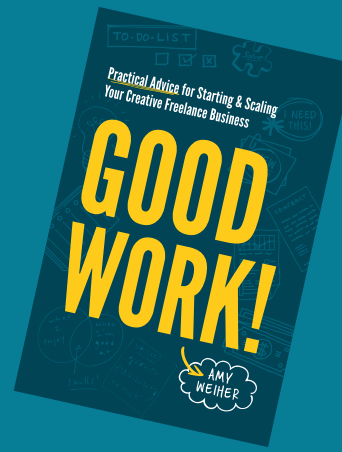


BUILD A GOOD FOUNDATION

(OR REASSESS THE ONE YOU HAVE!)

START WITH A REALITY CHECK.



Starting a business is easy. **Running** a business is hard work, and it's a job. If you're reading this, you likely already have the self-employment itch or are wondering about setting out on your own. But that doesn't necessarily mean that you're cut out for it or that it's even what you really want. If someone is pushing toward your own business by forcing you to read this book, beware of external motivation! You have to want it because you'll be the one doing the work.

Before you quit your job, or if you've been working for yourself for a while and need a change, think about the work you do and the business you daydream about. Take your time mulling over these questions.

Why do you want to start a business? What desires would it fill for you that your current job isn't, like more free time, a flexible work schedule, more control over your work, or working on a passion project? Can you get any of those by talking to your current boss or finding a new position elsewhere?

Assuming you're starting something that's related to your current occupation, what are the parts of your job that you like best? What are the parts that you like least?

If you could design the perfect job for yourself, what would it look like? What would it absolutely not include?

Do you have any experience with running a business or doing any behind-the-scenes business tasks? How did it go? What did you learn?

Is your business idea viable? Do people want or need what you offer? Is the need already being adequately met by others? How will you differentiate your service or offering to stand out? What research do you need to do to understand the market?

Do you have any experience working in the type of business you're thinking about? If not, what training or education will you need in advance and as you go?

Do you have access to other people who have done this before who can help or advise you? What advice do they have to offer?

Do you have any customers now? Where will you find more? Who are your target clients? How will you let them know what you have to offer?

Are you disciplined enough to get up every day and do what needs to be done, or do you need a lot of external motivation?

Are you driven and resourceful enough to keep going when things suck—because they will? Think of times you've faced a big obstacle. What did you do well? Where did you struggle?

Can you handle the uncertainty of an irregular paycheck? Do you have cash reserves? How do you handle uncertainty mentally and emotionally?

How do you handle failure? What skills and support do you need to develop to become more resilient?

How do you handle distractions? What are your usual distractions? How might you avoid them?

How do you feel about risk? Do you tend to plan and worry, or do you jump in without doing much thinking and preparing?

Do you have a support network—spouse, family, mentor, best friend, etc.—to help you financially, mentally, and emotionally? Do you know others in your field who can share ideas and encourage you professionally?

Are you willing to put in the time and effort it takes to market yourself and get more work? How will you start? Would you rather be a worker bee who does work that someone else acquires?

What is the best thing that could happen if you strike out on your own? How could you set yourself up for this best-case scenario?

What is the worst thing that could happen? What ways can you plan for that in advance and have solutions ready?

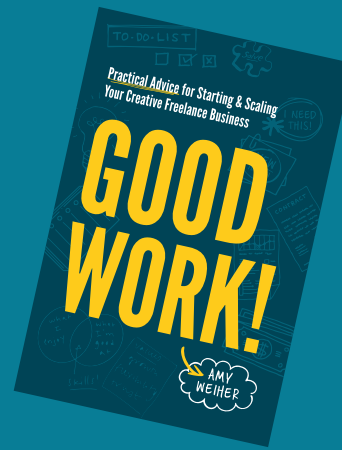
What are your strengths and weaknesses? Do you know how to manage them well? Does your personality lend itself to the entrepreneurial lifestyle?

Be brutally honest with yourself about these questions, even as you plan and dream. If the answers to some of these aren't compatible with running your own show, is there an existing job that might give you some of what you want without having to do it yourself? Or are there guardrails you can put in place to help you? Knowing your limitations is the key to crafting your plan for success. While you can't anticipate many problems, looking ahead as best you can prevents some problems and builds your problem-solving mindset.

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CONSIDER THE KIND OF WORK YOU WANT TO DO.



I'm presuming you're coming into this with a pretty clear sense of what you do overall. You already know you're a writer, designer, or illustrator. Drilling down from there, what kinds of projects do you want to work on? Spend some time thinking about past work you've enjoyed.

What type of project was it?

What industry was it in?

What kind of client was it—a big corporate client, a small nonprofit, or a small business?

Was there a personality trait, type of person, or style of working that appealed to you?

Were there lots of moving parts or a single type of deliverable?

Who else was involved in the project? What roles did they play? What were they like to work with?

How much did it pay? Or did you feel like you were rewarded well for your time?

What sort of timeline did it have?

How much creative freedom did you have?

What was the end result like?

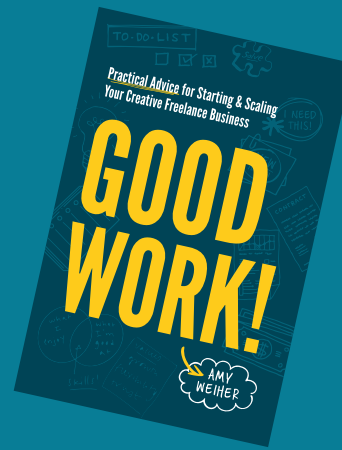
Why is it one of your favorites?

Once you've answered those questions for a few projects, look for patterns. If your favorite projects tend to be designing social media ads for pet sitters or writing annual reports for hospitals, notice that. It'll help you hone your skills and know how to better market yourself. You don't have to do that type of work exclusively, but life is short and business can be hard. If there's a type of project that gets you more excited than the rest, then do more of that.

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(OR REASSESS THE ONE YOU HAVE!)

THINK ABOUT WHO YOU WANT TO WORK WITH.



Now that you have some clarity on what you want to do, who do you want to do it for? When you're choosing your work, you're choosing your coworkers and partners and project bosses—and people make a huge difference in how a project goes.

Spend some time thinking about past clients you've enjoyed working with.

Who were they?

What were their personalities like?

How did they communicate? How did they handle any conflicts, questions, or clarifications?

How did they treat you, both as a person and as a vendor or partner?

Did they appreciate the work you did? How did they show it?

Did they value what you had to offer and listen to what you had to say? How did they show they trusted you?

Were they respectful of your time? How did you communicate with them about timing and the schedule?

Did they respect the budget and pay on time? How did they negotiate, if needed?

Did you have things in common with them, both related to the work and beyond it?

Where did they work—what region or industry?

What were their job titles? Where did they fall in the structure of their organization?

How much did they know about your industry or your type of work? Did they listen to what you needed to explain about the process and result?

What help did they need from you?

What were they passionate about?

Why did you like working with them?

Did you enjoy the work itself? Do you want to do more of that kind of work? Were you happy with the result?

Again, look for patterns. Maybe your ideal clients are women in their forties with big personalities who are married with kids and are vice presidents in corporations. Or maybe they're mechanical engineers in Midwest startups who are introverted and shy. Knowing who you want to work with will also help you figure out where to direct your marketing efforts and what to say to connect with them.

Having a target kind of client doesn't mean you won't work with anyone else or that it'll always be roses when your ideal client calls. But it makes things so much easier when you have an idea of who is right for you and then surround yourself with those people.