

# START AND RUN A HOME CLEANING BUSINESS

Susan Bewsey

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## CHAPTER 1

# SHINING IN THE SPOTLIGHT

### 1. BEFORE YOU GET STARTED

Starting a home cleaning business is an attractive idea, but before you plunge ahead, consider carefully whether you have the proper skills and attitude. Being your own boss and setting your own hours sounds fun, but the reality is that when things go wrong, you are responsible for putting things right.

The early stages of a business venture always require long hours from the boss. Depending on your financial goals for your business, other personal goals may never be realized because you may have to commit so much time to running the business.

To find out if you have the right attitude, examine your reasons for wanting to get into business for yourself.

I want to start a home cleaning business because:

- I just want to make money.
- I need to have more time with my family.

- I just got fired.
- I need more personal achievement.
- I hate my boss.
- I just think it would be fun.
- I need a more fulfilling lifestyle.
- I need a challenge.
- I just want to work alone.
- I believe I can provide excellent service.
- I need to control as much of my life as possible.
- I believe I can better use my skills on my own.

If you picked reasons that started with “I just,” you are headed in the wrong direction. However, if you were attracted to reasons that started with “I believe” and “I need,” you are on the right track.

These are the reasons to get into this business: to challenge yourself, to provide the best service, to improve your personal and working life. If you start out



thinking negatively, you won't have the proper motivation to make things happen. Be realistic and do it because it's what you want to do.

In Worksheet 1, write down your wants and needs for starting your business. It's okay to have "wants"; they are the fuel that sustains you on your journey.

## 2. IS THIS THE BUSINESS FOR YOU?

You don't have to love housework and cleaning to start up in this business, but if you do, that's an added bonus. What you do need are top-notch cleaning skills and the will to do the job well. The ability to be an efficient organizer is also a plus. You don't have to be a "neat freak," but you do have to have the energy and the desire to make order out of other people's chaos. It's a hard job, but it is one that people appreciate and will pay for.

If you're going to be successful at providing a cleaning service for people's homes, you've got to be able to deal with your clients. This is a demanding service that depends on repeat customers. If your customers don't like what you do, they'll let you know. If you can't provide what they want, they will go elsewhere. Sometimes, wearing more than one hat in a business is extremely difficult, especially when you're starting out. Can you be the person who cleans *and* the person who handles customers' complaints and concerns, as well as the person who follows up and makes sure the bills get paid?

Being your own boss is great, but your cleaning skills and experience only get you so far. If you're really determined to go ahead, consider getting further training to help beef up your entrepreneurial side, or find a partner who can handle the customer-relations side of things. Community colleges and small business centers often have courses and seminars on customer service and bookkeeping.

Starting a home cleaning business requires an investment of both your time and your money. You'll need to assess the potential market, purchase equipment, and advertise. Consider whether your location is one

that can support a home cleaning business. Is there any competition? For more about assessing market possibilities, see chapter 5 on marketing.

Have you got what it takes to get your cleaning business up and running? Worksheet 2 will help you decide.

## 3. FILLING IN THE VACUUM

Cleaning services come in all sizes: there are independents, agencies, franchises, and corporations. There are those who dabble and those who devote their lives to this market.

How far you want to go in this industry depends on your ambition. Remember, demand is high due to overworked, dual-income couples, homes being built, and an aging population in search of less work and more leisure time. American figures compiled in 1991 indicate there are over 102 million homes and 476,349 cleaning services registered with the census bureau. For Canada, there were over ten million dwellings and 6,312 cleaning services. Not included in these figures are the countless people in hotels and motels performing cleaning functions. Also missing from the above figures is the underground economy servicing homes and offices throughout North America.

Many services are included in the home-care cleaning industry and new ones are added all the time. The following is a general list of services offered:

- General house cleaning
- Spring cleaning
- Window cleaning
- Blind cleaning
- Chimney cleaning
- Wall and ceiling washing
- Post-disaster cleaning (fires, floods)
- Post-construction cleaning
- Post- and pre-party preparation
- House watch
- Pet watch

# WORKSHEET 1

## DETERMINE YOUR GOALS AND NEEDS

**I want to start my own cleaning business because I want —**

*Write down the five things you want from your business.*

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_

**I want to start my own cleaning business because I need —**

*Write down the five things you need from your business.*

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_

Keep this list in mind as you plan your business. One year from now, go back to this list and check to see which things you've achieved and which things have brought you the most satisfaction. Try it; it works!

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- Garden and outside patio maintenance
- Laundry and valet service
- Party hosting, reception
- Office cleaning
- Estate sale preparation
- Boat and yacht cleaning
- Property management

Your business can offer many special services besides cleaning. Use the services above as a starting point. Some may be immediately attractive because they

fit your vision of the business and what you see yourself providing. Use Worksheet 3 to help you pinpoint the services you want to offer.

