

Michele Christensen's “5 Essential Skills for Solopreneur Success” (PDF Version)



What Skills do you need to build a successful solopreneur business?

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I teach people how to have a profitable, sustainable, and enjoyable solopreneur business!

Welcome and thanks for purchasing the pdf version of my 5 day e-course on the “5 Essential Skills for Solopreneur Success.” In addition to all the content in the free version of the course, this pdf version contains additional examples and exercises as well as bonus content explaining the 5 skills. By the end of the course, you'll know what the 5 skills you need for solopreneur success are and have good idea of your strengths and challenges. The 5 skills presented in this course are CEO level skills that are important for managing your business as a business owner. There are numerous other skills that a solopreneur might need, but those tend to be more related to day-to-day functions and can be acquired if the CEO level skills are in place

If you've found an error or want to suggest something to be included in upcoming versions, please [contact me](#).

Michele

Skill Number 1: Strategic Thinking

The first skill you need to have as a solopreneur business owner is strategic thinking, and it's first because it's the single most important skill a business owner can have.

Strategic thinking is a broad topic, but at a basic level it means some combination of the following:

- know what your goals are and how you plan to get there
- know what activities will get you to your goal
- know why you do every single task you do and how it fits into your strategic plan
- having a plan for how to get each project done before you start it

We wear so many hats as solopreneurs that we often decide what to work on by the “squeaky wheel” method. This may keep you afloat, but it generally doesn't help you to build a sustainable business with long-term growth. If you want to be more than just afloat, you have to step back and do some strategic thinking.

Ultimately, business is about profit. Without profit you are doing volunteer work or running a non-profit. Both of these are valuable, worthwhile activities, but the defining feature of a business is that it is set up to make a profit. The beautiful thing is that you can make a profit and have customers that are happy to have paid you and better off for having done business with you. Business doesn't have to be a win-lose situation, and in fact I think this thinking will lead you to failure. Always strive for the win-win-win in your business – you win, the customer wins and the world becomes just a little bit better because of your work.

So all of your strategic thinking must ultimately answer one question:

How will this activity contribute to profits?

One of the tricky things is that there are a lot of intermediate steps to making a

profit, so some of your strategy may be geared toward getting these steps in place which ultimately lead to profit.

Example 1.1 -

I believe almost all businesses should have an e-newsletter, but setting up and merely sending a newsletter will not earn you money (unless you sell subscriptions). The strategy behind a newsletter could fill a book in itself, but basically a newsletter is a fundamental tool in building a community of people who are interested in what you have to offer and given the right opportunity may buy in the future. Thus a newsletter in and of itself doesn't add to profit, but it lays a foundation for making a profit in the future.

Unless you are already practicing strategic thinking, there are probably at least a few activities you do in your business that you don't have a clear purpose for. There's so much information, good and bad, about running your business that you may have gotten a message that you "have to" do something so you started doing it without knowing why. As of today, I invite you to stop doing anything because you "have to" or "fill-in-the-name told me to." Even if an expert is doing some technique, it doesn't mean that technique has a place in your business.

Exercise 1A -

Identify at least 3 activities that you are doing that you don't have a clear purpose for. Once you've found those activities, write at least 20 on each words explaining why you are doing it and how it will contribute to your profits. Read Examples 2 and 3 for a samples of how this is done. If you are having trouble finding something, here are some questions that may help:

- Why are you Tweeting/using Facebook/on LinkedIn/on YouTube, etc?
- If you have a printed brochure, what it the purpose?
- If you speak, advertise, exhibit at trade shows, etc what is the purpose?

- What is the purpose of your website?
- Why do you blog?
- If you go to in-person networking events, what is the purpose?

If you've never taken the time to ask and answer these questions, you may be thinking something like “Everyone knows you need to do that,” but that's not a valid reason to do something. Everything you do should have a desired, measurable outcome. If you find an activity that you don't have a clear purpose for, I invite you to do some research and decide why you are continuing to do it. If you really can't find a purpose, then consider stopping the activity and putting the time toward something for which there is a clear purpose. When deciding your strategy for an activity, make sure you consider the process by which people become paying customers. How will this activity help them along that process?

Once you've done the exercise, pick one activity you analyzed and tell me about it via sending me a [tweet](#) or posting it on my [Facebook page](#).

Example 1.2 -

When I first started my business, I put up a basic “brochure” website because I didn't know that a website could be anything else. My website now has 3 main purposes:

1. to show up prominently in the searches done by people who want what I have to offer
2. to give visitors who are not ready to buy a way to stay in touch and learn about me via signing up for email updates from me
3. to give visitors who are ready to buy a way to do so from their computer

For the first purpose, I deliberately use keywords in everything I add to the site and practice good SEO (search engine optimization). It's important though, not to overestimate the importance of SEO. Don't sacrifice quality to cram keywords into

your content.

