

# *the* SELF- EMPLOYMENT SURVIVAL GUIDE

**Proven Strategies to  
Succeed as Your Own Boss**

**JEANNE YOCUM**

Foreword by Rieva Lesonsky  
FOUNDER OF SMALLBIZDAILY.COM

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ROWMAN & LITTLEFIELD

Lanham • Boulder • New York • London

Published by Rowman & Littlefield

A wholly owned subsidiary of The Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, Inc.  
4501 Forbes Boulevard, Suite 200, Lanham, Maryland 20706  
www.rowman.com

Unit A, Whitacre Mews, 26-34 Stannary Street, London SE11 4AB

Distributed by NATIONAL BOOK NETWORK

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Information Available

#### **Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

Names: Yocum, Jeanne, author.

Title: The self-employment survival guide : proven strategies to succeed as your own boss / Jeanne Yocum.


Description: Lanham : Rowman & Littlefield, [2018] | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2017037263 (print) | LCCN 2017050924 (ebook) | ISBN 9781538108727 (Electronic) | ISBN 9781538108710 (pbk. : alk. paper)

Subjects: LCSH: Self-employed. | Strategic planning.

Classification: LCC HD8036 (ebook) | LCC HD8036 .Y63 2018 (print) | DDC 658/.041—dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2017037263>

 The paper used in this publication meets the minimum requirements of American National Standard for Information Sciences—Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Materials, ANSI/NISO Z39.48-1992.

Printed in the United States of America

PART I



NOW THAT YOU  
WORK FOR YOURSELF



## CHAPTER ONE



# You're the Boss Now

I wouldn't trade my nearly three decades of self-employment for anything, but some days I do wish I had a boss. In essence, I have multiple bosses, namely clients who are all pushing forward their own agendas. Sometimes it would just be nice to have one person who was in charge of telling me exactly what the priorities should be rather than having to decide for myself each day. This would be particularly helpful on those days when the number of balls I'm juggling seems overwhelming.

Before making the leap into the world of self-employment, please carefully consider whether you're really ready to not have a boss—to not have someone who is making the key decisions or confirming for you that your decision is the correct one. Self-employment is extremely stressful if you're not a decisive person. Every day is filled with choices about the direction you're taking your business, what you need to do next to move your business forward, and about the work you're doing for your clients.

I am usually quite decisive—to the point where my friends are often stunned by the quickness with which I've made major life choices—but even I sometimes have a problem picking from among the many options I'm faced with as my own boss. If someone like me occasionally feels anxious over trying to figure out what her priorities should be, I could only imagine what it would be like for someone for whom any type of decision-making is a stress-filled chore.

Sure, you can seek opinions on key decisions from mentors, colleagues, or family and friends. But when you're self-employed, in the end it all comes down to you. You are the one who will have to make the decisions that will determine if you succeed. Will you be comfortable with this?



Some people welcome the opportunity to finally show that they can make it on their own. They've felt reined in and have been dying to be the decision maker. But plenty of others leap into self-employment without considering that the proverbial buck will now stop at their desk.

If, upon reflection, your stomach gets a little queasy at the notion of having to be the “decider,” then perhaps you should consider delaying your dream of self-employment until you become more comfortable with decision-making. It is quite possible that once you get more professional experience—and more life experience—under your belt, you will become more at ease with decision-making and be better prepared for life without a boss.

If you happen to be one of the unlucky people who has a bad boss, having no boss at all probably seems awfully attractive. In fact, that was one of the top five reasons I became self-employed. I chafed under the micromanagement of my last boss. So I quit and didn't look back. If you find yourself in a similar situation, before making such a move, please thoroughly consider the ramifications of having no boss at all. If you have problems with decision-making, perhaps a better move would be to find a new job with a better boss.

If you've already made the leap to self-employment and are now struggling with decision-making, try these coping strategies.

### Coping Strategies

- **Know your decision-making style.** Some of us need to thoroughly research all our options before reaching a decision. Others go more with gut instinct. Some of us fall somewhere in between, which is probably the best place to be. Understand your style and try to reach a happy medium that enables you to move forward without getting mired in endless research or making a snap decision you will soon regret.
- **Don't overthink everything.** Some choices are so big that they deserve a lot of thought, but I know people who vacillate over every step of daily life, beginning with what cereal to have for breakfast. Don't be that person. Make choices and stick with them as you move through your workday, unless you receive information that gives you good reason to shuffle the items on your to-do list.
- **Have a friendly sounding board.** While I recommend finding a good mentor who has walked in your shoes and can give you the voice of experience, I also think it's good to talk over a decision you're facing with someone who is just a really good friend. This person will likely have known you longer than your mentor and probably knows your personality better because they've seen you in all sorts of situations over many years. Someone like this can provide valuable input that is based

on experience with you rather than on their own experience with self-employment. Listening to someone like this can be very helpful since they know your tendencies with decision-making and may help you avoid a choice you might regret later.

- **Trust your intuition.** When faced with a decision, often your first thought is your best thought. By learning to trust this gut instinct, which, after all, is derived from your life experience and your knowledge of the topic involved, you should significantly shorten the amount of time you spend dithering.

### Other Voices

**Barbara Rodriguez** started her interpreting and translation services business in Springfield, Massachusetts, in 2001. I met her a few years later when her business was located at the Springfield Business Incubator, for which I was writing a newsletter.

Here's what Barbara says on being the boss: I'm sure you've heard about how lonely it is at the top. That's because you have no one to consult with. The buck stops with you, and it can be frightening. Take the time to think things through. Sleep on it. At the beginning, I would make decisions quickly and then live to regret them. It took me many years to learn to sleep on decisions, and I mean that literally. Things are always clearer in the morning. You have to think about how a decision you make today will affect your business into the future. Are you taking on obligations you can't meet? Are you cutting yourself short? How is the market changing and how will those changes affect you? Can you deliver the goods and/or services on time? Again, meditation really helps me to see all angles of a situation—and again, sleep on it!

I've known **Howie Green** since 1973 when we worked in the corporate communications department of a large insurance company in Boston. Howie describes himself as a graphic designer, illustrator, and reluctant writer, but I would add that he is a very talented artist. He first was self-employed for a three-year period beginning in 1979. Then he returned to self-employment permanently in 1984.

Here are his thoughts on being the boss: In my youth, I worked for a lot of people, and I never had a boss who I thought had a clue as to what he or she was doing. I always thought I would make better decisions than they would. And I was right, so with that kind of an ego, I needed to work for myself.

