Chapter 1

It Takes More Than Talent

I was in the fourth grade when I wrote an essay about my kitten, Tangles. After my teacher, Mr. Wolf, read the piece, he nominated me to attend a young authors' conference at our local community college. Mr. Wolf was the first person to recognize my talent. At the time, I didn't know I had any.

It poked through as I grew, but it wasn't until my sophomore in college when I was studying environmental science when it re-emerged. I heard that the school's homecoming queen was selected via an essay contest and thought it was cool that the school picked royalty based on skill rather than looks. So I applied and, soon after, there I was, wearing a plum velvet gown and a rhinestone crown.

These were just glimpses of the talent that was inside of me—a gift that I never recognized until the crown came off, I had a bachelor's degree, and began working. Upon graduation, I had little desire to save the earth; I knew my heart wasn't in it.

There were some prospects for me to be an environmental scientist, but none caught my eye. On a whim, I decided to apply to be a reporter at a local newspaper and got the job. Now it was my *duty* to write. Seven years later, I am a full-time freelance copywriter and journalist.

I am intrigued by creative professionals. I have connected with solo professionals—or *solo-pros*, as I like to call them—that run the gamut. Some are veterans who freelanced before freelancing was hip, others are rookies off to a thriving start, and others are running a side business while they juggle a traditional full-time job. Most of them are genuinely talented, yet naively believe their artistic ability is all they need to be a business owner.

Some creatives talk more about their natural gifts than they do about delivering for the clients that are paying their bills. Many don't work *with* their clients because they are "the talent"—and think they are somehow above providing customer service or building client relationships. Others can't get out of the "starving artist" mentality and scrape by feeling completely unfulfilled.

There is definitely an important factor in using your talent to live off of, or just to lead a profitable side gig: You need to know how to *run a business*, not just *create*.

I subscribe to the theory that if your creative gift is your profession, you're going to need to be able to *sell* what you produce or provide. That involves being more focused on staying in business and using your natural gifts to do so, and less about hand-picking clients and charging exorbitant rates because anything less would diminish your God-given gifts.

I'm aware there are different measures of success. Some creative professionals may not have to support themselves or their households financially, so whatever kind of creative gig they have is an accomplishment. Really, it doesn't matter how you measure success. If you want a strong business that you enjoy, you need to possess some business awareness. That means building a client base, learning to work with clients that you may not love, filing taxes fairly, and mastering negotiations. It means keeping accurate records and marketing your business. And if you moonlight, it means going beyond "hobby mode," whether you want to keep a side gig or turn it into a full-time career.

When I worked as a reporter, I was able to hone my writing abilities well and efficiently meet the editors' needs. That carried over when I

launched my copywriting business; even though most of what I write isn't exactly hard-hitting prose (it is content used to sell products and services), I still know how to gather information and produce material that meets the needs of my clients—and often surpasses them.

My business has expanded to writing books and magazine articles, and I still use my editorial abilities. I love to write, whether it's short, snappy content to sell products or a compelling, witty article in a magazine.

That said, I wouldn't be where I am if I did not embrace professional best practices. My talent, no matter how wonderfully undiscovered and raw it was when I penned those essays earlier in life, wouldn't have helped me create such a fulfilling career if I did not incorporate sound business strategies.

This is the key to long-term success as a creative professional: You have to *do* business and *mean* business to *stay* in business. Your talent is just as important, but it's not the only thing that matters.

What is more important in running a creative business—your talent or your business know-how?

"This is one of those chicken–egg sorts of things. You need the talent to create work people will want but you need business skills to get the work seen and noticed. I have seen a lot of artists with so-so work and really great business skills make way more money than someone who has a lot of talent and no business skills. So business skills are definitely a must if you want to make a living from your work."

—Claudine Hellmuth, illustrator/artist, *www.claudinehellmuth.com*

One can get by on one's talent, but only for so long. Clients don't want to hire the artist that won't incorporate their feedback—otherwise, they won't refer that ever-so-talented artist to their colleagues. People talk in the industry. It does not take long to see that one guy is difficult to work with, and a company can hire someone just as gifted who is willing to work *with* them. The same goes for the administrative end of it: You may be a pro with clients lined up around the block, but

if you don't pay taxes on what you have earned, Uncle Sam will come knocking.

