

Building a Business: Jenna Hidinger Photography

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to outline the methods, decision making process, and field research by which I successfully created and implemented a business plan for my portrait and wedding photography business, Jenna Hiding Photography (established March 2014). The success of this project came through personal reflection, field research, and mentorship from my advisor, Professor William Shadle. Over the course of twelve months, I was able to draw up a business plan, legally set up a limited liability corporation, learn time management, and carry out the day to day duties of a small business owner, including bookkeeping, client meetings, photography sessions, and money management.

Personal Statement

In 2012, I photographed my first wedding by myself. As a college freshman, I felt highly unqualified for the job, and though I was receiving only a few hundred dollars for my services, I knew I was in way over my head. I remember leaving the wedding thinking, “I will never, *ever* shoot another wedding on my own. There’s no way I could possibly do this for a living.”

As a self-proclaimed perfectionist, I hated putting time into a dream that I was not automatically good at. It was easy for me to look at other photographers who had been in business for years and think that my photos could never compare to what they were producing. I never realized all of the blood, sweat, and tears that accompany a dream of enormous magnitude. No one is lucky enough to have his or her dream handed over to him or her on a silver platter. Everyone works hard to attain seemingly unreachable goals and dreams, and though I realize that now, I definitely did not when I was first starting out. There have been many moments in the last few years of my life that have pushed me toward my dream of becoming a portrait and wedding photographer; some were small, some big – some successes, some failures – some directly and some indirectly related to photography. However, all of these moments have cultivated a spirit of perseverance that has allowed me to keep pursuing my dream.

When it comes down to the core, photography is about using the camera as a tool to connect with people, which has been a driving force behind my dream. I love getting to the foundation of who a person is, and, more importantly, capturing who they are in a portrait. I firmly believe that my opportunity to travel has given me a love for all of the different cultures and people around me.

In May of 2012, I traveled with Robert Morris University to Ireland for a “photography abroad” class. It was the perfect opportunity of meeting people from the U.S. with similar interests and meeting people from Ireland with interesting stories, customs, and heritage. Though a lot of the class complained about having to haul their cameras with them everywhere, I didn’t mind one bit. Every photo from the trip tells a story and captures a moment that I can never have back, and I wouldn’t trade that for anything. If anything, the trip confirmed, and catapulted, my love and desire to pursue photography, and gave me a network of aspiring photographers my age to keep me motivated.

In contrast to Ireland, in July of 2011, just ten months earlier, I had the opportunity to travel to Kenya on a mission trip. After traveling to Ireland, I regret not bringing the best camera I owned at the time with me to Kenya. I missed out on capturing an unending amount of beautiful personalities and connecting with the people on a more personal level. However, I did learn the value of a dream while I got to know the people I encountered.

For me, photography has never been about a camera. It started with a desire to show people the beauty they hold. I’ve come to realize that photography is about more than just me – it’s about showing people around me the good that I see. There’s no way I can show anyone any good if I’m caught up in the trap of perfection. The best way for me to serve others is to give up my own preconceived ideas, and dream with other people in mind.

Decision Making: Starting a Business

With twenty-three million small businesses operating within the United States alone, business literature is in high demand among those currently operating or seeking to operate a business (SBA, n.d.). Countless books have been written regarding all areas of business development, on topics ranging from business entities to financial planning to developing a business plan, for businesses ranging from the food industry to creative arts, to everything in between. Though there are many important avenues to take into consideration when beginning a business, the most important and basic elements include deciding to become a business, choosing an entity, reporting taxes, and writing a business plan. All of these items will allow a business owner to come to the market prepared to face numerous situations he or she encounters, and will allow a business owner to not only run an effective business, but to understand *why* the business she runs is successful and effective.

Deciding to Become a Business

Much of the literature (within the field of business) discusses the topic of who is fit to begin a business, and who is not. This question is highly debated. Some literature argues that anyone is capable of beginning a business, such as the article *Who is the Entrepreneur? Is the Wrong Question* (Gartner, 1989). Gartner argues that there is no set of personality traits that makes an individual more inclined to begin a business. He asserts that many people research the wrong type of material when it comes to the question “Who is the entrepreneur?” Researchers look at who an entrepreneur is, instead of what the entrepreneur does that causes him or her to start the business in the first place. Many people start businesses because they have a product or service that they enjoy selling or performing that other people are willing to buy. Gartner concludes that one does not need to have certain characteristics to be paid to do what they love. It takes a passion for what a person is offering to the world to be successful and to ultimately start a business (1989).

Dave Ramsey’s *Entreleadership* supports Gartner’s answer to the question, “Who is the entrepreneur?” Ramsey’s book gives leadership and entrepreneurship advice (hence the name “entreleadership”) for anyone who has a passion for a product or service he or she offers. He encourages individuals to build a business around their passion, because if a person is not passionate about her business, her business will ultimately fail (Ramsey, 2011). From both Gartner and Ramsey’s literature, one can conclude that though there is no set of characteristics that a person must possess to start a business, passion is absolutely key. Without a love for what an individual is producing or servicing to others, there will be no drive for success. Thus, once a person’s passion is established, she must move on to the next important piece of becoming a business: choosing a business entity.

Choosing an Entity

The next important step any potential business owner must take is to decide what type of business he or she will operate. There are four main types of legal entities an individual operating within the United States can begin. These include a Sole Proprietorship, a Limited Liability Corporation (LLC), a Partnership, and a Corporation. A person can choose what type of business he or she wants to operate based on his or her individual needs.

For example, Kamoroff explains that most individuals begin their business as a sole proprietorship (Kamoroff, 25). Any person who completes business transactions is automatically a sole proprietor. This is the simplest way to set up a business, and it is a good fit for anyone who is just getting started on his or her own. However, there are a few mentionable disadvantages regarding the formation of a sole proprietorship. Nova Publishing Company's *Everything You Need to Know to Start a Limited Liability Corporation* explains that sole proprietors could face have difficulty receiving loans (Nova Publishing, 2). Many sole proprietors lack "collateral to obtain a loan, and the owner must mortgage his or her house or other personal assets to obtain the loan" (Nova, 2). This could put the owner's well-being, as well as the owner's family's well-being, on the line.

