

# EAST BAY BUSINESS TIMES

ENTERPRISE

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**Upclose**

## Susan Urquhart-Brown

[Xenia P. Kobylarz](#)

**Title:** Career and business consultant

**Company:** Career Steps Consulting & Coaching

**Education:** B.A., English literature, Allegheny College, Meadville, Penn.; M.A., education, College of Notre Dame; M.A., career development, John F. Kennedy University

**Residence:** Oakland

**Age:** 59

When it comes to starting a business, changing jobs and switching careers Susan Urquhart-Brown is a pro. But that's not just because she advises business owners and career people for a living.

The 59-year-old author of "The Accidental Entrepreneur: Practical Wisdom for People Who Never Expected to Work for Themselves" has been through many re-inventions of herself and "accidentally" started her own consulting business in the process.

She started out as an elementary school teacher, then switched to nonprofit management and ended up managing the executive education program at UC-Berkeley's Haas School of Business.

By the time she earned her master's degree in career development at John F. Kennedy University in Walnut Creek in 1995, Urquhart-Brown had become the sole proprietor of her very own consulting business.

Since then, she has shepherded dozens of startup businesses and counseled individuals going through career transitions. During that time - from 1998 to 2001 - , she also wrote an advice column for

entrepreneurs in the San Francisco Chronicle.

"I didn't really plan or consider myself as an entrepreneur, but I'm the kind of person who really likes being challenged. People said I couldn't earn enough money to support myself in private practice so I went out and did it just to prove them wrong," Urquhart-Brown chuckled. "You could say every piece of advice I give my clients, I pretty much have tested it myself. I have pretty much walked my own talk."

### **Traits of a successful entrepreneur**

In my book I listed 10 traits that make an entrepreneur successful. You have to have self-confidence, you have to be optimistic, you have to be a multi-tasker, you have to be able to constantly motivate yourself, you have to be a good communicator, you have to be a calculated risk taker, you have to be flexible, you have to be a smart decision-maker, you have to have drive and determination and, finally, you have to be action-result oriented.

### **Most common mistake**

Small business owners tend to think they can and have to do everything. I tell my clients not to fall into the trap of being a lone wolf because no one is good at everything. Look for what you can outsource, who you can get help from, what hat you can pass off because you may end up doing more \$15-an-hour jobs than the kind of work you are trained to do that might bring in \$100 an hour instead. You have to learn to balance it out.

### **Best practical advice**

Keep your day job while pursuing your passion on the side. A lot of people are driven by their passion for something and yet are unable to really pursue it because of financial issues. The tagline I have is to put your passion and power to work one step at a time. It might take longer than you would want, but you can actually do it. Whatever it is, changing your career or starting a business, it can be done.

### **Lessons learned**

Most people when they start their own business just want to do the work and forget to do the marketing and business development. When I opened my own business I made the same mistake. I put my name on the door, advertised in the Yellow Pages and waited for the phone to ring. I discovered pretty quickly that I needed to do more than that and started to learn what it takes to build a business. I sat down and figured out who my target market is and how I can reach them and let them know who I am. I started speaking in front of groups and writing articles. I got involved with various professional and business organizations and my practice took off just on word-of-mouth. You really have to be out there. There is a direct correlation between how many clients you get through word-of-mouth and being out there. Out of sight, out of mind.

## Acquired tastes

**Hobbies:** I love to travel, I love skiing and I love to hike.

**Favorite books:** Ladies' Detective Agency series by Alexander McCall Smith

**Favorite movie:** "What the Bleep Do We Know?"

**Favorite cuisine:** Mediterranean food

**Set of wheels:** Silver PT Cruiser

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