Creatives have different priorities for their businesses; one of mine is being able to live a comfortable lifestyle—not to have to work 40 hours a week, every week. To be able to work from where I want, and have my choice of clients. To enjoy the projects I take on and have a steady pipeline of work coming in. Through time, I've been able to make my vision a reality. Every day isn't perfect, nor is every client, but I wouldn't want to be doing anything else with my life. I want you to be able to do the same, no matter what your ambitions entail.

According to the 2012 Freelance Industry Report (available at *www.internationalfreelancersday.com/2012report*), people launch their own creative business for a number of reasons. About 28 percent of freelancers chose to go solo for more freedom and flexibility, 23 percent did so to follow their passion, 13 percent wanted to be their own boss, and 29 percent got into it "accidentally."

Regardless of how they started their own businesses, this chapter will introduce you to some freelancers who appreciate and have developed their talent—and who integrate business principles into their career. This chapter will not discount that your talent is probably amazing; instead, it will give you the tools you need to draw upon it and excel as a creative professional.

Do you think many people let their ego over their talent get in the way of business?

"I tend to see younger and less-experienced creatives get tangled in ego issues. This manifests itself in an unhealthy "us vs. them" mentality. To a degree most creatives have some level of ego, but it's about keeping things in check while still remaining confident. At the end of the day, people don't want to hire and work with jerks no matter how talented they are. Make the interaction about building a partnership and not battling an adversary."

—Jay Rogers, designer/illustrator, *www.jayrodesign.com*

Getting Started: Setting Up Shop...or Studio

One part of launching a creative business that does not involve your artistic ability is deciding to earn money off your talents, whether it is a side business or your primary role.

Von Glitschka (*www.vonglitschka.com*), an illustrative designer from Oregon, has been in business for more than a decade. (You may know him because we hosted the Freelance Radio [*www.freelanceradio.com*] podcast together, along with our moonlighter friend, Dickie Adams. You may also know Glitschka's name because he is an author, teacher, and speaker.)

One of the biggest reasons Glitschka has been so successful is because he took time to learn about business when he began. Just because marketing and client relations were two facets of business that came naturally to him, he was still aware that he needed legal and financial advice because those areas were not his strong suits.

He retained a business lawyer, who explained how tax, payroll, and bookkeeping systems worked. Then one of his clients told him about a small business management program at a local college; he took the course. He says it was extremely intimidating because he is not a math fan, but it helped tremendously.

"I signed up and became friends with the guy that ran it and he mentored me," recalls Glitschka. "He got to know my business, and then audited how I could improve it business wise. That was a big eye opener."

As a result, he decided to hire a bookkeeper and a CPA. Though he isn't glued to a calculator, he knows what records to keep so these professionals can accurately report his earnings. *That's* doing business.

Just as you would with any other venture, it's important to do things properly. In other words, even though you can probably set up your creative business in your spare bedroom (mine only required a computer, technically), that's not necessarily enough. Choosing a business model, devising professional goals, and formulating your internal processes are just as important.

As a result of the strong business platform, Glitschka has been able to build an impressive reputation for himself and garner top-name clients—all while providing for his family financially.

"I know creative people who'd I consider better than me and they are struggling to make ends meet...not because of lack of skill, talent or craft, but due to lack of business sense and operating a business," he says. "Commercial artists may be commercially centric but they can still be starving artists if they don't know business basics."

How can a creative individual decide if he or she should start their own business or just freelance on the side?

"I did it the moonlighting way. I had a day job and I worked really hard at my own business until it was so big I could barely keep up. I got laid off in a company-wide layoff and just at the time my own business was really starting to take over so it was perfect timing. The disadvantage is you have to essentially work two jobs, your real job and the one you are building, but the advantage is you can do it without worrying about money and that takes a lot of pressure off your little fledging business."

—Claudine Hellmuth, illustrator/artist, *www.claudinehellmuth.com*

Why Creating Isn't Enough

Chances are, you realize that you need more than just your artistic side to make your business work. Obviously you will need to engage clients, which involves marketing and selling, too.

Glitschka says that too many creative professionals believe if they simply create, the clients will come, and—*bam!*—they are in business. That's not the case. Your artistic flair can be the greatest thing out there, but you need to be the one marketing yourself so prospects see why you are the best for the project. Otherwise, someone with just as much talent *and* business sense will get those jobs. Let's face it: Someone else can generate deliverables just as lovely as yours, but not all creatives can combine the talent *and* business know-how—and that's what separates flourishing business owners from those who try freelancing and are forced to go back to a 9-to-5 job they dislike.