LLC's can be thought of as a step up from a sole proprietorship. Many individuals who begin as sole proprietors become LLC's because of the "greater liability protection" (Kamoroff, 25). Limited liability companies allow a business to become its own entity, with its own employee identification number (EIN), separating the business from the person who is running the business. To illustrate, if someone were to sue an LLC, the company could only be sued for its current assets – not for the personal assets of the individual who owns the LLC. In contrast, if a person is sued as a sole proprietorship, all of her business AND personal assets are on the line in a court of law.

Partnerships can be run one of three ways: as a sole proprietorship, as an LLC, or as a corporation. Like a sole proprietorship, if the partners do not legally become an LLC or a corporation, they are a partnership by default (Kamoroff, 25). However, partnerships have the ability to become an LLC or corporation (with increased liability), just like a sole proprietorship. In Nova Publishing Company it states a few important disadvantages of being a part of a partnership. One of the most important disadvantages to take into consideration is the potential of the business to have a conflict of interest. In addition, when a partnership is set up like a sole proprietorship, each partner is equally responsible for the success (or failure) of the company (Nova, 3). In other words, if one person from the partnership bails, the other person is liable for any outstanding debt or assets.

The last form of business entity is the corporation. This is the largest and most legally binding type of business that a person can operate (Nova, 4). There are two types of corporations that a person can form: an c-corporation and a s-corporation. The c-corporation is the larger entity of the two, consisting of shareholders, directors, and officers. Unlike those of an s-corporation, shareholders of a c-corporation "do not contribute to the direct management of the corporation" (Nova, 3). S-corporations, however, "must have more than 75 shareholders" (Nova, 5), who "contribute to the direct management of the corporation" (Nova, 5). Corporations are generally for larger businesses, such as Walmart and McDonalds, but can also include smaller chains and franchises. One of the disadvantages of forming a corporation is the "degree of individual control lost" (Nova, 5). Anyone sitting on a corporation's board has the power to control the management of the corporation, which could jeopardize the owner's control of the organization.

It is important to have a clear understanding of each type of entity before deciding what type a business owner will operate in. While each has pros and cons, it is up to the business owner to decide what features she must have, and what features she can live

without. Because of the extra legal protection provided by the Limited Liability Corporation, I decided to make my business an LLC.

Reporting Taxes

After an individual chooses the entity in which he or she wishes to operate as, he or she must figure out how the business will be taxed. Different entities are held to different tax regulations. Because sole proprietorships and LLC's are the most likely candidates for a small time business owner to operate, those will be the focus for the purposes of this section.

Limited Liability Corporations are held to more severe tax regulations than a sole proprietorship. An LLC can be taxed as a sole proprietorship, as a partnership, or as a corporation. Most individuals operating their own business will be taxed as a sole proprietorship unless they are part of a partnership. LLC's pay taxes based on the calendar year, not on a fiscal year, which means the tax year is from January 1 to December 31. Yearly taxes, filed in April, must consist of IRS Form 1040-SS and a Schedule C. Along with paying yearly taxes, LLC's must pay monthly sales tax, which is governed by the state in which the LLC is operated, and quarterly taxes, or estimated income tax. Quarterly taxes can be paid using "vouchers from IRS Form 1040-ES" (Nova, 30). Depending on the gross income of an LLC, estimated income tax can also be paid on a monthly or yearly basis.

Sole proprietorships must pay yearly taxes in April and must report any income on their personal tax returns; partnerships that are not an LLC or corporation must do the same. Sole proprietors must also collect sales tax and pay estimated income tax on a monthly, quarterly, or yearly basis. Many individuals continue operating regardless of the risks inherent in this legal form as a sole proprietorship, without incorporating to an LLC because of the additional form (Schedule C) that must be filled out at the time of filing.

One piece of information that surprises individuals beginning their own business is the amount of taxes that must be paid as a self-employed individual. As a W-2 employee, the company that a person works for matches the amount of federal tax, for Social Security and Medicare, that each employee is required to pay; thus, fifty percent is paid by the employee and fifty percent is paid by the employer. Self-employed individuals are required to pay one hundred percent of the federal tax, which must be calculated on an individual's income tax statement (ZenBlog, 2013).

Writing a Business Plan

Aside from taxes, one of the most daunting parts for any business owner, especially one in the creative arts, is writing a business plan. Fortunately, business literature has exploded within the last decade with a large variety of books and articles to aid any business owner in writing a concrete plan. There are even books written specifically to aid creative business owners in writing a plan. Jim Horan, a creative business owner herself, wrote a book in 2004 titled *The One Page Business Plan for the Creative Entrepreneur*. In this book, Horan contends that because creative businesses are always changing and growing, they should have a document that is constantly changing and growing, too. She describes the business plan as a living document that is frequently tweaked and revised to reflect a business owner's current pricing, driving forces, and needs of the target market. She seeks to break down any business to its purest, most

important form to create a short document that can easily be manipulated, changed, and followed by a creative mind (Horan, 2004).

In contrast, Mike McKeever's *How to Write a Business Plan* (written in 2012) emphasizes a multipage business plan with an in-depth look into financial planning, marketing tactics, and potential for growth with the intent to attract shareholders and investors. McKeever describes a business plan as much more detailed and analytical than Horan's ideal plan. McKeever's ideal business plan, unlike Horan's, is very financially driven, and takes a look at "how much money you need and how you'll pay it back" (McKeever, 8). He goes on to list the benefits of writing a business plan, which helps a business owner increase funding, decide to continue in business, improve the overall idea of the business, and stay on track (McKeever, 8-9).

Whether a business owner decides to take a simple or complex approach to writing his or her plan, there are a few key elements that should be included, regardless of how long or short the plan will be. Both Horan and McKeever agree that every business owner should have a problem statement (what problem is the customer facing that the product or services will fix?), a description of the business (including what type of entity a business is, what products and services a business offers, and what the business is not), and some sort of financial prediction (McKeever, 23).

