



Investing in Yourself

by Gwynne Wiatrowski Guzneau

As summer dwindles into fall, I want to plant a seed. Whether you're self-employed, unemployed, or work for someone else, it's time to start thinking about investing. Not dollars, stocks or bonds. I'm talking about you. In the next six months, what are you doing to invest in yourself?

And why do I ask? Three years ago, I left the employ of a local law firm with plans to start my own practice. On Tuesday, I'm meeting with a cash flow management consultant to help me plan as I review the Quickbooks reports that show an increase of 200% in gross income over last year. Obviously, something I'm doing is working. My success and I believe yours – everyone's – is only as good as the support you have and the supports you put into place to advance your goals.

So what about you? Your business? Your career? What supports will you put in place in the next six months? And of those supports, which ones are focused solely on your personal and/or professional growth and development?

Three years ago, I started with some chicken scratch on a pad to develop my idea about a law practice focused on providing clients counsel, education and collaboration, rather than the top-down know-it-all approach I'd seen one time too many in both the local 11-attorney firms and the large 400-attorney firms where I received my legal training. And after investing time, energy and money, I now own a thriving law practice poised to break out of the red and into the black (hopefully before year end).

I'd like to share some of the local resources I tapped to provide the support I needed to build my business. Before I do so, I want to share a framework that has helped me maintain a positive outlook amidst the ups and downs of starting and growing a business.

Time. Energy. Money.

Each of us has a limited amount of time, energy and money. We're all aware of our checkbooks, when they feel full and, especially, when they are empty. At the Gestalt International Study Center <http://www.gisc.org> in Wellfleet I learned to think about a checkbook for my time and a checkbook for my energy, not just a checkbook for my money.

This simple framing of my resources helps me retain resiliency in the months when cash flow hits its low. I know the money isn't there, but I also know that I have time and energy to put into a new marketing effort or other projects that will promote positive cash flow. And so I plow forward, "poor" for that moment in only one respect and "rich" in the resources of time and energy.

What shape are your resources in at the end of the summer season? High in money, low in time and energy? That was me when I used to waitress summers at the Eastham Lobster Pool. Maybe you're unemployed and high in time and energy. The idea is to take what you do have and "throw it" at your personal resource that's currently under funded.

For instance, when I left my job, I had money saved from practicing at a large law firm in D.C. and I threw that money at the problem of not finding work at a Cape law firm that fit my needs or working style. For several months, I didn't take clients, instead I used the time and money that was available to invest in myself and build some new supports to carry me forward as an entrepreneur.

Coaching

In 2006, I hired Susan Coppelman <http://www.susancoppelman.com> as a personal life coach to help me reflect on the transition I was undertaking and to consider various job opportunities. I walked away from our sessions with some powerful reflections that informed my understanding of my own values as I stepped into the unknown world of entrepreneurship.

Later, I joined a monthly group coaching session for small business owners sponsored by the Community Development Partnership <http://www.capecdp.org> in Eastham.

Finally, after meeting Beverly Ryle of the Center for Career and Business Development <http://successoryourownterms.com> in the group coaching sessions and other workshops, I decided to hire her as my business coach.

Education



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With a Bachelor's degree in American Studies, a Master's degree in Elementary Education, and a law degree, you'd think I'd be all set. For me, the challenge has been to create my own course of study in business development and entrepreneurship. This has been remarkably easy to do at a low to moderate expense, thanks to the following organizations:

Community Development Partnership, Eastham

Their Smart Start program and related seminar series is an excellent review of the basics of business planning and the key components any entrepreneur needs to keep at the forefront of her business strategy. In addition, I attend many of their monthly workshops on topics such as cash flow, search engine optimization, and marketing. In short, this group has provided consistently high quality information and educational experiences at an exceptionally low price. Finally, as an organization run primarily by women, I recommend them as your first stop for business education and information.

Gestalt International Study Center Wellfleet

Who knew? Just off 6A in South Wellfleet, a highly respected and approachable group of organizational development professionals, leadership consultants and psychologists offer two particular workshops that I want to recommend as well as an upcoming conference:

- Next Phase <http://www.gisc.org/individuals/programs/pone.php> An excellent workshop focusing on personal and professional transitions. Through personal inventories and life mapping exercises, get in touch with your core values and develop new strategies for visualizing and achieving your goals. It's offered again at the end of August!
- Women, Work and Leadership <http://www.gisc.org/leaders/programs/ptwo.php> Small and large group discussion, reflection and presentations focused on a myriad of work and leadership issues women face. I met a number of Cape-based professional women with whom I continue to meet, as well as women from all over the country and the world.
- Family Businesses <http://www.gisc.org/practitioners/programs/ConferenceFamilyBusPrTr.php> This November conference will provide support to family business owners, as well as professionals who work with family businesses. Look for my report in the Winter issue of CapeWomenOnline!

So, what's next for you? Will I see you at Gestalt in November? Or maybe at the CDP this fall? I hope so.

As an entrepreneur, the buck stops with you AND it starts with you.

Investing in yourself – whether it's for personal or professional development – is one of the wisest business decisions you can make.