Stephanie Jones (*www.cleverfinch.com*), a designer from Virginia, worked at numerous advertising agencies in account planning and strategy before delving into the artistic world. This background has been effective in helping her meet her clients' goals. She never had to step off a high horse of "I have my talent and that's all I need," when she started her creative enterprise; she knew business was equally as important from the start.

"I always knew how important it was to be professional with my business, even when it's not focused on the fun part," she says. "Being a strategic resource for your clients builds value, and you don't just build that by creating pretty design pieces."

Finding Your Creative Edge

Glitschka is a natural connector, and leverages this ability to cultivate what I call the *creative edge*. Your creative edge is comprised of the things that set you apart from others when you use your natural abilities. I'm not talking only about your artistic talents; I mean strengths like speaking, listening, writing, coaching, analyzing, mediating, and networking. These aspects, along with your talent and business expertise, can become your competitive advantage.

Glitschka is also involved in the design community. Spending time online communicating with fellow designers and creatives, as well as attending in-person events, has helped him to stand out as a thought leader in the industry. Clients want the "go-to guy" for their campaigns; they want the very best and turn to him for it. This has given him a creative edge.

Why do freelancers need to learn more about business basics?

"While legal and financial advisors can help with things such as incorporation, taxes, contracts, and collections, you still need to know the basics. How much should you charge? When should payment be due? What can you do when a client is late or refuses to pay? Things are continually changing in our industry. So, it's not only important to keep up on current trends and software, but also with changing laws, policies, and more."

—Julie Cortés, co-founder, *www.freelancersu.com*

Customer Service Trumps Talent

Is the customer always right? It's the age-old debate. Although the customer may very well be wrong sometimes, in most cases, they are paying you to do a job that goes beyond using your creative abilities; it involves meeting their needs and expectations, and *that* requires more than your ability to write, paint, or design.

So many creatives are wrapped up in their artistic ability and the way they think a project should go, and do not partner *with* clients. Upon the first inkling of criticism, they insist their artwork is best and refuse to compromise. Ultimately, this can trigger a tense relationship or lead to the end of it—along with the added drama of a check "in the mail" that never arrives. From there, it can become a legal matter—just another reason why you must be business-savvy.

Let's take Alan, a fictional example of a creative who, unlike Glitschka and Jones, didn't see how important it was to concentrate on business and instead focused more on his natural gifts. Alan is a very bright designer with an impeccable artistic eye. So when his client, a major beauty company, hired him to conceive some ads for a new product line, they were shocked to find out that the aesthetic didn't align with their branding platform at all. They had met with Alan to define their objectives, but Alan went with his original concept for the design and never stopped to listen to what the client wanted.

When the client saw the work, which was alluring but not at all in line with their company, they told Alan that they didn't like it and they wanted him to go back to the drawing board.

Alan's problem is that instead of working *with* the client to polish the work, he took all their criticisms to heart (I know, it can be hard *not* to do) and became extremely defensive. He maintained that the design met their needs and then told them that because he was the designer, they should trust his expertise. Oh no, Alan—that attitude will send you right back to a smelly office with fluorescent lighting.

The problem with Alan and creative professionals like him is that even if his design was gorgeous, he never made an effort to satisfy his client. Hopefully when a client hires you, they know what some of your existing work looks or reads like to get a feel for your competencies.

If you don't have the business sense to ask specific questions, you can totally miss the mark and the final product could be way off-target, as Alan's was. And if you don't build a revision process into your contract, you may hit the client with fees that extend past their budget—likely ticking them off even more. You can spend all the time in the world producing the "best" material, but if a client doesn't like it—and you don't know how to cope with that—you can lose the client along with your credibility as a professional. You have to be able to work together, even if you are the one who is open to feedback and the client is the one on the defensive side of things.

Why's that, you may ask? Think about corporate America. If a company used an in-house designer, they would have pulled that person into the conference room and ripped apart the design (politely, I'd hope), and then that designer would have gone back to his or her desk, grunted a little, and fixed the problem. Ultimately, the client would have gotten what they wanted. This is why I think so many companies fear working with contractors; they don't want to put a great deal of money into a project fearing it will come back all wrong. If you want to work with larger companies, you have to be prepared to understand the concepts of customer service. You have to be able to gratify them, even if you hate the final design.