For the second purpose, I have multiple opportunities to sign up to my newsletter prominently placed on the site. There's an “about” page for people to read my story, basic information such as how to contact me and my blog which gives people the ability to see what I have to say over a long period of time.

For the third purpose, I have items for sale with on my site. Don't make it hard for people to buy!

Example 1.3 -

“Karen” is a parenting coach whose practice is slowly building as she tries various ways of meeting new clients. Wanting to jump start her success, she decides to start Tweeting to get more clients. Of course, Twitter can be a tool in building your business, but rarely if ever will someone read a single tweet and make a purchase from a business like hers. Without a clear strategy, her tweeting would only waste time.

So what might a basic Twitter strategy be for Karen?

- First, find out if her ideal clients are even on Twitter. With over 640 Million users, it's likely they are but she should still make sure.
- Connect with potential clients by searching for things they might be tweeting such as “child,” “children,” “parenting,” “stay at home mom,” etc. She could follow the people tweeting these topics and some portion of them will follow back.
- Connect with other people in her industry and related fields that might be sources of information, referrals or joint ventures.
- She could tweet nuggets of information that help to establish that she knows her field. Twitter is one way potential clients might vet her before hiring her.
- Tweet using the keywords in her industry so that other people and search

engines find her.

- Tweet her blog posts and website updates so that more people visit her site and could become clients or email subscribers.
- She could tweet tidbits about her day so people get an idea of what she does with her clients.
- She could tweet things that help people to get to know her because anyone who might hire her would want to like her and feel a kinship with her as well.

This list could easily go on and on, and if you asked 10 different people to craft a strategy for her you'd get 10 different answers. The bottom line is that you need a strategy. Without strategy, you could be wasting a lot of time without getting any results and you could even be hurting yourself.

Skill Number 2: How to measure if your efforts are working

The first skill you need for your success is strategic thinking, which is all about what to do, why to do it and how to do it in order to succeed and make profits. Once you have done some strategic planning, you'll know the answer to one of the most important questions you can ask about anything you do:

Why?

If you know why you are doing something, you have the beginning of what you need to measure if it's working. Here are some examples:

- If the purpose of your website is selling your hand-made artwork, then you can set some numeric goals to tell you how you are doing on this project.
- If the purpose of your Facebook fan page is to get people to opt-in to your newsletter, you can measure how many new people you get each month. As you learn and revise your strategy, you can see if the number goes up or down each month.
- If the purpose of your twitter activity is to drive traffic to your website, you can see how much traffic is generated in a month.

Do you see some possibilities for measuring how effective your activities are? It's important to start with a baseline, i.e. where you are at today, before you make any changes. You can then see how a specific activity works or doesn't work.

Numeric or quantitative goals can be good because it's very clear if you are making that goal or not. Often though, it's enough to say you want a number or a percentage to simply grow each month.

Example 2.1 -

As I mentioned in a previous example, I think that one of the biggest assets a business can have is a list of people who have subscribed to an email newsletter.

Thus, I put a lot of effort into building my subscriber list. I measure my results in 2 ways. First, I look at my total number of subscribers and have a goal that it grows every week. Second, when I get new subscribers I always look at where they came from so I know which of my efforts are working.

Exercise 2A -

The assignment for this lesson is to look at one of your general goals and create a way to measure it. Even if you don't know what technology to use in order to get the data you want, at least define what would help you measure your performance so you can get help when you are ready. By having a clear picture of exactly what you need you'll be able to hire someone and have a good chance of getting exactly what you asked for.

Once you've done this assignment, tell me what you are going to measure and how by sending me a [tweet](#) or posting it on my [Facebook page](#).

One of the biggest places to waste time in your business is on social media. Of course, you can do great things for your business on social media sites, but spending too much time or using social media without a plan can be a huge time suck. That's why the next exercise is included in this section.

Exercise 2B -

Pick one goal of your business that you hope to further by using social media and find one measurement to track your progress. As with the first exercise, even if you don't know what technology to use to get the data you need you'll still benefit from this exercise whether you hire the task out or find what you need on your own.

Tell me about what you've decided to start measuring in a [tweet](#) or post it on my [Facebook page](#).

Skill Number 3 - Time and task management

The first two skills covered what to do, and how to tell if it's working. The next critical skill solopreneurs must master in order to be successful is time and task management. Some people may argue that these are two separate skills, but I find they are so interrelated that it's hard to say exactly where to separate them. The ultimate goal of good time and task management is to have the knowledge that you are working on the best possible thing right now and that nothing has been overlooked or forgotten. This knowledge alone will eliminate a lot of stress and make you more productive.