From the beginning, I knew I wanted to write a concise business plan similar to Horan's model. As a part-time business owner with other obligations, I knew I wanted a plan that would be flexible enough to accommodate quick changes, but comprehensive enough to give me a good view of my current mission, financial status, and pricing. Because of this, I decided to limit what I included in my business plan to the following: mission statement, vision statement, goals, success indicators, target market, marketing plan, cost of operation, and pricing structure. With these eight categories, I can easily modify, delete, or add information without the plan becoming being too bogged down by excessive information. As an entrepreneur who does not plan on showing my plan to investors or shareholders, I intend to use my plan as a way to measure my degree of success and to keep myself and my business on track.

It is important for any person who is considering beginning a business to go through all of these steps. After deciding to becoming a business, a person must carefully choose an entity, learn how to report taxes for that entity, and ultimately write a business plan that encompasses important information regarding the customer, financials, and products and services a business will offer. Though there are many other important factors that go into creating a successful business (such as branding, marketing, bookkeeping, etc.), these basic suggestions will help any potential business owner through the first few steps.

Though there is much literature available regarding the beginnings of a business, beginning a business involves more of an in-depth understanding of the target market group a person wishes to service, and an understanding of how the product or service a particular business offers will affect said market group. Admittedly, aside from very few sources (including Orenstein's 2010 edition of *The Photographer's Market Guide to Building Your Photography Business*) there is not much information available regarding product development (specifically photography based services and products) in correlation with the target customer group. This gap in photography-based literature creates difficulty for those seeking to begin photography businesses. However, as Jon

Acuff points out in his book *Start* (2013), many creative minds tend to jump straight into action, offering services and products, without truly knowing their market.

Business Plan: Jenna Hiding Photography 2014-2015

Mission Statement: What I do and why I do it – why do I exist?

Jenna Hiding Photography (JHP) seeks to provide an honest, energetic, and comfortable experience for consumers seeking wedding, portrait, and family photography services. JHP seeks to make every person in front of her lens feel valuable. JHP also seeks to keep packages and information simple and straightforward.

Vision Statement: Where do I want to go with this?

Jenna Hiding Photography's vision is to create photographs that represent pleasant memories for consumers in need of wedding, portrait, and family photography that are reflective of who the consumer really is, and to lay out services and products to consumers in a simple manner.

Expanding on the Vision: Why Simplicity?

JHP seeks to keep things simple. There are a million different products and services that I could offer to consumers, but we only choose a few. Why? Because, quite simply, I believe they are the very best. I don't want to overload my customers with products and services; I want to do and sell a few things with excellence. I am constantly searching for the latest and greatest products that I believe will give my consumers the most "bang for their buck."

Style Vision:

JHP seeks to produce work that brings back memories for the consumer. We strive to make photos that the consumer will be proud of, that make the subject of the photo feel important and valued. Because I wish to adhere to a similar style and produce a similar product throughout all of my photographic projects, I have chosen two guiding style words for my photographic work: *natural* and *editorial*.

Successfully taking a "natural" looking photo, in terms of style, means that the subject looks comfortable. Their expression and body language do not look forced.

Successfully taking an "editorial" looking photo, in terms of style, means that the photo tells a story or evokes a feeling for the viewer. The photo can stand on its own or in a series with other photos.

Goals:

- Short Term:
 - o Create a new website
 - *How:* I plan on using Wordpress (the cheapest, most affordable options with beautiful presentation) to create my website. I know a good bit of HTML and CSS code, so I would like to create the

- website myself. However, if time does not allow, I have a friend, Brandon Jones, who has offered to create it for me in exchange for my photography services.
- o Change logo (again) to reflect new name (as of August 2015)
 - *How:* Design a new logo myself before August of 2015. I don't want much to change about the logo, except for my name.
 - o Book 10 weddings for 2015
 - *How:* Market more to couples who are recently engaged. This may include running a special for referrals, running an ad on Facebook, and the like.
 - o Avoid renting equipment for weddings (which would save around \$250 per wedding)
 - *How:* Save up enough money to buy a Canon 70-200 f/2.8, and upgrade my Canon 50mm f/1.4 to a 50mm f/1.2.
 - o Get better at couple posing (weddings, engagements, etc.)
 - *How:* I'd like to find a couple of couples for whom I could do free shoots, just to practice posing them. Experience is always key. I'd also like to order a book or two specific to couple posing to generate some ideas.
 - o Better communication: find ways to better communicate with clients to ensure I am getting the type of photos they are looking for
 - *How:* Achieving this goal may mean revamping the questions I ask clients before the shoot, having more phone or face to face conversations with them prior to the session.
- Long Term:
- o Expand the business to include graphic elements, such as "save the dates" and "graduation announcements"
 - *How:* I would like to start putting out feelers for this sort of thing. I've had people contact me in the past asking if I could do "save the dates," graduation announcements, and Christmas cards, but I have not taken on the projects due to a lack of available time. IF I decide to go full-time, I would love to incorporate my design abilities into my business.
 - o Plan a styled shoot with a variety of vendors in the Pittsburgh area.
 - *How:* Putting together a styled shoot requires fantastic connections and communication, especially if it is a styled wedding shoot. For the shoot, we would need a dress, flowers, jewelry, a location, shoes, and a hair/makeup artist – plus, a lot of time to plan. Because I have only had one large wedding season thus far in my business, I hope to continue building relationships with vendors over the next year in hopes that I will be able to reach out and plan a successful shoot.

Keys to Success: What does success look like within my business?

From a business perspective, success looks like simplicity, honesty, and straightforwardness. I want to give consumers the best products and services up front – no strings attached – for a fair price. I believe that simplicity is king and allows me to do a few things with excellence, rather than many things only subpar.

Success looks like good communication. I really want to focus on having a set process for my communication system to make sure I am getting the photos my clients are hoping for.

In addition to good communication, success looks like calculated risk-taking and an absence of fear of failure. By nature, I am not much of a risk taker. But I've learned that some of the biggest risks I've taken (pre-thought out, of course) have been some of my greatest successes and pivotal points within my business. It is easy for me to be afraid of failure and to only do what I know will work because I do not want to fail. Failure is actually only a state of mind and a way of learning how not to do something. I want to push myself to be better and to achieve more, and that means taking calculated risks and being unafraid of failure.

