



carol@carolrossandassociates.com | www.carolrossandassociates.com | 303.666.0580

## Lessons Learned From Self-Employment

My first year in business, I wrote an article entitled, Biggest Surprises in Being Self-Employed. The title was indicative of my novice state. After spending 19 years working for large corporations, I hadn't learned a lot through experience yet, but I had my eyes opened to what self-employment was all about.

I am now completing my second year in business. In the lifecycle of small companies, I've reached young adulthood. I still have tantrums but they are less frequent and less intense than in the teen years. I know what's needed to become successful, not because I've done everything right, but because I've experienced some wrong turns and gotten a few bruises along the way.

In no particular order, here's what I've learned:

1. **My business shifts with my personal growth.** Since I've started my business, I've become more confident of my abilities, more willing to focus on things I can do with ease, and more appreciative of the value that I bring to others. This has determined what services I offer, what clients I go after, what gigs I take, and who I collaborate with.
2. **All business relationships have a natural evolution.** Don't fight it. Some relationships never get off the ground, some gain momentum quickly and just as quickly run their course, some develop slowly and burst into action when the time is right. Others feel comfortable from the start and then, like the winter jacket in springtime, no longer fit.
3. **Be clear on what each business relationship brings.** I have relationships that exist for the sake of referrals. Other relationships are about creating and creating wealth together. And still others are about sharing knowledge.
4. **What will get me through the hard times is not perseverance. It is hearing the truth.** I was blessed to hear the truth from a business mentor—the truth of why things were not going well, the truth of my role in the results I was getting, the truth of how I was interacting (or as the case may be, not interacting) with others. Once I heard the truth, I knew what I needed to do to get back on track.
5. **Be discriminating in picking allies.** I have many acquaintances in the business world. I have far fewer allies. My allies are individuals who will support me, not because they like me, but because they understand and respect what I stand for. My allies are

willing to stand next to me. They are confident enough in themselves to go on the journey with me, even when it is fraught with danger.

6. **The more I trust my gut, the more I can sit back and ride the wave.** Not everything has to be hard or a struggle. Sometimes, I can get to an answer a lot faster and easier if I think less and write in my journal more. When I faced a situation that could have resulted in litigation, I trusted my gut to talk with the key player directly, before consulting my attorney. Our conversation became the start of a wonderful collaboration into areas of interest for both of us.
7. **Claim what is mine.** I derive great satisfaction from stating what makes me unique and special in the marketplace. Yet, it has not been an easy thing to do. When I figured out what was mine, and I was willing to receive what I had attracted—whether the perfect client or a gig that seemed to come too easily—life became a lot easier.
8. **Let the naysayers have their air time and then move on.** The naysayers may be real people or they may be my own inner critic. It doesn't matter. I manifest my desires by focusing on what I want, not by focusing on what I don't want.
9. **Be willing to “give up to get.”** Sometimes, I must destroy in order to create. The puzzle cannot be re-configured if I'm not willing to move the pieces around. When I realized that I could no longer rely on providing a standard workshop as a steady source of income, I opened myself to more opportunities. I let go of a core service that had provided half of my revenue the first year in business. Since then, I've developed a set of tools that serve my clients in a deeper way and make me a better consultant.
10. **When my family no longer likes me, it's time to take note.** I have said very little about the role of family in the life of a self-employed business person. This may be the most important lesson of all. My family is the barometer for whether I'm leading the life I want or whether my life is leading me. Know when to look in the mirror.

I have a feeling that each year of business will lead me to a new set of lessons. Young adulthood is a good place to hang out—for awhile. At some point, my experiences will lead me to a new phase of my business life. What I hope for as each change occurs is what I hope for in life—that the spirit stays strong while the mind and body transform.

Copyright © 2006 by Carol Ross and Associates, LLC. , [www.carolrossandassociates.com](http://www.carolrossandassociates.com). Contact [carol@carolrossandassociates.com](mailto:carol@carolrossandassociates.com) for reprint permission. If you enjoyed this article, visit Carol's blog, [www.blog.carolrossandassociates.com](http://www.blog.carolrossandassociates.com), and podcasts, [www.liveactioncoaching.com](http://www.liveactioncoaching.com), [www.leadingwithawholenewmind.com](http://www.leadingwithawholenewmind.com), and [www.consciousliving-leaving.com](http://www.consciousliving-leaving.com). Carol is an executive coach, organization development consultant, and writer with over 20 years experience in the telecommunications and energy industries. Carol specializes in helping clients get unstuck and into the flow of great work. She works her magic by bringing the power of the creative, intuitive right brain into a left-brained world. While her degrees in engineering from Northwestern University have served her well, it's been her life and work experiences that have moved her to do her best work. She is certified by The Coaches Training Institute and credentialed by the International Coach Federation.