This doesn't mean the customer is always right or that you can't give your professional opinion; it means you have to build your business to accommodate their needs, from the way you express your business practices and word your contract to the communication techniques you use.

How can solo-pros be more attentive to customer service?

"I think that being in any kind of creative services industry is a delicate dance between leading the client and following the client. I think it's a constant back and forth, so I lead for a while, then you lead for a while...and at the end of the day, the client gets to lead, meaning the client gets to determine the ultimate direction of the project because they're the one putting the money into the project. You are a client service and that means that they get to call the shots."

—Todd Henry, founder/CEO, *www.accidentalcreative.com*

Aligning Your Work With the Client's Vision

Delivering positive customer service is obviously a big part of operating a business, but it goes beyond just being nice or spending that five extra minutes on the phone with a client in a pinch. If you know what your role is as a freelancer and strive to understand the client well, you will better grasp the vision of the project, which can help prevent sticky situations and result in more clients singing your praise.

Todd Henry, who founded the creative consulting firm Accidental Creative (*www.accidentalcreative.com*), believes that solo-pros need to take time to understand what their clients want in order to satisfy them.

As much as I think I understand what a client wants sometimes, I, too, have had situations when the customer isn't happy with what I have produced. In that case, I have learned to take a "How can we improve this?" stance rather than the "Why don't you like my work?" or "There must be something wrong with me!" approach.

When our work doesn't match up to the client's vision, we have to be willing to "let go of our pride and our ego," says Henry, who hails from Cincinatti. Otherwise, you could have an unsatisfied client on your hands that won't use your services again or, even worse, tell others not to.

Letting the client know that the project is a collaborative process from the start is vital. That way, even if it's not exactly what the client wanted, you can still team up to make it just right. Otherwise, they may not be open to revising the deliverable if needed, and insist that you did not do what they asked. During client consultations, I almost always let the client know about the revision process—namely, that I build a few rounds of revisions into the cost. Not only is it a selling point because it provides peace of mind that they won't be stuck with something they don't like; it lets the client know not to judge the first draft too harshly because I am available to help them make it sparkle.

Must-Read
The Accidental Creative: How to Be Brilliant at a Moment's Notice
by Todd Henry

Taming Your Inner Critic

Sometimes the clients aren't the harsh ones—we are. This is another issue that can cause roadblocks if you want to run a strong creative business.

In the beginning of my copywriting career, I was the one who demanded perfection more than my clients. If my first attempt wasn't flawless, I would be furious with myself. I knew revising was important, but I wanted every client to be picture-perfect happy with what I did. When they were not so pleased or suggested changes, I would go hard on myself and tell myself that I was wrong. Sure, sometimes I would be defensive and have to "take five" to calm myself down, but mostly I was completely too critical and harsh on myself. I didn't know at the time that in not educating the client about the creative process, or believing in it myself, I was making work much more stressful than it needed to be.

So the work had to be edited—so what? Once I really understood revisions were necessary—and a great way to improve customer service—I put the concept into my sales pitch, started getting excited about pleasing clients, and received more positive feedback and referrals for going the extra mile to satisfy customers.

Not all clients will be pleased with what you do, no matter how many times you try to tweak the deliverable. When the client demands perfection out of the first draft or first stab at a concept, you have to reassure them that it is all right to refine it. This is the part of the project when you start to put your ego aside even if what they want is off the wall. Again, in educating a client up front that revisions are often necessary, you are less likely to have an irate client—and if you've had one, you'll do anything to prevent it from happening again. Client relations is a big aspect of being business-savvy; it's *not* just all about how to file taxes!

Are We All Egomaniacs?

George Coghill (*www.coghillcartooning.com*), a cartoon logo artist and designer from Ohio, believes solo-pros identify themselves as artists, so when criticism comes their way, it's natural to take it personally.

That's why it's important to realize that you are creating for *someone else*—not yourself. What you produce is subjective—some people will like it and others won't—but if someone else is footing the bill for it, you have to heed their input.

"I think the successful artists are able to tame the ego," Coghill notes. "It's tough to take direction on your creativity, and if you let it get to you it can hurt."

Jones admits that she relied more on her talent than her business acumen in the beginning. "I slowly learned more about how to defend my work and fine-tune my creative brief so I was coming closer to achieving the client's goals and my own," she explains. "Slowly shifting from relying solely on my talent to relying on my talent *and* business skills."

