

people, many of them other women who had already started their own businesses. They offered me tremendous encouragement, and said that securing clients would be the least of my problems — that being too busy would be my biggest problem. Guess what? They were right. And if my public relations firm had not developed, here's a bonus step: Know you can always turn back!

## Ten Steps to Starting Your Own PR Business

- STEP ONE: Know your motivation.  
 STEP TWO: Know your passion.  
 STEP THREE: Know the market.  
 STEP FOUR: Know your vision.  
 STEP FIVE: Know the legalities.  
 STEP SIX: Know what you “must” make financially.  
 STEP SEVEN: Know a good bookkeeper and/or accountant!  
 STEP EIGHT: Know your timing.  
 STEP NINE: Know your limitations.  
 STEP TEN: Know and face your fears.  
 BONUS STEP: Know you can always turn back!

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Doreen M. Poreba, APR, is an award-winning, accredited professional with more than 20 years of experience in public relations, marketing, community relations and journalism. She is the founder and president of The PR Czar, Inc., a full-service public relations firm in Palm City, Florida. Additionally, Doreen

is a free-lance writer for *The Palm Beach Post* and *Florida Pennysaver* and conducts training workshops for businesses, associations and nonprofit organizations.

A magna cum laude graduate of Slippery Rock University in Pennsylvania, Doreen began her career in radio broadcasting and as a television news reporter with ABC affiliates in Youngstown, Ohio, and in West Palm Beach, Florida. She gained invaluable public relations and marketing experience in both the corporate world and nonprofit sector, having worked for The Miami Herald Publishing Company, Northwood University, and SunFest, Florida's largest music, art and waterfront festival. Her work has been recognized with more than 50 awards from the Florida Public Relations Association, International Festivals & Events Association, Florida Festivals & Events Association and the Association for Women in Communications, Inc.



FLORIDA  
PUBLIC RELATIONS  
ASSOCIATION

## TEN STEPS TO STARTING YOUR OWN PR BUSINESS

by Doreen M. Poreba, APR

How many times have you thought about making a change in your life, but were too afraid to let go of the familiar? How many times have you felt the imbalances of life, from juggling the demands of your career and your family to your own needs?

When I finally got tired of keeping count, I decided the only way to take control of my life and my career was to go into business for myself. The decision to start my own public relations firm was not easy, but this story does have a good ending. Today, I wouldn't have it any other way. Does that mean it's the right decision for you? Only you can answer that, but perhaps my experience will assist in your decision making process.

### STEP ONE: Know your motivation.

Before taking the entrepreneurial free fall, it's important to know why you want to go into business for yourself. This will help you to keep your focus once you do start your own business.

Before founding The PR Czar Inc., I had spent seven years as the public relations and marketing manager of SunFest, a nonprofit organization that annually produces Florida's largest music and art festival on the waterfront in West Palm Beach.

Much like any other annually produced event, the last few months leading up to the festival were extremely hectic. I spent very little time with my two young boys and husband during this time. I often missed the boys' school field trips and other activities. My primary motivation to start my own business was so I could have more control over my day-to-day schedule and spend more time with my family.

A secondary motivator was to replace the glass ceiling with a blue sky. At SunFest, I had reached the top of my position's pay scale and there was no room for upward mobility. Being my own boss has taken care of this limitation. Your motivation may be to make more money or to be more creative. The reasons will vary by person. The important thing is to define your motivation and priorities, and then to focus on them.

Since launching my business, there have been times I have allowed myself to get “too busy,” and I suddenly realize that I'm not spending as much time as I desire with my family. I then refocus on my primary motivation for starting my business, and I get back on track again.

You may have heard the old axiom that running your own business requires you to work 24 hours a day and spend less time with family and friends. Again, it goes back to motivation. When I find the business at odds with my number one priority,

I either refer new business opportunities to colleagues or enlist the help of associates.

## STEP TWO: Know your passion.

Knowing what types of projects and clients you'll enjoy most will help direct and organize your business. Do you plan to specialize, or take a generalist approach? Even though I was just starting out on my own, I was very "picky" in choosing clients. Not everyone can afford to do this, but I believe it's what has made me successful. I entered into work agreements with people I liked and respected and followed my gut when I got an uneasy feeling from a potential client.

## STEP THREE: Know the market.

Contact everyone you know whom you can trust prior to leaving your job. Find out what opportunities may exist. Determine who may hire you on a freelance basis to help get you started. Get a feel for possible pitfalls by talking with people who are already running their own PR business and prepare accordingly.