Target Market: Who is my target market? (economic)

- High School Seniors: 16 to 19 years (middle class income)
- Families with children ages 1 to 12 years (middle class income)
- Newly Engaged Couples: 22 to 32 years (middle class income)

Marketing Plan: How will I reach out to my target market? (split between portraits and weddings)

- Social Media (Twitter, Facebook, Instagram)
 - High school seniors: Twitter, Instagram
 - Families and Couples: Facebook, Twitter
- Website/Blog
 - All potential customers
- Connecting with other vendors (photographers, caterers, floral designers, boutiques, etc.)
 - By sending low-resolution photos from events for FREE for commercial use

Financial: Operating costs (per month/year), yearly budget, etc.

YEARLY/MONTHLY OPERATION COST:

<i>Service Expense</i>	<i>Times per year</i>	<i>Cost per month</i>	<i>Cost per year</i>
HelloSign	12	\$15	\$180
Liability Insurance	1	\$41.67	\$500
Memory	4	\$100	\$400
Business Cards	1	\$55	\$55
Office Supplies	12	\$8.30	\$100

Website domain/hosting	1	N/A	\$25
Gas	12	\$41.60	\$500
TOTAL:	N/A	\$188.27	\$1,760

*Unfactored Expenses: Broken equipment (\$1000 deductible with liability insurance), equipment upgrades, food)

Portrait Pricing Structure

Portrait Overhead Cost (Materials):

<i>Expense</i>	<i>Approximate Cost</i>
Box	\$4
CD	\$12
Gift Print	\$2
Envelope	\$3
Postmark	\$3
Gas	\$15
CD Case	\$2
Paying Assistant	\$20
TOTAL:	\$61

Portrait Labor (Hours) :

<i>Labor</i>	<i>Hours</i>
Prep for shoot	2
Email exchange	0.5
Travel to/from shoot	1
Actual shoot	1.5
Editing/Culling	4
Packaging/sending	1
Scouting shoot	0.5
TOTAL HOURS:	10.5
TOTAL HOURS X \$20:	\$210

MATERIALS + LABOR:	\$271
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Wedding Pricing Structure

Material Cost:

<i>Expense</i>	<i>Type (Cost to Client or Owner)</i>	<i>Cost</i>
Buy coffee @initial meeting	Client	\$15
Engagement CD	Client	\$12
Engagement gift print	Client	\$4
Engagement CD case	Client	\$2
Engagement box	Client	\$4
Engagement envelope	Client	\$3
Engagement delivery	Client	\$5
Gas to engagement session	Owner	\$15
Scouting e-sess gas	Owner	\$15
Scouting wedding gas	Owner	\$30
Equipment rental (wedding)	Owner	\$250
Wedding gas	Owner	\$30
Wedding PASS gallery	Client	\$30
Snacks for wedding	Owner	\$15
Wedding CD case	Client	\$24
Wedding CD	Client	\$24
Wedding gift print	Client	\$7
Wedding box	Client	\$4
Wedding envelope	Client	\$3
Wedding delivery	Client	\$4

Paying second shooter	Owner	\$100
Starbucks for second shooter and me	Owner	\$10
TOTAL:		\$586

Labor Cost:

<i>Labor</i>	<i>Hours</i>
Initial meeting/emails/phone call	1.5
Preparing invoices/contracts	1
Scouting engagement	2
Prepping engagement	2
Shooting engagement	1.5
Designing CD	0.25
Culling/editing engagement	4
Going to post office to send e-sess	0.5
Packaging engagement	0.5
Scouting wedding	2.5
Prepping for wedding	3
Picking up/dropping off rentals	4
Shooting wedding	9.5
Driving to/from wedding	2
Culling/editing wedding	8.5
Designing wedding CD	0.25
Going to post office to send wedding	0.5
TOTAL HOURS:	43.5
TOTAL HOURS x \$35 per hour:	\$1522.5

Materials + labor hours:	\$2,108.5
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*No profit is shown in these numbers. Only the cost of materials and labors required to complete the job are factored.

Jenna Hidinger Photography Business Journal

September 3, 2014: 11:38PM

This week has been a bit challenging. There are a lot of photos to edit, and not a lot of time to do it. Packages need to go out, checks need to be deposited, bookkeeping is way behind, and in about a week and a half, I have a wedding I am a bit afraid to shoot.

So what do I do? Instead of wallowing in everything, I typed into Google, “What to do when you feel discouraged about your photography.” (Did I mention I’ve been comparing my work to a lot of other people’s work lately? Well, I have. And it’s depressing.)

After coming across a site called <http://theyoungrens.com> (Youngren, 2012), I found a blog post that had a video with a super awesome quote in it (here it is): <http://theyoungrens.com/photographers/ira-glass-on-creativity/>). I’ll also post the quote below for future reference – I think I need to print this one out and hang it everywhere.

“Nobody tells this to people who are beginners, I wish someone told me. All of us who do creative work, we get into it because we have good taste. But there is this gap. For the first couple years you make stuff, it’s just not that good. It’s trying to be good, it has potential, but it’s not. But your taste, the thing that got you into the game, is still killer. And your taste is why your work disappoints you. A lot of people never get past this phase, they quit. Most people I know who do interesting, creative work went through years of this. We know our work doesn’t have this special thing that we want it to have. We all go through this. And if you are just starting out or you are still in this phase, you gotta know its normal and the most important thing you can do is do a lot of work. Put yourself on a deadline so that every week you will finish one story. It is only by going through a volume of work that you will close that gap, and your work will be as good as your ambitions. And I took longer to figure out how to do this than anyone I’ve ever met. It’s gonna take awhile. It’s normal to take awhile. You’ve just gotta fight your way through.” – Ira Glass (Youngren, 2012)

It’s interesting. When I read this quote, it makes complete sense, because I want it so badly. I want to be a photographer. I want to shoot portraits and weddings and engagements. I want to know the perfect light to use in any situation to achieve the results I want. But then I realized something. Do I even know what I want? I think I’m more concerned with making the “right” photo than making a photo I actually love. I’m trying to figure out the best photo that can be made in a particular environment or setting, but I neglect my own creativity in the process. Why? Because I’m seeking other people’s approval. I want everyone to like my photography, because if they don’t, I can’t handle it. But why? Because I don’t even know if it’s what I want.