Fusing Talent and Professionalism

What Jones has done is use her talent *along with her business skills*—a recipe for success.

"You don't like the first draft of that brochure, dear client? What would you like to change? Let's talk about it." (Client relations.) "I do think you should keep this section because I believe it will be a help to accomplish your marketing goals." (Negotiation.) "Okay, how do these changes work for you? Let me know what else I can do to help." (Customer service.) "Your total is on this invoice. Thanks for your business!" (Accounting.) These are all pieces of business that are separate from your artistic talent yet must be incorporated if you want to flourish.

Once you embrace that you need to deliver customer service, and that being self-employed isn't all about you, you'll have a happier base of clients and peace of mind. Doing what you love will be enjoyable—as it should be.

Must-Read
Breaking into Freelance Illustration: A Guide for Artists, Designers and Illustrators **by Holly DeWolf**

Money Matters

Another reason that some creatives focus more on their craft than they do on business is because they do not believe money is important. And I realize that, because the majority of us choose to use our gifts because we're truly happy when we create. I'm not out to make millions; I just want to make enough to live on and do what ignites my creative spirit.

But starving artists are a thing of the past. You don't have to be poor to practice your creative talent. Plenty of copywriters I know make upward of six figures a year and I know artists that pull in enough to support their entire families on one income.

Perhaps most of us just want "enough to get by" because we think that's all we're worth, but that's not true. Though you may not want to charge top-dollar as a rookie solo-pro, you can still charge—and earn—a competitive wage.

Some charge too much, some too little—and others don't know what the heck they're making. When I interviewed Jones, she said she knew plenty of designers working all day who think they are making hoards of money, but don't know how much they earn. "They think they're making money, but really they're not. And it's even more concerning that they're clueless about it," Jones notes.

When I think about freelancers and money, some main concepts come up: Creative professionals charge either too low or too high, don't pay or properly complete taxes, and do not put the legal means in place to ensure they get paid. We are going to talk about all of these aspects in the coming chapters.

What types of financial goals should I set when launching a creative business?

"Initially to be able to at least come close to breaking even. Within a year or so to be making as much or more than working for someone else. If you can't meet these goals realistically, the attractions of working for yourself versus working for someone else have to be very, very strong, or done out of necessity. Pay particular attention to your

billable efficiency—i.e., the percentage of available hours that are actually billed to clients. Service businesses that average under 50 percent billable efficiency are seldom successful."

—Cameron Foote, principal/editor, *www.creativebusiness.com*

Henry believes that it is difficult for freelancers to think in terms of money or want to deal with numbers because it is a challenge to turn their thoughts into value, or to value their contributions.

"The tendency is to underestimate the value you are bringing to the process," he advises.

He says we emphasize our artistic nature instead of incorporating business principles because we tend to be more into creative *ideas*, not necessarily *outcomes*.

Think about it: Did you or are you thinking of starting your business primarily to make money? No, that's secondary. The primary goal is to be able to do what you love, right? It was for me, too.

In that respect, it's understandable that you are more focused on your talent when you start out. Perhaps you want to deliver good customer service and satisfy clients, so you focus solely on your talent, or what you can deliver. Who cares about a contract, right? You just want to be able to create a logo for this really cool coffee company, or draft an annual report for a big-name national vendor. Once you hear a few positive remarks about your work, it can feel tremendously rewarding. Then you think, "Hmm, maybe I am good at this. Maybe I can really do this! Maybe I really am a writer/photographer/designer/blogger."

Look, there's nothing wrong with appreciating your talent—or centering your energy on it. Once the honeymoon is over, however, you may realize that not all projects give you butterflies. That's when you're going to have to be very efficient with your time, and time is money.

This is really the ultimate goal, isn't it? Not to spend half your day compiling invoices and the other half creating, but to get the business practices down pat so you can spend more time doing what you love.

It's reasonable that you want to do what excites you; few people are brave enough to even entertain the idea of trying to make a business based on their talent. You will just have to make an effort to put

as much into the business aspects as you will with the creative time. In time, maybe even the "business ickies" will be enjoyable for you, or at least they won't take up too much time. (Hey, invoicing could sort of be fun if you think about all the money coming in—especially if you took the time to ink a contract and ensure you'll actually get paid.) If not, you will have to simply accept that business practices have to be a part—but not all—of what you do as a creative professional.

