5 Key Steps to Build Your Side Hustle



Here’s how to shift your mindset and your focus to finally start that dream side hustle.

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This article is an excerpt from Cathy Heller’s new book, Don’t Keep Your Day Job: How to Turn Your Passion Into Your Career.

You don’t need to know how you’ll achieve your dream. No one ever does! But you do need to build a runway. As we continue our lives, we should continually open ourselves to new possibilities, new projects, and even new places. Our wildest dreams could be waiting for us in the next decade.

Here are the five steps to take in order to get there.

1. Experiment

We all have amazing talents to share with the world, but in order to achieve greatness, we have to be willing to allow ourselves to experiment without being perfect.

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There are one or two (or ten!) areas where you could dedicate time and attention, and then create something spectacular to share with the world. Where are these areas? The first step to finding them is through play. Ask yourself: *Where can I have some fun?* Then make a mediocre version of something—whether it's a photoshoot or book club or computer program. We have to take the first step, wobbling like a baby giraffe, before we can learn why and how and for whom to keep walking.

So many people pause because they're not certain what they're supposed to do. Is it painting or pottery or making pies? They try to think their way around the trial and error, the pain and the disappointment while robbing themselves of the incredible experiences that actually direct them where to go on their path. So experiment!

2. Educate

Knowledge is power, and self-education is another godsend of the digital age.

Any course – in any format, on any timeline! – is accessible to you right now. Courses range in price, with endless affordable options as well as free YouTube channels. In-person workshops are also incredible resources to take your work out into the wild and meet other explorers on a similar path. There are also endless Facebook groups, podcasts, and books where you can learn what others are already doing in the space you're attracted to.

This learning period is often unsexy. But it’s necessary. A listener of my podcast, a woman named Kathy, once wrote to tell me about how she began her own education process. “I suffered with an eating disorder, anxiety, and depression for 15 years, and found exercise as a way to reduce anxiety,” she told me. “I finally decided to get my personal trainer certification and I’ve been enjoying helping family and friends. Then I went on to get a fitness nutrition certification to gain more knowledge of my love of nutrition.” Now she’s enrolled in a nutrition school, so she can become a health coach.

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Each step paves the way to the next, so it is not enough to learn and study. You must also create and implement each lesson as you go. What you’re taught is never the only method, but hints at one possible approach. Never stop learning.

3. Evaluate

After starting a project and learning as much as you can, it is time to test how your product or service fits your particular market.

Testing a product or idea online is simple and inexpensive. Use Facebook ads, Google surveys, Instagram polls, and email lists. It is best to start testing responses as soon as possible so that you can continue to evolve your product for a real audience.

The best sign that you’re on the right track is excitement. People will start to share a product or service they love with their friends or family for free. Word-of-mouth marketing is the gold standard in product testing, but it takes time to happen. You must be willing to commit to iteration as much as praise.

This is how furniture designer Patrick Cain began. “I did something that no other self-respecting artist would do,” he told me: He then started to sell his pieces at the Rose Bowl Flea Market, which gave him an opportunity to get free market testing. He saw firsthand how people were responding to his work.

4. Envision

Wake up every morning and embody the person that you’re on the road to becoming. Imagine taking on the day as the photographer or screenwriter or meditation coach that you’re training to be, even if you still head to the office at 9 a.m. You’ll be amazed that when you start to believe and embody this new persona, then others believe it too. They’ll call you a baker before the bakeshop opens, and an athlete before you step on the court.

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Of course, there were days when you’ll feel like a total impostor—but remember that it’s part of the process. Mike Lewis, creator of the brand When to Jump, felt this acutely while he still worked at his corporate job. But one evening, when a stranger at a dinner party asked him what he did for a living, he spoke confidently of his new identity: He said he’s an entrepreneur building a new kind of community. The stranger handed him a card that read “Arianna Huffington” and said, “We’d love to partner with you.”

It was the beginning of a life-changing deal. And it all happened because he envisioned his new self.

5. Execute

You’ve experimented with some ideas, educated yourself on

technique, evaluated the marketplace, and envisioned a new reality. Now it is time to execute.

This takes dedication and time—but I *know* there are pockets of time that you could use to create a business doing something you enjoy! Build something and then practice charging people for it. Make dollar one. Make that first sale. Notice how that feels to you. It may sound strange, but making money is a huge mental block for people. To build a real business, you must get accustomed to people paying for your service, product, or content.

You'll also need to focus on your own finances. Set up a plan that allows you to slowly build a financial base so that you have a base of cash for when you finally ditch the regular paycheck. This could be as simple as creating a direct deposit into a savings account or skipping the daily $5 coffee. Or, it could be as transformative as moving into a different full-time job—one that leaves you more time and mental energy to focus on your side hustle.

Don't sideline your side hustle dreams

Ultimately, these five steps should prepare you to confidently build a side hustle that dances with potential. Your foundation is built, but that doesn't mean taking the leap comes without fear. The key is to cushion the landing with the knowledge that you have a product or service that people want, the infrastructure to build a long-lasting business, and a bank of great work already out there living and breathing.

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