Running a business is emotional. I’ve second shot with an RMU alum a few times now. Every photographer I shoot with, I tend to open up to a bit concerning my insecurities with photography, because I always wonder how other people can get through them so easily. Once I asked him something about always having ideas for different weddings. How does he keep up? How can he come up with so many different

things for so many different weddings? His answer completely surprised me. He said something to the effect of, “weddings are pretty much all the same. The only things that change are the couple and wherever it’s held. I only shoot weddings right now to get some extra money; it’s not really what I want to do, so I’m not really worried about it.” What?

This guy, who is SO good at shooting weddings, doesn’t even want to shoot weddings. I don’t understand. No compendo. I don’t follow? In that moment, I had such a pang of jealousy. I want to shoot weddings. I want to be good at shooting weddings. I want to have pretty photographs of weddings. I want to know exactly how to pose a couple, how to make them comfortable in a session, how to make them look stinking awesome, and how to do it all in ten minutes or less (not really). He is so good at this already, but he doesn’t want it. In that moment, I felt like I could never have it.

If he was so good, but he didn’t even want it – imagine how good he could be if he did. I would never stand a chance. But back to the quote above – there is a gap. There’s a gap between what I want to produce and what I know how to produce. But I’m frustrated with myself because I’m not producing what I want. I’m not sure how to produce what I want, but I know what I want! It’s hard, because I feel like I try to learn as best I can – but it never seems to be enough. I suppose it takes time – but time and experience also take time. And I’m not a very patient business woman.

I think I have some critical questions that need to be answered. What do I want my business to look like? Do I want to shoot weddings, or am I just doing it for the prestige/glory/whatever? What steps can I take to improve my photography and my overall skill? How can I feel more comfortable behind the camera? How can I make people more comfortable in front of the camera?

The truth is, I want everything to be perfect right now. I hate waiting. I hate giving people something that I don’t feel is complete, like my services and my experience, which are still in the works. But ultimately, I know I have to start somewhere. I know I need to begin somewhere. And I know it takes time. I don’t like messing up, but when I do, I need to learn from my mistakes and not beat myself over the head. And also, I’m learning that sometimes it takes trying things over and over again to finally get them right. So I might not always learn straight away (like I expect to), but eventually, I will learn. And that has to be enough for right now.

September 5, 2014: 12:25AM

How to deal with having to deliver a wedding I’m not 100% satisfied with:

I’m not sure at this point. I just finished editing and exporting a wedding I wish would have gone differently... and I feel like crap. What do you do when things don’t turn out exactly how you want?

It’s not for lack of trying or preparation. It’s just that weddings can be SO unpredictable. It’s kind of insane sometimes. All of the plans can get thrown out the window. Sometimes I encounter situations while on the job that I’ve never encountered before. Sometimes things run really behind. And sometimes the couple gets tired of taking photos. All of these things happened at my last wedding.

I had really high expectations for this wedding. I'm talking really high. I just came off of an awesome wedding and was feeling great. The last one went great – great couple, great location, great end product. I felt like this next one was in the bag. Great couple (that we had taken the time to get to know beforehand by meeting with them multiple times), great location, and I was renting a gorgeous camera that I thought would solve all my problems.

Well, not much went as planned. It's not that it was a disaster, it's just that it didn't go the way I imagined it going, and I panicked. I was so well prepared, so ready to go, that I forgot to leave room for one thing: changing variables. And there are a ton of changing variables at any given wedding. I also forgot something else:

I am still learning.

I can cut other people grace, but not myself. I am pretty much the meanest person ever to myself, and I loathe it. That's a strong word. I hate that I beat myself up for failing on the first, second, or even tenth try. Sometimes it takes a while for things to click, especially when weddings are spread out for me. I practice and research in between, but experience is the ultimate teacher.

Patience is something I am learning. I have to do the "reps" to get the results. But I want a short cut. Whenever I realize I have a problem doing something (i.e., lighting a reception), I immediately want to fix it. Immediately. There is no time to waste! Even if I don't know how to, I immediately feel pressure to figure out what is wrong and fix it.

If there is one thing I'm learning in life and in business, it's that all good things take time. If you want something to be great, you have to give it time to cultivate – through experience, through hard work, and through reps.. You have to do the reps to get the result you want.

No matter how badly I want to beat myself up for missing the shot or picking the wrong location or choosing bad lighting – I have to remember, I am a human being. Not every shot I take is going to be perfect, and when I compare myself to other photographers in the field who have been shooting for much longer than I have, I am doing myself a disservice. Yes, it's good to look at other people's work to see how I can improve my own, but it's bad when I start berating my own abilities based off of someone else's work. I get so fed up with myself for doing this all the time. I cannot go one day without it happening at least five times. No joke. I need to find a way to destroy this negative thought pattern once and for all. (But of course, that will take time as well).

September 6, 2014: 12.45AM

I honestly did not think I would be writing in this journal as much as I have been. And I'm starting to notice a trend – I have the need to write in here late at night, probably because most of my self-deprecating thoughts come late at night. That's a good trend to notice.

September 7, 2014: 1:48PM

Yesterday was awesome. I second shot a wedding with Gabrielle Halle, one of my biggest mentors in the field of photography – and such a dear friend! I am so thankful I can share my struggles with her. Yesterday we talked about photographing as if no one ever told you how to do it. She told me about an article she recently read by a woman who had experienced writer’s block for years.