Must-Read
***Creative, Inc.: The Ultimate Guide to Running a Successful Freelance Business* by Joy Deangdeelert Cho and Meg Mateo Ilasco**

Make Business Part of Your Business

Elise Cripe knows how important revenue is. The blogger uses her Web site (*www.eliseblaha.typepad.com*) to promote her workshops and the sale of her paper goods, and also earns income from advertisements on the site. I frequent her blog a lot for visual inspiration and have always been impressed at how she ties her talents into making a living. Though she is artistic, she also puts a great deal of emphasis on being professional.

"I like to say that it doesn't matter how smart or creative you are. If you can't communicate your idea or market it well, it will never bring profits or rewards," says the California-based blogger. "I think talent gets you started, but business know-how will keep you going."

Cripe says it is vital to keep track of money. "Don't underestimate the importance of tracking the money," she says. "Save everything and keep notes on expenses. If numbers are not your thing, then consider hiring someone to handle that aspect of your business." (See? You don't have to be a QuickBooks whiz or understand what Section 179 of the Internal Revenue Code is.)

Cripe says her genuine love of writing helped her blog to grow into a revenue-generator. Although blogging is part of her full-time job, she says it is not the only way she brings in money. "I wear many different hats to generate my total income, but blogging is the glue that holds it all together," adds Cripe, who draws a small amount of income from

sidebar advertisements and affiliate program commissions. Her blog evolved into a vehicle to promote on-line workshops she teaches on paper crafting and Web design, and is also the on-line shop where she sells charming paper goods.

The blog has opened up numerous opportunities for her as well, as Cripe has secured consulting gigs and product design projects.

"All have been very unique experiences and something I am so grateful for," she adds. "I have been blessed to turn my hobbies into something that generates income for my family."

What skills must creative professionals possess innately—and which can be learned?

"The only innate 'skill' I believe one needs is a passion for what you are doing. Creativity and business can be learned through focused practice/repetition. One needs an overabundance of passion for what they are doing to keep them going through the inevitable rough business periods. If you aren't in it completely, it will be very easy to be discouraged and the business will eventually suffer."

—George Coghill, cartoon logo artist/designer, *www.coghillcartooning.com*

A Little About Me

Before we get going on all of the juicy details that will help you run an awesome biz, I want you to know my story. It may help you better understand where I came from, why I felt the need to write this book—and why you may want to take some of the advice in it.

After graduating college and securing my first two jobs as a newspaper reporter, I then switched gears and entered the environmental industry. I knew I loved writing, so when a job came up for a technical writer at an environmental company that offered better pay, I took it. The chance to do some corporate writing (and the ability to alleviate my fears about not "using" my environmental studies degree) was all I needed to move into a less-creative sector. I worked there for about two years when I realized how much I had loved writing and journalism—just not necessarily the job I was in at the time.

About that time, I began exploring creative careers and I guess you could say stumbled upon the concept of copywriting. I never knew that it existed, or that it could be a lucrative career. At the time, I had a boss who would pick apart my highly technical environmental reports, which did little for my self-esteem. Soon after I discovered copywriting, I inquired about taking on some projects for a local two-woman creative firm. I remember being so nervous to meet the women at a local coffeehouse that I didn't even offer to pay for our drinks before I left. I was so thrilled that they thought my writing was promising. "What a ditz I am," I thought when I realized I forgot to offer to pick up the tab. "They'll never hire me."

But they did, and I was amazed. From there, I started moonlighting. About a year later, I wanted to take my business to the next level and be out on my own, but I knew I wasn't quite ready financially. Most of my hesitation was because full-time freelancing didn't offer steady pay, and without a traditional job it would be tough to get health insurance, which my momma said never to go without. What was the next logical step?

I applied for a part-time job as a copy editor at a bigger newspaper. It required evening hours so I could develop my copywriting business during the day. Finally, I had a solution I felt good about: I wasn't taking an all-out plunge into full-time freelancing, but I was on the right path. I could build up my business, earn a steady paycheck, and dive into full-time freelancing once I knew my business was sustainable.

No job is perfect, though (even the ones you cherry-pick). At the newspaper, all of the copy editors except for the veterans had to travel to the warehouse about 20 minutes away once a week to proofread pages as they came off the printer. The problem was that I was going nearly every night I worked. The warehouse didn't exactly feel like a safe place—particularly at 1 a.m.—and I soon got fed up being the boss in my freelance life and being treated like a peasant at my part-time gig.