To get to this level of clarity and freedom, you need two things:

1. A system for managing your time and tasks that is as robust as you need it to be to handle your business and your life, but no more complex than it has to be
2. An ongoing commitment to using that system consistently

Your system consists not only of the tools you use but also how they work together and your rules for using them. Your tools may consist of any of the following: calendar, to-do list, some way to track projects, pre-set priorities, guidelines, files, alarms, notepads, sticky notes, index cards, smartphone, etc. It's important to have just one place where each item can go (e.g. all unpaid bills are always in just one place). It's also important to have a way to stay on top of things as they move through your system. For example, an invitation may involve you deciding if you can attend, registering, making travel arrangements, etc. I'm a big fan of constant improvement of my system and I invite you to change your system whenever it suits you.

Once you have a system, it's critically important to use your system consistently. Even if you have the best system for yourself that could possibly exist, it's usefulness plummets if you use it less than 100% of the time. The obvious problem is missed appointments or tasks, but the less obvious and more severe problem is the undercurrent of stress that comes from never knowing if you're on top of all that you need to be or if you are working on the best thing right now.

This uncertainty will hinder your ability to use your unique brilliance by draining your mental energy and using valuable mental capacity by keeping track of things better kept in a system. Human brains are capable of great things, but are lousy at keeping lists. Even old-school pen and paper can be better.

Example 3.1 -

I'm a huge fan of "GTD," the productivity system described in the book "[Getting Things Done](#)." A few of my favorite points in that system are:

- Put tasks, i.e. small physical actions you can take now, on your to-do list not big, undefined projects. For example, try "Make a list of all assets" not "Plan retirement."
- Capture everything in your system. Things we don't write down or have a way to hang on to tend to bounce around in our heads and cause stress.
- Process new items that you get (emails, phone messages, requests, etc) regularly. That doesn't mean you have to do them right away, but make a decision about what to do with them right away.

Exercise 3A -

The assignment for this exercise is to look for a spot in your system where things tend to leak, i.e. you lose track of them or forget to do them. This could be something like mail being put in your car and never handled, appointments that you make on the fly and don't put in your calendar or paperwork for a specific project that tends to scatter all over. Once you've identified this area, find a solution and implement it. Don't get hung up on buying things or creating a complex answer – just find a simple, preferably free fix and do it.

When you've created your solution, comment on my [Facebook page](#) or send me a [tweet](#) telling me about the headaches you'll save yourself.

Exercise 3B -

If you don't already have a cohesive system for time and task management, you probably have lots of loose thoughts, to-do items, ideas, etc bouncing around in your head. This is a poor use of your amazing brain power! If you're bogged down keeping lists in your brain, you're not as free to be creative and use your knowledge to help others. This exercise will help you clear your mind and should be repeated regularly until you are in the habit of capturing all these items. Grab a piece of paper or open a document on your computer. Set aside at least 10 minutes and start writing down everything that's on your mind that is not or may not be recorded elsewhere. The process may be slow at first, but stay with it for the allotted time.

Once the activity is done, you have an inventory of things that tend to leak out of your time and task management system. Now is a perfect time to start plugging those leaks.

Once you've done this exercise, tell me some of the things you got written down that weren't recorded before by sending me a [tweet](#) or by leaving me a [Facebook](#) comment.

Skill Number 4 – Marketing

The first three skills are focused on helping you manage your work flow. Once you've mastered that, the next essential skill is marketing. Often new solopreneurs are surprised to learn that in most solopreneur businesses, marketing is as critical to business success as the actual product or service being sold.

Many people have gotten a really bad impression of marketing. They think it's about manipulation, high-pressure sales tactics or hype. Of course, some businesses use those tactics, but it's not necessary or desirable for solopreneurs. Marketing for heart-centered business owners should be about showing the benefits of your product in the best possible way and making it easy for those people for whom you're a good fit to say a big, resounding “YES” to you.

Marketing your business includes some or all of the following, plus a whole lot more:

- sales
- copy writing
- social media
- speaking
- SEO (search engine optimization)
- in-person networking
- describing what you do

I myself have undergone a huge shift in this area. As recently as early 2010, if you had asked me if I'd rather have dental work or a sales conversation, I would have picked the dentist. Knowing this was my weak spot, I invested in a lot of training and surrounded myself with people who have an ethical, service-oriented approach to marketing. As a result, I now enjoy sales conversations and really enjoy marketing my business. I believe the same is possible for you!