#### 4. YOU'RE ON YOUR WAY

Many people dream about starting their own business but never go ahead and do it. Faced with the reality of organizing even a simple venture, many people are overwhelmed and lose their enthusiasm. However, the key to success is to plan well and break down each goal into accomplishable tasks. If you follow the advice and steps given in this book, you may realize your dream and launch your own successful cleaning business.

## WORKSHEET 2

### CHARACTERISTICS OF SUCCESS

To run your business effectively, you have to be able to work on your own, seek help when needed, have the commitment necessary to finish a project, and take responsibility for your business's finances.

Consider the questions below; if you can honestly answer yes to all of these questions, you have the characteristics that spell success.

- |  |           |          |
|--|-----------|----------|
| 1. Do you like people?                                     | _____ Yes | _____ No |
| 2. Do you like the industry?                               | _____ Yes | _____ No |
| 3. Can you manage staff?                                   | _____ Yes | _____ No |
| 4. Can you separate your personal life from your business? | _____ Yes | _____ No |
| 5. Are you a "take-charge" kind of person?                 | _____ Yes | _____ No |
| 6. Can you take criticism?                                 | _____ Yes | _____ No |
| 7. Are you an organized individual?                        | _____ Yes | _____ No |
| 8. Do you have common sense?                               | _____ Yes | _____ No |
| 9. Do you enjoy selling?                                   | _____ Yes | _____ No |
| 10. Are you a planner?                                     | _____ Yes | _____ No |
| 11. Are you a sincere/honest individual?                   | _____ Yes | _____ No |
| 12. Do you desire financial independence?                  | _____ Yes | _____ No |
| 13. Do you like hard work?                                 | _____ Yes | _____ No |
| 14. Do you enjoy rewarding yourself?                       | _____ Yes | _____ No |
| 15. Do you enjoy dealing with the public?                  | _____ Yes | _____ No |

**Basic physical requirements:**

- |   |           |          |
|---|-----------|----------|
| 1. Do you have a private area in your home to work or access to a small office?   | _____ Yes | _____ No |
| 2. Do you have the financial ability to operate a business for at least three months without financial stress while your business is growing? | _____ Yes | _____ No |
| 3. Do you have transportation or a vehicle which could be dedicated to business use?  | _____ Yes | _____ No |

## WORKSHEET 3

### WHAT TYPE OF SERVICE SHOULD I OFFER?

**1. First consider the type of environment in which you want to work.**

**Do you see yourself:**

- (a) working in people's homes?
- (b) working in a corporate or office setting?
- (c) working in a variety of settings, corporate and private?

*I see my business providing cleaning services for \_\_\_\_\_*  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

**2. Then consider which services you can best offer:**

- |  |           |          |
|--|-----------|----------|
| General house cleaning                 | _____ Yes | _____ No |
| Spring cleaning                        | _____ Yes | _____ No |
| Window cleaning                        | _____ Yes | _____ No |
| Blind cleaning                         | _____ Yes | _____ No |
| Chimney cleaning                       | _____ Yes | _____ No |
| Wall and ceiling washing               | _____ Yes | _____ No |
| Post-disaster cleaning (fires, floods) | _____ Yes | _____ No |
| Post-construction cleaning             | _____ Yes | _____ No |
| Post- and pre-party preparation        | _____ Yes | _____ No |
| House watch                            | _____ Yes | _____ No |
| Pet watch                              | _____ Yes | _____ No |
| Garden and outside patio maintenance   | _____ Yes | _____ No |
| Laundry and valet service              | _____ Yes | _____ No |
| Party hosting, reception               | _____ Yes | _____ No |
| Office cleaning                        | _____ Yes | _____ No |
| Estate sale preparation                | _____ Yes | _____ No |
| Boat and yacht cleaning                | _____ Yes | _____ No |
| Property management                    | _____ Yes | _____ No |

## WORKSHEET 3 — Continued

3. Were there any services that you can't offer right now, but would consider offering in the future if your customers wanted them? List these below.

*I anticipate that my business could offer these services in the future:*

(a) \_\_\_\_\_

(b) \_\_\_\_\_

(c) \_\_\_\_\_

(d) \_\_\_\_\_

(e) \_\_\_\_\_

(f) \_\_\_\_\_

4. What about your own skills and background? Are there aspects of home or office care or customized services that aren't included in the list above?

*List other possibilities for services:*

(a) \_\_\_\_\_

(b) \_\_\_\_\_

(c) \_\_\_\_\_

(d) \_\_\_\_\_

(e) \_\_\_\_\_

(f) \_\_\_\_\_