After about a year as an editor in the doldrums of a warehouse instead of a newsroom, my copywriting business was booming. I was engaged to be married to my husband, Tim, and I would soon be able to go under his medical insurance—a monumental relief.

I connected with a prospective client who wanted to hire me part-time and let me work from home—score! Now I could transition to working from home full-time, but still have a steady income coming in from a stable job.

It all sounded great until I left the newspaper and the new job fell through. "Now, I'm screwed," I thought to myself. With nothing else to do but try to find another part-time gig, I started working full-time for myself while I sought another part-time job in the writing field. There I was, doing what I wanted to do. I was a full-time freelancer. I was an *accidental* full-time freelancer.

I never returned on-site as a part-time employee. Things just took off from there. These days, I work mostly from home, primarily because I can. I still take on copywriting projects, but I also have been able to use my journalism expertise to write books and magazine articles. Luckily for me, all of my experiences before becoming a solo-pro were not a waste: I use my technical background and journalism expertise every day. I've built up my skills in the marketing field. Each step I took was helpful to build my talent and business know-how.

For me, baby steps were the only thing that worked, but I know plenty of solo-pros that have taken the plunge headfirst. There is no one right way. To have a creative business, you just have to set yourself up for success and do the best you can, integrating your talent and business knowledge. If you're not sure what you have to offer on the business side of things, you have definitely picked up the right book.

Rock What You've Got

Whether you fall into self-employment without a penny in your pocket or intend to moonlight on the side while you work a full-time job, you have two things to work with: your talent and your ability to do business. Your talent is there already. I'm sure of it!

Your ability to conduct business? That's where I come in. Once you can fuse your gifts and your professionalism, you will be able to thrive. It is my hope that however your creative career plays out, you will be able to enjoy what you do for a living. And if it's in your PJs every day, well, there's nothing wrong with that!

Sweet Success
Diversify and Nurture Your Talent

Few people can make food look appetizing in photos. Kitty Florido (*www.asterisco-sa.com*), a graphic designer and photographer that splits her time between New York and Guatemala, has become pretty good at it. Florido launched her business 12 years ago after she enrolled in some marketing courses. After taking a job in sales for a postcard company, she realized she enjoyed the creative aspects of the job more than the sales part. "I started playing around with design software, and realized I was good at it," she recalls. A few months later she landed her first client, and soon after launched her own business.

When a client needed photographs of food, she started exploring her photography aptitude. Since then, she has completed a class on food photography and recently started a culinary Web site (*www.thefoodieskitchen.com*). She says that her skills as a designer have changed, and a huge part of her business has evolved into the food photography arena—a niche she loves.

Florido says it's important to keep cultivating talent so you have something new to offer clients. For her, developing her natural gifts has been, well, appetizing.

Beginner Mishap
Business Comes First

After Tim Wasson (*www.tjdub.com*), a Web designer from Illinois, graduated from art school, he worked as an illustrator and animator at an advertising agency.

"I just hated having to come to work at a designated time, all the meetings, the time-tracking. I was a creative, damn it!" he recalls. "I detested estimating time on projects, logging hours, answering phone calls, and revising work." That along with being confined to a cubicle was unbearable for Wasson, who was just 21 at the time. He quit the job to pursue life as a solo-pro.

"I assumed my pure talent and portfolio would sell me [as a freelancer], no problem," he says. "What I didn't have, unfortunately, was any skill at all in selling those features to potential clients."

The jobs he did get as a freelancer involved more than just conceptualizing mockups. He had to meet deadlines and keep within project budgets—two things he loathed. "I always fell back to the excuse that 'I'm a creative! I should be able to do what I want...business should be plentiful,'" says Wasson.

He continued to miss deadlines, struggled with client communications, and was puzzled on what to charge for projects.

"My business was crashing and burning," he adds. "I still had a great portfolio, but without the almighty referrals that drive my business today, and with no testimonials, I was going nowhere."

Soon after, he went back to a traditional job. He took another stab at freelancing after a few years, and, though he did better that time around, he eventually took an offer for an in-house design job. Wasson says that running his own business isn't quite for him.

"To be successful, you have to master sales, proposals, and client relations," he notes. "Talent comes after all that."