When she began writing, the words came easy for her, and she got famous fast. So she decided to reach out to some of the top bloggers around the world for advice – she would meet them for coffee, ask for tips, and then try to write, but she found that she wasn’t writing how SHE wanted to write anymore, because now there were rules she had to stick to; regulations she had to follow that were set up by people who were telling her what she should and shouldn’t be doing. Of course, none of those people had any ill-intent towards her, but they somehow crushed her own creative spirit. This woman couldn’t blog the way she wanted to anymore because she had over learned. She knew everything she *should* be doing, so when it came time for her to exercise her creativity, she couldn’t. That is exactly how I feel with photography right now. There are so many things you have to do to shoot a wedding, and I have a tendency to look at what everyone else is doing and see it as “the standard” that I have to hit. This photographer does this type of posing, so that must be the right way to pose. That photographer uses this kind of reception lighting, so that must be the right way to do lighting. That must be the best way. I have to learn that way so I can be successful, and if I don’t nail that photographer’s lighting, I feel as though I’ve failed.

That is where I’m at right now. I need to not feel bad about photographing in a way that pleases me. There is no right way to shoot a wedding. There is my perspective, and there is someone else’s perspective. I can experiment with different kinds of lighting, but in the end, there is going to be one that I like more – and whichever one I choose, I can’t feel bad for choosing. That just doesn’t make sense! A creative business is supposed to be about selling my perspective and creativity with the world. How am I doing that if I’m constantly trying to copy what everyone else is doing? I’m not. I am not allowing myself to say “Hey! I love that light. I love that pose. So that’s what I’m going to do.” Instead, I say, “Oh look, that photographer’s photos look like this. So that is how mine need to look too! And if I don’t do that, I’ve failed.”

That is false, and I am tired of hearing and believing the lies that are constantly fed to me within my head. I need to wake up and realize that it’s okay to like what I like. I keep thinking, though, “What if what I like is wrong?” Well, wrong by whose definition? Not everyone will like the work I produce. *My* art is *my* perspective. Period. Of course, there are certain shots that I need to get, like the first kiss, the bouquet toss, etc. – but *how* I capture those moments is what makes me different. I need to remember all of this, because it is *so* important. God uses Gabrielle in huge ways to challenge me. Praise God for her friendship!

Lesson: Do not apologize for what you enjoy creating.

September 19, 2014 – Prioritizing

Goal: get more organized, prioritize, and get more done during the day.

I currently have a problem of getting side tracked. I feel like I'm doing so many different things and spreading myself in so many different areas that I rarely accomplish any tasks I need to on a given day. Professor Shadle suggested that I not only write a "to do" list for each day of the week, but also prioritize the list so I know I'm getting what absolutely needs to get done that day done first. I did that yesterday and felt awesome. I had a ton of photos to edit, and I plugged away and got through about half of my load (which is more than I would usually get done!) Next week (hopefully on Sunday), I'd really like to sit down and make a list for each day, and prioritize the tasks for each day so I know exactly what needs to be done. It would be great to have it all written out so I don't have to worry about remembering it. That's part of the struggle, too: remembering what I need to do.

October 8, 2014: Organizing Life and Prioritizing

Today, I realized that I am not very organized. I have a lot of tasks that I complete in a week, but none of them has any pattern or rhythm. Today, I decided to make a list of all the things I do on a daily, weekly, and every-other-day basis. Then, I categorized all of the tasks into different days of the week. A few tasks (answering inquiries, recording client progress, and answering "other" emails) are daily tasks that I complete first before starting on weekly or every-other-day tasks. On Mondays, because I have class, my only other responsibility is to edit photos. On Tuesday, I have the whole day to get things done, so my added tasks are blogging a session, sending invoices, and sending model release forms and contracts to clients. Wednesday is also a long day (much like Monday), full of class, meetings, and helping with youth group. The only other task I have for that day is editing. For Thursday, I catch up on bookkeeping, put together client packages, and visit any session locations for the next week. On Fridays, I edit and drop off client packages at the post office. Saturdays are reserved for working at the Marriott, and Sundays are reserved for church and helping with youth group.

Next, I want to prioritize all tasks on each day of the week so I know what order to go about doing them in. Answering inquiries will always go first, every day. I like to get those out of the way first. Recording client progress will most likely go second to last, because a lot of the work I get done during the day has to do with the various stages my client goes through. Last will be answering "other" emails, because those usually aren't of utmost importance, and if I have to push them back a day, it's not a big deal.

October 28, 2014: Business Model Decision

One of my most recent decisions involved choosing what type of business plan to begin writing. Business plans are mainly used to attract the attention of a potential investor, so that he or she might be willing to fund a particular company's endeavors. From the get-go, I knew the purpose of my plan would **not** be to attract investors. I would rather focus on attracting customers who might invest their money in exchange for a good product. In addition, starting an on-location (non-studio) portrait and wedding photography business does not require a huge start-up cost. I initially paid some money

out of pocket for a low level DSLR (digital single lens reflex) camera, but almost everything else I've bought for my business has been funded by my business. Thus, I would much rather my business plan contain information pertinent to my target customer, as well as guiding materials for myself. I want to clearly define what my business is about, how I hope to grow, and the current products and services I offer.

October 29, 2014: Establishing Boundaries

I recently began reading a book entitled "*Boundaries: when to say yes, how to say no, to take control of your life*" by Dr. Henry Cloud (2002). Recently, my life has felt a bit out of control between school, business, a part-time job, an internship, helping with youth group, and planning a wedding (yes, I'm getting married)! All of the above are wonderful things to be a part of, but all exemplify a small problem I've had ever since I can remember: I can't say no, especially if it means passing on a great opportunity.

I've gotten myself in a lot of hot water in the past with saying "yes" to too many good opportunities, which has prevented me from being *really* extraordinary at one or two things. I'm pretty good at a lot of different things, but because my efforts are so thinly stretched, I've assumed the responsibility of being "a jack of all trades, master of none." What's a student-business owner-fiancé-internee-youth group leader to do?

Learn to say "no." I would contend that "no" is one of the most empowering words in the English language, when used correctly. When it comes down to it, choosing to say "yes" to one thing means saying "no" to another. And saying "no" to one thing means saying "yes" to another. As Dr. Henry Cloud once wrote, "Setting boundaries inevitably involves taking responsibility for your choices. You are the one who makes them. You are the one who must live with their consequences. And you are the one who may be keeping yourself from making choices you could be happy with."

