



When personal interests become a business

By Lauri Huff, APR

We all know them, the coworkers who seem happy coming to work — punching in and out on time with no delay. They have a smile on their face and a jaunt to their step. What makes them happier than the rest of us? One factor may be what they do for fun outside of work, essentially their side business.

In Tucson alone, there are possibly thousands of workers who dub themselves freelancers — these are the above mentioned workers who seem just a bit happier than the rest of us. Why is that? Possibly because, in addition to their “stable” day job, they have a freelance life doing the projects that they really want to do.

And there are hundreds of individuals who have officially turned their public relations and marketing activities into full-fledged businesses. Arizona is among the top states in the country for new business startups.

So what is behind this not-so-sudden influx of entrepreneurs? For many, it’s the need to get out of stifling work environments, the daily grind. For others, it’s a life-long dream. And, for many these days, it’s a necessity due to the economic downturn.

I started Building Blocks Public Relations in 2008. I was one of those with a smile on my face, working full time and doing freelance public relations jobs on the side. But I knew that one day those two worlds wouldn’t work together anymore. Since I was 25 years old, I have dreamed of owning a marketing firm, specializing in public relations. Last year, that dream became a full-time reality. And there are so many stories in our community about people just like me.

One of my colleagues left her full-time position after her husband received a promotion in another state. She moved and became a stay-at-home mom for nearly three years. As most entrepreneurs have, she has always had a little fire inside her to turn an interest in making creative baked goods into a business. Would it be the cute and creative cakes, cookies and pies? Or the savory entrees and side dishes?

She decided it would be her delicious homemade exotic jellies. What previously only her family and close friends had the opportunity to experience, she is preparing to introduce to the rest of the jelly-loving world. As she’s now realizing that creating a brand is the most stressful part of her new business process but it’s also the most fun. She’s fortunate that her previous career was in graphic design. She can now bring that passion to her new venture to really define the business and bring what was once her hobby to life.

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Whether it's writing, sewing, decorating, landscaping, photography, dog training or candle making, there is a way and a time to turn hobbies and personal interests into a career, if you have the passion and drive and, most importantly, the opportunity. As with anything else in the business world, you have to be smart about launching your idea, your brand. Know your market. Know your audience. Know your messages. Know your strengths and weaknesses. Know when to get help.

With the proliferation of social media, everyone is now a marketer in their own way. The key to success is knowing how to market the smartest way. And of course, if you make the jump to be your own boss, make sure you engage one of the many outstanding public relations/marketing practitioners in Tucson to help you develop a plan and navigate through the traditional and not-so-traditional communication tools.

Life is short. Make your career fun.

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