

# Creating a Premiere Design Business

*Roundtable Discussion with Lisa Kahn, ASID*

## Beginning Designers:

### The basics

#### Work for another firm first.

- It's a great way to see both how to handle clients, projects, work flow, etc. and also
- A way to identify what doesn't work (and then you can do it better!)

#### Understand Basic Business Principles

- Close a sale
- Negotiate a contract
- Write even a simple business plan to chart your course
- Write business goals, review them and update them
- Make and stick to a budget
- Read and understand financial reports
- Market your firm, or to hire someone who will help you
- Network and make contacts for yourself and the firm
- Hire and build a team
- Fire people - it happens!
- Gain a working understanding of things you might not be familiar with, like
  - Sales Tax Collection and Reporting
  - Liability Insurance

#### Have a Sense of Adventure

- This is going to be fun and you will love it, but it's also scary at times.

#### Believe in What You are Doing

- You must believe that you are helping people live better lives --
- The STRESS involved in being sandwiched in between clients, vendors and subcontractors is crazy at times.
- It takes a firm conviction that you ARE making a difference to keep you working at it every day.

#### Know Your Strengths; Staff Your Weaknesses

- One way to find out: StrengthsFinders 2.0
- Find out what your gifts and strengths are and

- Identify what kind of people you need to surround yourself with to succeed

### Tips for Designers Starting Out:

- Interior Design is a BUSINESS.
  - 80-90% of your time: basic business operations
  - 10-20% actually doing design work.
- DO NOT SKIP WORKING FOR SOMEONE ELSE FIRST
  - I know designers who decided to just make a go of it from the start and they spend most of their career catching up and trying to get a handle on things.
  - This is a **critical** step if you want to be truly successful.
- Find someone you respect in the field and endear yourself to them.
  - **Pay it forward**, be kind, helpful and supportive and then put them on speed-dial.
  - **You will need someone to talk to** and to ask advice from time to time. Social Media platforms can also be good for this -- Facebook groups, Google + circles, Twitter Chats, LinkedIn Groups.
  - **Organizations like ASID or WithIt** can also be good for this. Find a venue that works for you!
- Believe in yourself and they will come -- do not discount the power of positive thinking and the magnetics of the Universe!

### Designer Already in the Business

- Work ON the business:
  - The Nibbled To Death by Ducks Syndrome:
    - revisit the definition of your Ideal Client -- update it if needed.
    - Stick to it. It's easy in hard financial and economic times to take non-ideal clients and projects. I have done this many times and end up hating myself later. The right clients are out there -- have a schedule that is open to them!
  - The beauty of saying NO:
    - can you walk away from a project or client that doesn't fit?
    - Making room for projects that do fit
- Live Your Life
  - Balance of work/family/self
    - Take care of yourself first, so you can take care of your family and business.
  - Reclaim your inspiration --
    - Recommended: The Artist's Way
    - Invest in your inner creative.
    - Try to remember what it is you really love about this business, and get back to doing that.
- Investigate New Opportunities
  - The best way to attract new opportunities
    - Shine where you are first

- Share all you can, helping those around you
- Ask for help and contacts
- Don't lose heart - remain positive and open
- Use Social Media to gain contacts, exposure & opportunities you might not have had access to before.
- Mentoring
- Possible areas for growth:
  - Designing a line for a manufacturer
  - Consulting with manufacturers on their design
  - Open an e-commerce shop
  - Write a book
  - Start a blog

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