November 6, 2014: Bringing Things Full Circle

It's interesting to see things come full circle. As human beings, we inherently wonder why we're placed in certain places to do certain tasks. Recently, I had a moment where things came full circle. I saw a little glimpse of why I may have been put in certain areas at certain times in my life.

For example, for the past few years I've been working with a youth group at Grace Community Church, where my fiancé is the Middle School Director. I've gotten involved in co-leading a small group of eighth grade girls, but have met a lot of different middle-school and high-school students along the way. This past year, I've had the opportunity to photograph a handful of the high school seniors for their senior portraits, which have all led to at least one or two referrals. It's crazy how something so small like serving at church can open so many doors!

In addition, I've received a lot of inquiries from students at Eden Christian Academy, the school I attended for fifteen years. My sister, who is a sophomore, has been a huge help in talking me up to the seniors and soon-to-be seniors. In addition, while I was attending Eden, I made a point to reach out to the younger grades. I knew how it felt to be the little seventh grader who was afraid of talking to the big, intimidating seniors. Now, those kids whom I reached out to are booking me for their senior portraits.

They still mention how comfortable I made them feel when I was a senior and they were a seventh grader, which is why they booked me for their portraits. They wanted a comfortable experience. It's so cool to see those actions four or five years ago still impacting how they perceive me, and now, how they perceive my business.

If there is anything I've learned in the past year, it's that people who trust you will do business with you. I've seen it time and time again: reputation always wins out. Someone could be the best photographer in the world with the most beautiful portfolio, but if they are rude to their customers, their customers will go somewhere else. I don't say this to "toot my own horn" in the least; I just think it's crazy to see how God has used situations in the past to prepare me for what I'm doing right now. I am so thankful He has given me the ability to work with these kids again.

November 10, 2014 – Search for Perfection

"By releasing the self-assigned pressure of perfection, you will release the corresponding anxiety and allow yourself to perform up to your abilities." – Carolyn L. Rubenstein (2010).

Much of my photographic career (and business) has been based on a search for perfection. Up until very recently, I rarely had a session where I felt good at all afterwards. Usually, I emotionally beat myself up with comments like: I should have done that better. I can't believe I didn't use more of that location. The light in that one spot was awful, why would I even go there? Who do I think I am to be able to do this? How will other photographers view my work? There is nothing unique about what I produce - I should just stop altogether. I've come to realize that "success" to me is perfection. But much like the quote above pointed out, always having to have perfection produces an enormous amount of anxiety. Carolyn, the author of the article, used a personal story to illustrate the quote. Because it's so good, I had to include it here:

"During my freshman year at Duke, I failed my first two exams. I had prepared so much for both exams and can still remember the moment I called my mom after getting an F on my chemistry exam. I thought that I didn't belong at Duke, that I wasn't good enough. Ultimately, I graduated from Duke summa cum laude, and I credit those two exams for my academic success. I had only known the situation of being "perfect" prior to college, and those tests served as my wakeup call. Perfect was no longer what I wanted. Instead, my first goal distilled into simply passing my exams. When the threat of perfection was lifted, so was the pressure and anxiety I felt while preparing for and taking exams. I also reexamined my expectations. What did I want in the end, just good grades? No, I wanted to become a psychologist. I had a goal and I was going after it" (Rubenstein, 2010).

Talk about powerful. Carolyn credits her success to her failures. Why can't I do the same? Another part of my quest to perfection is comparison of my work to others' work. If I see a gorgeous photo taken by someone I know (especially someone who is on a similar photography level to me), I instantly feel terrible. Why didn't I take that photo? Why haven't I done something like that recently? Well, because I wasn't the photographer for that shoot. There is no way I could have taken that exact photo, because I wasn't there when it was taken. And I'm not that photographer. We both have different viewpoints.

I'm tired of feeling bad. I'm tired of never feeling good enough, and of constantly comparing my work to others and always seeming to come up short. I know it's not about them; it's about me. I can control how I respond and react to any given situation, so it's my responsibility to have my emotions in check.

November 17, 2014 – The Week I Wanted to Quit

Life has its ups and downs. Business has its ups and downs. A month ago I was ecstatic with where I was, where my business was going, and about the work I was producing. And last week, I wanted to quit.

It wasn't just the events that transpired last week that made me want to give up. It was a culmination of a few crappy weeks in a row. For starters, I had two weeks in a row where I had *three* clients cancel or postpone a shoot (two cancellations, one postponement). Two of them happened in the same day. I know I can't take business personally, but two cancellations in the same day really hit me. I was upset, discouraged, and personally distraught over the fact that people would want to cancel their sessions with me. That's one of my biggest mistakes in business: taking bad things that happen personally.

Fast forward to this past week. I had a great senior session on Monday, and an okay family session on Thursday. After attempting to emotionally beat myself up for "not doing a good enough job" on the family shoot, I came to the conclusion that a lot of the problems I encountered were out of my control, steering clear of a mental breakdown, consuming me for the rest of the night. I felt pretty good coming home from the shoot, knowing that though it wasn't my absolute best shoot, I in fact did get *some* good shots, and the shots that didn't really work out weren't fully in my control.

Then I got home and checked Facebook. Part of me wishes social media did not exist. I saw that I had a message from an exchange student who visited RMU for a semester. She is an incredible photographer, and we still talked on Facebook about our work every once in a while. When I opened the message, the first words I saw were: "I'm drunk..." I should have closed the message then, but instead kept reading on. My photographer friend continued her message by telling me "now is as good of a time as any to tell you what I really think about your work." She went on to talk about how I could do so much better, how I just imitate other people's work, always work inside my comfort zone, etc. Ouch. I had never heard such negative feedback about my work before. And though I should have brushed it off, I let it settle in for the night. The positive mindset I had worked so hard to attain earlier in the night fell away, and I was left with only negativity and discouragement. I wanted to quit.

The problem wasn't as much of what she said as how I let what she said affect me. I am the first to admit my lack of confidence in what I produce, and generally, in myself as a whole. I have a hard time standing up for what I produce (photography, graphics, etc.) unless I have done it before and it has been deemed by peers as "worthy." I've spent most of my life figuring out standards, meeting them, and exceeding them to gain confidence. Any area of my life where I have not exceeded standards and expectations feels like failure. And if I can't figure out what the "standard" is (it's hard to define standards for creative work), it's even harder for me to stand behind my work.