Many people start their solopreneur business out of passion for what they do and a desire to help people. From the outside, it seems like all you have to do is be

really good at what you do, slap up a website (read “online brochure”), and print some business cards. Then, since everybody you work with loves you so much your phone will ring off the hook, right? If you've had your business more than a few months, you already know this isn't true. Marketing is almost as important as the product or service you sell. If you are using your unique brilliance to serve others, marketing is your obligation to the people you serve. If they can't find you, don't know how you can help them or don't know how to say “YES!” to you, you can't help them.

Example 4.1 -

Many knowledge entrepreneurs, such as coaches and consultants, make the mistake of giving clients only one entry into their community. Rarely will you meet someone who is ready to sign up for one-on-one work right off the bat. More often, they'll want to hang around in your community with little or no risk and see if you're a good fit. To accommodate this, you'll want to have lots of free ways for people to get to know you (newsletter, social media, speaking engagements, blog, etc) as well as products they can buy to test you out at a lower price points.

Exercise 4A -

The first assignment for this skill is to polish your elevator pitch. Your elevator pitch is how you can quickly answer the “What do you do?” question (as if you only have the length of time an elevator ride takes). It's a question we get asked all the time, in both business and personal settings, and a good answer can be invaluable in communicating how you serve people.

Since this section covers marketing, I invite you to do a little pitching on my [Facebook page](#). Come on over and share your elevator pitch and a link to your site. Be sure to mention that you're sharing your homework from this course.

Exercise 4B -

Since marketing is such a huge factor in the success of your solopreneur business, there is a second assignment for this skill. This exercise will help you learn the difference between features and benefits which will help you across all of your marketing platform. Features are characteristics of your product or service, and benefits are what the client gains. For example, a feature of this report is that it is in pdf format. A benefit of this report being in pdf format is that it will help you acquire the skills you need to have a thriving, profitable business anywhere you want to read it. Your clients and customers are much more concerned with the benefits, i.e. what will they get than they are with features, although features are important too.

The assignment for this section is to list all of the features you can think of for one of your products or services, and then list how this features translates into a benefit for your client. Once you have this list, keep it handy for any time you are talking or writing about your product and try to incorporate the language describing the benefits.

Tell me about one of the features of your products and services in terms of how it benefits your clients via a [tweet](#) or [Facebook](#) comment.

Skill Number 5 - technology

Technology is the 5th and final skill you must master to be a successful solopreneur. I hope you've enjoyed the lessons and that you have taken action on each lesson.

The final essential skill is technology, specifically web and communication technologies. Before we go any further, I want to assure you I'm NOT going to suggest you learn how to program in HTML or how to write your own smartphone apps (although if those things are your unique brilliance, go for it!). As the CEO of your solopreneur business, you do need to know how to manage the tech needs of your business. You have three choices:

- do it yourself
- outsource it
- a combination of DIY and outsourcing

For most people, I think the optimum is some combination of do-it-yourself and outsourcing. Most of us can't master all the technology we can benefit from using so some outsourcing is good for almost everyone. But I caution against outsourcing too much or not being informed before you outsource. I've seen a lot of people end up in bad situation because they didn't take the time to learn enough to make a good hire or a good product choice. I've also seen people with a profitable project on hold because they can't get their web person to make a simple change. Whenever you are ready to add new technology, it pays to get informed before you even think about hiring someone or buying something.

I believe it also pays to have at least some skills on your own. Being able to add a page to your site, edit an existing page or do basic photo editing like fixing red-eye can keep you from being attached at the hip to your tech person. Call a pro when you need to, but see which of the less-complex tasks you can handle yourself.

I'm sure there are successful businesses who use little or no technology, but they

are the exception not the rule. For the rest of us, getting a good handle on this area is imperative to our success. If you are under-utilizing technology, you could be missing a huge opportunity to have the business you desire. Even if you are the most creative, heart-centered solopreneur, there's probably room to use technology to expand your reach and serve more people.

Example 5.1 -

Aside from great email and search, Google offers many excellent free technology tools. Just a sample of the Google tools I use:

- Picasa for photo management
- Analytics for website traffic data
- Webmaster tools and Adwords for keyword research
- Calendar (comes free with Gmail account)
- Documents (free with Gmail account), a cloud-based office suite

Exercise 5A -

The assignment for this skill is to identify one area of technology that you get hung up on see if there's a way to make it more accessible to you. A basic Google search is almost always a good way to start. Send me a [tweet](#) or a [Facebook](#) comment with your plan.

That's the last of the “5 Essential Skills for Solopreneur Success.” I hope you've enjoyed it and have done the exercises. If you haven't gotten to the exercises yet, try to do it soon so this book doesn't become yet more “shelf help.” The exercises are designed to be an integral part of this work, so do your best at getting to them.

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