## STEP FOUR: Know your vision.

How do you envision your business in the beginning, in five years, in 10 years, and how are you going to get there? First, determine if you want to start off as a sole practitioner and remain that way, or if you plan to grow. My vision was and remains to work as independently as possible — literally not to have any employees. This is not to say that I don't ever work with other professionals. To the contrary, when I get involved with a client or project that's bigger than what I, as one person, can offer, I partner with other PR professionals, graphic designers, or whatever the

job calls for. By bringing our skills together, we offer a solid team of expertise. I've found that it makes no difference to the employer whether the other people are my employees or subcontractors — as long as we produce results!

You'll also have to decide whether to be home-based or work in an outside office. As the number of home-based businesses grows, I have found that there is no down side to having a home office. In the PR business, clients expect you to come to them anyway.

This also is a good time to begin working with a professional graphic designer who can give your business the "look" that matches your vision. Having your business cards, letterhead and envelopes designed ahead of time will allow you to pursue clients as soon as you "open your doors."

## STEP FIVE: Know the legalities.

Check with city and county government offices regarding occupational license requirements and/or zoning permits. Florida's official website, MyFlorida.com, contains links to state information for new and existing businesses. All owners conducting business under a name other than their own must file a "Fictitious Name" registration with the Florida Department of State, Division of Corporations.

Discuss with your accountant options for conducting your business as a sole proprietor, corporation or partnership, and whether your business requires you to collect sales taxes and have a sales tax certificate. If you plan to hire employees, check into those requirements as well.

You'll want to have written agreements with your clients, so begin researching your options or consult with an attorney. There are dozens of books that include examples of generic contracts that can be modified for your use.

## STEP SIX: Know what you "must" make financially.

If fear of making "enough" money is holding you back, ask yourself — "What's the least amount of money you can make and still live?" Before leaving my full-time job, I calculated what I had to bring in to continue living my lifestyle, and then I looked at the least amount I would have to make to just get by, knowing I may have to make some sacrifices. Doing this exercise will help you conquer your financial fears.

For the longest time, I was stuck on the notion that I could not start my own business without having secured an "anchor" client, one that I could count on month in and month out. But I got over this idea, and when I left my full-time job, I had no signed clients, but a lot of possibilities. The possibilities came from doing my homework by meeting with my contacts and researching the market. Within my first week of business, I signed two agreements for project work. In fact, my first year, I managed to succeed with no retainers — only project work — and I exceeded even my own financial expectations.

## STEP SEVEN: Know a good bookkeeper and/or accountant!

The biggest mistake that I made was not hiring someone to handle my monthly books and other tax and financial requirements that come with being incorporated. Should an accountant do his or her own PR? The answer is the same to whether PR professionals should do their own accounting! I finally learned this lesson and no longer have the headache of trying to handle my books.

## STEP EIGHT: Know your timing.

Once you know your motivation, passion, market, vision, legalities and financial picture, it's time to

determine when to take the plunge, er, control! All of the steps mentioned previously will assist in your decision. Set a departure goal, and take into consideration your current employer's needs so you don't burn any bridges. Bear in mind that the final decision should hinge on what's best for you.

In my case, I knew I couldn't leave before the festival took place, so I waited until the event ended and the wrap up was concluded. By the time this occurred, I had taken all of the necessary planning steps, and it was time to implement the plan.

## STEP NINE: Know your limitations.

Over committing myself has been a recurring theme in my life. I've had to work at learning to say no. When you start your own business, it helps to learn this skill quickly, and then apply it! Give yourself time to settle in to your new experience — and that's what it is — it's so much more than just a business.

Set limitations and "rules" for yourself. Know in advance how busy you want to be. Are you willing to work 24/7, or do you want to actually have a life? Refer to your primary motivation: was it to make more money, have more time, or something else? Know how many voluntary commitments you're willing to tackle in addition to your clients. Be sure to build in time to network with other professionals. In the beginning, when you're on your own, it can get lonely compared to the camaraderie you experience in a typical office.

## STEP TEN: Know and face your fears.

Still not convinced? Oftentimes we don't move on because we fear what "might" happen, but usually never does. My biggest fear was not being able to make it on my own. I feared I wouldn't be busy enough, or make enough money on my own, when in fact, the opposite happened. I talked to countless