Don't get me wrong; there are a few things I will not compromise for other people's standards, like my faith in Jesus Christ and what He did for me (in spite of who I am). Any confidence I have is found in Him. But I've lived my whole life as if my confidence in Him can't translate into any other areas of my life. God gave me gifts and abilities that I use, and because I use the gifts he has given me for his glory, I can find confidence in what he is calling me to do and produce. There is always, *always* room for improvement, but I should never let a drunken girl halfway across the world make me want to quit doing what I love. I need to have confidence in the fact that I have been equipped for what God is calling me to do: run a photography business. Clearly, he has led me this far. He won't leave me in the midst of it ("Do I bring to the moment of birth and not give delivery?" says the Lord." [Isaiah 66:9]). He'll provide a way for me to endure my temptations to doubt and be negative ("No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it." [1 Corinthians 10:13]).

December 2, 2014

Every once in a while, I'm confronted with a need for change. Today, a photographer whose work I greatly admire came to speak at RMU. It's always helpful to hear from other photographers who have been through the process of beginning a business, especially when they are extraordinary at running it. Thinking back over the talk, there are a few things specifically that jump out at me.

First, to show only my best work, or the work I want to shoot more of. If I want to shoot more farm weddings, I need to show more farm weddings and show fewer ballroom weddings. If I want to shoot more seniors in downtown Pittsburgh, I need to show more shoots of seniors in downtown Pittsburgh. It's really an easy concept, one I should already know, but it's really sinking in today as something I need to implement.

Second, I need to push myself. When I asked the photographer who was talking if he ever got discouraged while looking at other people's work, he said no. If anything, he says, "I can do it better." This is a foreign concept to me. I wish I had more of that personality. Instead of thinking, "I can do it better," I think, "I suck." My way of thinking is less challenging and more self-destructive. I want to challenge myself. I want to believe that I can do better than what I see. But instead, I think, "Could I even do *that*?" Instead of challenging myself, I make myself live up to another photographer's standard, another photographer's photos, and another photographer's definition of success. I want to think, "I can do that better." I want to push myself to *be* better. But I have to stop belittling myself in the process. There's nothing wrong with assessing strengths and weaknesses. In fact, it's a necessarily component to improving. But there IS something wrong with constantly telling myself I can't do it. If I think I can't, I won't be able to.

Bi-Weekly Meeting Notes with Professor William Shadle

September 17, 2014

- There are two parts of every business: selling and making
- Prioritize the daily list!
- Do tasks in a chunk of time rather than of little chunks of the same task over time
- Add notes from meetings to binder for final project
- Set office hours for myself
- NEXT ASSIGNMENT: Document time management and prioritization

October 8, 2014

- Time blocks with certain things
- Email to ask about timeframe for having the binder (final thesis product) completed
- *Binder Components*
 - Business Plan
 - Structure to the process of starting a business
 - What I initially thought I would make in terms of money, and what I am making now
 - Reflection
 - What did I learn through this whole process working with Professor Shadle as a result of the formalized structure
 - 6 different days at least
 - Final reflection is the benefit of being in the honors program and what the program required me to do to receive the credits
 - Various decisions (decisions that were made about the business)
 - 6 different days at least
 - Each will have a date and a heading
 - Decisions:
 - Setting up categories for tracking receipts
 - Chose to use free software (WAVE) instead of QuickBooks
 - Prioritizing certain things
 - Deciding how I would keep track of collecting receipts and how I would organize them
 - Deciding how to price
 - Notes from mentoring sessions with Shadle
 - Hardcover book as final product
 - Examples of revenue streams
 - Samples of client communication (PDF's, etc.)
 - Separated by chapters
 - Marketing tool for me!!!!
- For presentation: use big photos and digital copies
- Email professor Vandieren to see when the Undergraduate Research Conference takes place (is there one in the fall?)
- Get business plan done
 - Needs to answer who, what, when, where, why, how, and how much?

- Goals for the business
- Sleep on the dates for getting things done (the full book, part of the book, etc.)

October 22, 2014

- Send Professor Shadle stuff to show that I've done something this semester (from all different sections)
- Make a mini portfolio inside the final book at end of the book

November 5, 2014: Deliverable Dates

- Table of contents
- Identify chapters in the book:
 - Business Plan (NOVEMBER 12)
 - Decision making matters (DECEMBER 3)
 - Reflections (journals) (NOVEMBER 26)
 - Summary reflection/benefits of complying with the HONORS courses (NOVEMBER 19)
 - Notes from mentoring sessions (DECEMBER 10)
 - Mini portfolio of pictures/samples of work
 - Marketing materials
 - Screen shots of website
 - How I branded myself (logo)
 - Pricing PDFs
 - Example of product packaging
- Parts of the book
 - ***2 sections of the book course requirements/marketing (part 1: title, part 2: title) (catchy title for part 2)
- Presentation:
 - Business cards
 - Book
- Have PART 1 DONE BY END OF SEMESTER.
- *6 weeks of the spring semester to wrap up the marketing pieces
 - Bring draft of PDF to meeting on February 18 @ 1:45PM

November 19, 2014

- Talk about pieces of the project that needed to be done
- Revise business thesis portion of the project
- Finish reflection pieces of the project

December 3, 2014

- Talk about formatting the thesis for the honors booklet
- Format for the coffee table book

Conclusion

Building (and sustaining) a business while attending college as a full-time student is incredibly challenging. Through sharing my research, reflections, findings, and personal experience, I hope to encourage others, specifically students in college, to consider entrepreneurship as a potential alternative (or addition) to working for an employer. Through the process of building a business, I have been forced to learn leadership, time management, and personal responsibility from a new perspective. In addition, putting together a business plan has given my business a clear direction and starting point for all decisions I make, including the types of jobs I take on, the purchases I make, and the overarching purpose behind why I do what I do. I plan to continue to grow, learn, and strengthen my business plan and leadership skills to create a business that operates purposefully.

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