

Book Review: 101 Home Office Success Secrets

By Ramona Creel

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Being in business for yourself can be daunting, overwhelming -- just downright scary at times. And it seems sometimes that all the successful entrepreneurs are keeping their home-based business secrets to themselves. I remember trying to "pick brains" in the days when I first started my organizing business. If I could get anyone to talk to me about how to MANAGE a business, I was lucky -- and each time I only got a small piece of the puzzle. I must have spoken with at least 50 different professionals from a variety of backgrounds before I felt that I had all the information I needed.

If you have ever wanted a comprehensive guide to running a HOME-BASED BUSINESS, look no further. Lisa Kanarek provides you with everything you need in her book "101 Home Office Success Secrets." Whether you want help with marketing, customer service, your personal work habits, or sales -- Ms. Kanarek offers a wealth of practical and insightful suggestions. Since our theme this month is BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION, let's focus on the three areas that will help you stay on top of routine administrative duties best:

MANAGING YOUR OFFICE

Of course, before you can do anything else with your home-based business, you need to set up your OFFICE. But Ms. Kanarek's suggestions extend beyond the physical layout of your space -- her hints and tips are aimed more at helping you work effectively within your office space. She starts off with a discussion of your EQUIPMENT purchases -- computers, fax machines, furniture, telephones -- suggesting that you should invest in quality the first time out. This may seem counter-intuitive to a new business owner -- the urge to skimp and save at the start is a strong one. But as Ms. Kanarek points out, cheap equipment will malfunction and wear out quicker, costing you much more time, stress, and money in the long run.

Ms. Kanarek also spends some time discussing the physical arrangement of your home office. But she veers away from the typical organizing suggestions -- she's not going to tell you to get an "L" shaped desk or where to put your phone. Ms. Kanarek emphasizes more the LOCATION of your office -- suggesting that you will be more efficient if your office is appropriately situated. She points out the value of keeping your home and your office separated -- even when your office is in your home. She also suggests that you consider setting up your office where you WANT it to be rather than where you think it SHOULD be -- based on the correct assumption that you will be more productive if you work in a pleasant, enjoyable environment than if you are relegated to the corner of a dark, damp basement.

GETTING THE HELP YOU NEED

The next concern in creating an efficient office environment is your STAFF. Although many home-based business owners feel compelled to hire a local high-school student to handle basic administrative duties, Ms. Kanarek encourages her readers to be willing to pay for QUALITY EMPLOYEES. Just as with your office equipment, an unskilled employee will cost you more in time (teaching them how to do the job and closely monitoring their work) than a skilled one will in salary. And remember that hiring quality staff does not have to mean full-time, on-site help. You can accomplish a great deal with CONTRACT administrative assistants -- especially freelancers who perform routine office duties for you from a remote location.

ORGANIZATION

Of course, this section will seem like "preaching to the choir" for professional organizers -- but Ms. Kanarek approaches the topic of getting organized from a slightly different point of view. Her emphasis is more on how you use your ADMINISTRATIVE TIME effectively -- something which we could all stand to do better! She talks about the importance of developing a ROUTINE -- and building some padding into that schedule to accommodate the unexpected. This can be a particularly challenging task for home-based business owners -- who have to bear the responsibility not only of doing the work, but also serving as the TAKSMASTER. One of the best lessons an entrepreneur can learn is to set aside regular blocks of time for following up on phone calls, sending letters, data entry, routine follow-up, and other necessary tasks.

Ms. Kanarek also addresses a common tendency among entrepreneurs -- PERFECTIONISM. The need to do everything perfectly can lead to an almost endless list of "to-do's," and a nearly automatic compulsion to focus on everything that you still have left to accomplish. She suggests focusing on what you have done, rather than what you haven't. She also offers some practical tips for weighing the time you will invest in a project or client with the eventual PAYOFF.

PERSONAL WORK HABITS

Finally, staying on top of your everyday business responsibilities requires the evaluation -- and possible change -- of your personal WORK HABITS. Ms. Kanarek focuses her efforts on helping readers build awareness -- awareness of their behavior, their skills, and their personal worth. The most important suggestion she makes is that you not be afraid to change what ISN'T WORKING. This may seem like a glaringly obvious philosophy, but it's amazing how often business owners fail to follow this advice. I know I myself have been guilty to getting so attached to a certain process -- a way of doing things -- that I failed to see when my efforts weren't bringing in the same results anymore. It takes a keen eye to recognize when a procedure needs to be tweaked, re-worked, or even discarded.

Ms. Kanarek also advises that you understand what your time and talents are worth. This means being willing to change your FEE STRUCTURE if you are undercharging for your services. She even offers some specific suggestions for enhancing your services while you raise your fees. She also points out that appreciating your own worth also means being careful about GIVING AWAY your ideas for free. This is know as "spilling your candy in the lobby" -- losing potential business because you told the client how to solve a problem before he/she hired you. As she states, "The key is to create a balance between what advice and time you are willing to give away and how you will be compensated for your time." But this would seem to be the key to all business dealings -- striking a balance.

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