrive, not survive. I am a senior advisor to CEOs ranging from billion-dollar organizations to small start-ups. I've worked with hundreds of different organizations and individuals. My experiences have given me a front row seat to the transformational power of the employee-to-solopreneur move. I've seen firsthand how rewarding and life-changing the journey can be when an individual professional makes the successful transition to owning and operating their first business.

Today you have the ability to live any life you want. Your thinking is the only inhibitor of your dreams and of achieving those dreams. You can be and do anything. Reka, my wife, and I are examples of what the solopreneur life can look like. We are living the life of our dreams. We take a total of three months off a year, spread out about a week each month for adventures, and one full month to live somewhere overseas. We are humbled to work with people we want to work with. We're privileged to be helping people we want to help. We are grateful

because we have discovered our purpose. We plan to keep working until the day we die because we love what we do, and we love having an impact on others. I get to go to work. To embrace these beliefs, and remind myself of them every day, I have tattoos with the infinity symbol and the words *abundance* and *gratitude*. I know that is a little on the hippie-vooodoo side of things, but it works for me and is a constant reminder that living the life of your dreams is worth the work it takes to get there.

ESTABLISH TRUE NORTH

Just as the hand on the compass always points north, I live by and run my business by a core group of principles I call my True North—which I share further in chapter one.

I draw on those principles specifically to help you, the reader, find your happiness, adventure, and self-confidence. Through this journey, there's a chance I will help you decide that being a solopreneur is *not* the best option for you. I still consider that a victory because this knowledge will help you to potentially save your life savings, your marriage, your health, or all of the above. Your journey through this process may help you decide that your job isn't so awful, or that all you need is a change of employment. My intention is that if you move forward into the journey of solopreneurship, you do so with eyes

wide open; your path is clear, and your likelihood for new-found success on your terms is very real.

My goal is not to convince you to do anything. I love what I do, but that is my life. If you choose a different path to a solopreneur life, I couldn't respect you more. This is not for everyone. I don't want everyone to convert to solopreneurship; rather, I want to create an awareness of this opportunity, introduce a road map, and empower people to thrive. For some, the journey alone will light up your brain. It will get you thinking and looking at things in a completely different way. We will help adjust and expand these thoughts, and you will see opportunities abound. What kind of opportunities? Business, niche, and areas to thrive in your best life.

When you start this solopreneur journey, you may think that one path is where you're headed, but the fact that you're opening up your mind to this opportunity could result in another path. You never know what will happen, but adjusting your thinking allows you to become aware of available opportunities. You will potentially see different paths, different industries, and different niches. Part of our process together is that change in thinking: to be more of an investor, manager, head of business development, and technician. The investor will make sure the business is viable and the financial investments align with the goals and *need to haves* for the company's success. The

manager will make sure that the technician stays on task and delivers the product or service on time and within budget. The head of business development is the one who ensures you actually have work to do and helps build the relationships. And, of course, the technician is the one doing the job!

This process will also help you to start becoming aware of all the opportunities that exist. We live in such an abundant time! Within these pages you will find my step-by-step process to researching, launching, and growing a solo start-up. You will identify what success looks like on your terms. You'll receive advice and direction on much of what a small business owner needs to know. You'll learn from my own experiences as well as expert interviews. More importantly, you will begin to fully understand the tools needed to slowly and safely transition from being a great technician in someone else's organization to owning and operating a great business that you own, manage, and work in as a great technician. These are the same tools used in the Solopreneur Success Certifications and Solopreneur Success Camps. Members get one-on-one coaching or virtual-based group coaching, accountability, and a road map to follow. You'll get the same information here for just the price of the book.

Let's get started.