

The background of the entire page is a large, dense crowd of people, rendered in a blue-tinted, hazy, and slightly blurred style. In the foreground, three individuals are clearly visible: a man on the left in a dark suit and light blue tie, a woman in the center with short brown hair wearing a purple shirt under a dark blazer, and a woman on the right with long dark hair wearing sunglasses and a striped shirt. The overall mood is one of a vast, anonymous crowd with a few distinct individuals.

Is SELF- EMPLOYMENT *for* YOU?

ANYONE *can start a business...*
only FEW *can SUSTAIN a business.*

PAUL E. CASEY

(1,517 words)

Are you thinking about taking the plunge into the world of self-employment? The following excerpt on "Organization" is from the book, "Is Self-Employment for You?" This book goes beyond the ABC's of how to write a business plan but examines the potential entrepreneur's emotional readiness and personality traits that ultimately make the difference between success and failure. "Is Self-Employment for You?" Author Paul Casey has been successfully sustaining his communications business for over fifteen years. You can purchase the book by visiting Amazon.com and inputting Is Self-Employment for You?

ORGANIZATION, ORGANIZATION, ORGANIZATION

By Paul Casey

If the motto for real estate sales is, "Location, Location, Location," the motto for starting and maintaining a successful business should be, "Organization, Organization, Organization."

Organization, or a lack thereof, often makes the difference between success and failure in business. Success in business is all about developing *systems* that make doing your job and its various tasks easier and more profitable with each passing day. Time *is* money, as they say. And the more organized you are, the faster and easier it will be for you to manage your business and make money.

Organization means opening your daily mail and deciding what to do with it on the spot, instead of letting it stack up a foot high on the desk. It means returning phone calls within 24 hours, and not letting phone messages back up on your voice mail. It means having a filing system for bills, invoices, receipts, tax records, etc., so you can locate whatever document you need quickly. It means having a Rolodex or file box where you keep the business cards and contact information for all your clients and potential

clients. It means having a business card of your own that you can hand out to people—with your company name, address, phone and fax numbers, e-mail address, and web site URL—so they can contact you easily. It means making sure that your car is in working order, so you won't miss important appointments. The more organized you are, the more you can accomplish in a day, a week, or a year.

When you hear that someone is “burned out” from running their own business, it usually means that the business owner is exhausted from the daily effort of trying to run a disorganized business. A business owner who is disorganized is continuously flailing away like the worst government bureaucrats or people who work for large organizations. These people can many times afford to be disorganized because their salary is not based on organizational ability. For the self-employed business owner, organizational ability is an essential survival tool. I firmly believe that being organized is one of the major reasons I am still in business today.

Being organized also instills a sense of confidence in your clients and potential clients, while not being organized tends to have the opposite effect. There is a print shop across the street from my office. Each time I visit this print shop, I see empty and unplugged computers, diskettes stacked everywhere, and papers and files spread out across the desks and piled on the floor behind the counters. The entire shop has a look of general chaos. I no longer use this print shop for large projects where I have to leave an original set of documents with them. I'm afraid that they will misplace or lose my documents. I often wonder how many other customers they have lost because of their poor organizational skills.

Riding in someone else's vehicle tells me a lot about whether or not I want to

work with them on a professional basis. If the car is relatively clean on the outside, and if the inside is not littered with fast-food wrappers and old newspapers, it tells me that this person is organized and pays attention to detail. If someone is organized enough to make sure that their car is presentable, I imagine that their home and office are probably also organized as well. If I conduct business with this person, my project with them will probably be completed in an orderly manner.

THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION IS OVER

When you own your own business, you often feel like you are on the outside of the business world looking in. You start to see how outdated much of the routine of conducting business really is. Most businesses still run on the Industrial Revolution and assembly-line models. Assembly lines require that all employees show up at the exact same time, for obvious reasons. One employee's absence can shut down a whole operation. For some reason, we seem to think that this model should apply today.

In the past twenty years, technology has advanced to the point where most of us could work from our homes if we wanted to. With the right software and the security codes needed to access our company's computer network, most of us would have no trouble telecommuting every day. Yet we still feel obliged to get into our single-occupancy vehicles and fight our way through traffic every morning, to spend all day in an office cubicle. In most companies, employees are still required to be at their desks by 8:00 AM, and usually go home around 5:00 PM, just the way it was a hundred years ago. This is a huge waste of time. Using your time wisely is not only a precious resource; it is also a major competitive advantage.

IT'S ALL ABOUT TIME

Organization is about having, if not a strict schedule, then a good idea of how you use your time each day. Time is your most precious commodity, and wasting time is a business killer. This doesn't mean, however, that you have to work fifteen-hour days, seven days a week. I am working fewer hours today than at any time in the history of my business, but I am making the most of my time. Therefore, I am also making more money than I have ever made.

Time management is as basic as thinking through your commute to your workplace. If you work in a large urban area, the curse of the long commute is probably the biggest time waster of all.

I generally get up around 5:30 to 6:00 AM and work in my home office until 8:00 AM. I find that I am at my best intellectually during this time, and that I am more alert earlier in the day. On most mornings, I complete over two hours of work before most people even arrive at their offices. There are few interruptions like phone calls this early in the morning, and I actually get more accomplished during this time than at any other time of the day. (I've written a good part of my book, "Is Self-Employment for You?" during my early-morning work period.)

At 8:45 AM, my commute to downtown Seattle is less than ten minutes. By this time, most people are at work, and traffic has thinned out to the point that I don't have to wait around in traffic jams. If I were to take the same route at an earlier time, say around 7:00 AM, my commute could last up to an hour. Likewise, for my evening commute, I usually go home around 6:00 PM, so I don't have to deal with evening traffic.

The time of your daily commute may not seem important, but again it's the small

things that add up. Time management decisions like this *can* make the difference between success and failure. Let's say that, by taking a later commute, I save myself two hours per day that I would normally spend stuck in traffic. Two hours times five days per week times 50 weeks per year = 500 hours per year. In one year, I have saved time equivalent to over 21 days. In about twelve years¹, I will have saved almost one full year in productive time, just by timing my daily commute so that I don't have to travel during peak traffic periods. This doesn't even factor in the extra time and efficiency that I gain by working without interruptions between 6 and 8 AM

I very seldom have downtime unless I want it. On the rare occasion that I do get stuck in traffic, I still try to use that time productively. I turn on the radio, listen to radio ads, and compare them to the ones I've produced. Perhaps I can borrow a pointer or two from the ads I hear. If I'm stuck in a long line at the grocery store, I try use that time productively as well. For example, I might start thinking about my book and how I can express my thoughts and ideas more clearly in the chapter I'm working on. This usually works until I start mumbling to myself, at which point the people who have been waiting in line with me suddenly start to migrate to other lines.

If you are an organized person your prospects for successfully sustaining a business will be substantially higher than if you are not organized.

¹ Calculations based on working 260 days per year. (5 days per week X 50 weeks per year)