

The background of the entire page is a large, dense crowd of people, rendered in a blue-tinted, hazy, and slightly blurred style. In the foreground, three individuals are clearly visible: a man on the left in a dark suit and light blue tie, a woman in the center with short brown hair wearing a purple shirt under a dark blazer, and a woman on the right with long dark hair wearing sunglasses and a striped shirt. The overall mood is one of a vast, anonymous population.

Is SELF- EMPLOYMENT *for* YOU?

ANYONE *can start a business...*
only FEW *can SUSTAIN a business.*

PAUL E. CASEY

(1,796 words)

Are you thinking about taking the plunge into the world of self-employment? The following excerpt on “Technology” is from the book, “Is Self-Employment for You?” This book goes beyond the ABC’s of how to write a business plan but examines the potential entrepreneur’s emotional readiness and personality traits that ultimately make the difference between success and failure. “Is Self-Employment for You?” Author Paul Casey has been successfully sustaining his business for over fifteen years. The book costs \$15.95 and can be purchased by visiting Amazon.com and inputting Is Self-Employment for You?

TECHNOLOGY: THE GOOD, THE BAD, AND THE UGLY

By Paul Casey

In the past twenty years, nothing has allowed more businesses to succeed—or to fail—than advancements in technology. The technology explosion of the past two decades has made it possible for more people to start their own businesses than ever before. There is no way, practically or financially, that I ever could have published a newspaper if it were not for the incredible leaps made in desktop publishing and other technologies around the time I started my business in 1988.

Affordable computers, pagers, and cell phones have allowed people to become instantly accessible to anyone. With home office equipment and voice mail, we no longer have to pay for a receptionist or an answering service to organize our business, schedule appointments, and take calls as we did in the old days. Thanks to technology, we can now conduct our business anytime, anywhere.

But like anything else, too much of a good thing can be a curse. There is a

difference between technology use and technology abuse. I have seen people fail in business because they didn't know how to use technology properly. No matter how far it advances, technology is still only a tool for delivering products or services. *Technology starts to fail us when the technology itself becomes the master of the business, and the product or service becomes secondary.* Webvan.com and Homegrocer.com are a good example of the "tail wagging the dog" syndrome. Both companies hoped to revolutionize the American grocery industry by doing away with the traditional "brick and mortar" supermarket. Webvan.com eventually bought out homegrocer.com but in 2001, Webvan.com shut down its operations over \$800 million in debt!

What happened? There were so many fatal flaws that a whole series of books could be written about the debacle. The major reason the concept didn't work is that it relied on one technology but the customers were not able or willing to change a life time of habits to suit and the timetable of investors. Many of the dot-coms or should I say "dot-gones" suffered from the same syndrome. *(For more reading on the dotcom crash, go to employmentforyou.net.)*

Before you purchase any type of technology for your business, ask yourself, "Will this technology really make my business run more smoothly? Or will it actually make things more complicated?" Do you *really* need a cell phone that can access the Internet and send e-mails? Or will this techno-toy distract you from making sales calls and getting projects completed for your clients? Should you really use an accounting program like Quickbooks to keep track of your income and expenses? Or would it be more cost-effective to find a bookkeeper or an accountant to watch over your money? Be very discriminating with technology. In many cases, technology is a distraction, and is

responsible for entrepreneurs doing a lot of unnecessary and unproductive work.

READY, AIM, SEND!

Another downside of technology is the explosion in e-mails. Every day, we can receive hundreds of e-mails, mostly from people we don't know. The worst of it, of course, is known as "Spam" (named after a Monty Python song in which the word "Spam" is repeated over and over). Most Spam e-mail messages contain advertisements for products, services, or web sites that nobody in their right mind would even *think about* using or looking at in a million years. Most of us simply delete Spam from our Inbox without even looking at the attached message.

But Spam aside, e-mail is like any other technology tool. It can make conducting our business easier, but it can also hurt us if we don't use it correctly. I know a number of people who use e-mail as a substitute for doing their job. They spend their days sending out e-mails and responding to messages from friends and business associates. They measure their job performance by the number of e-mails they send or respond to. It makes them feel important, when in fact they are just wasting time. If you wish to be a successful business owner, you can't spend four hours a day on your e-mail.

One of the most effective uses for e-mail is as a means to send your potential clients a summary of your products or services. You can attach a resume and samples of your work, and even include a link to your web site in the e-mail message. But e-mail should never be used as a *substitute* for regular sales tactics. You must still make cold calls, go to chamber of commerce meetings, visit with clients, and check back with them every few months in order to sell your business.

Never send an e-mail describing your products or services to someone unless you

have called or met with them first to introduce yourself. If you send a "cold e-mail" to a potential client, it will probably be deleted with all the other Spam that they receive on a daily basis. After you have contacted a client and sent an e-mail to them, you should always call them back a few days later, to verify that they received the e-mail. And never assume, just because you've sent them an e-mail with your contact info, that a client will automatically think of *you* when they have a need for your type of product or service.

Also, I strongly urge you to resist the temptation to send e-mail jokes, sports scores, political views, or inspirational messages to your current or potential clients. If you are continually sending out non-related business e-mails, you are screaming to your clients that you have a lot of extra time on your hands. If you are currently working on a project with a certain client, they may start to wonder why you aren't working on their account with all this extra time. Even if you're not working on a project with that client, you are still wasting their time by forcing them to skim and delete your e-mails.

PHONE ETIQUETTE & VOICE MESSAGING

I am against the death penalty, with one exception: I would openly advocate public executions for all violators of phone etiquette.

As a self-employed business owner, you must remember to treat every potential business contact as if they are the most important person on the planet, especially when you are talking to them on the phone. Businesses and organizations change at a rapid pace. You don't want to alienate people with bad phone manners. The person you put on hold today might be a future executive or even a CEO.

Here are some tips for good phone etiquette. (Follow these tips and, if my "death penalty" wish ever becomes law, you'll never end up in front of the firing squad.)

- If you are on the phone with someone, *NEVER* put them on hold to take another call, unless you are in a life-or-death situation. Let your voice-mail take the message and return the other call *after* you have completed your current conversation.
- *NEVER* bring a cell phone to a meeting with a client and take calls during the meeting. Your client will count it as a point against doing business with you. (There are people who have done this to me. They are absolutely clueless that this is the major reason I will not work with them or send them any business.)
- Also, *NEVER* take calls on your cell phone during lunch. You will annoy not only the person you are having lunch with, but also the people around you in the restaurant. Whenever I see someone taking calls on their cell phone during lunch or dinner, I have to resist a sudden urge to grab their phone and toss it into the soup tureen!
- Use Call Forwarding to forward your office number to your cell phone or home number. This makes it easier for the client to contact you, and they only have to remember one phone number. In fifteen years, I've used one single phone number for my business.
- Use voice-mail instead of an answering machine. Voice-mail only costs about \$7 a month. It never misses a call, you never have to change batteries, and it never cuts a caller off before they finish their message.
- Make your voice-mail message quick and to the point. Don't give callers your daily itinerary. Which of the following voice-mail messages would you rather listen to? (The first, by the way, is an actual voice-mail message. The name

has been changed to protect the guilty.):

“Hi this is Steve. I will be out of the office for most of the day attending meetings all morning and afternoon but I will back in the office all day tomorrow. After a 9 AM staff meeting, I will be available for most of the day and will be checking in for messages. If you need to get in touch with me immediately, my cell phone number is 304-678-4567, or you can reach me by paging me. My pager number is 304-557-9876 ext. 234993. My e-mail address is steve@meetings.com. Please leave your name, phone number, and time that you called and I will get back to you as soon as possible. Have a great day.”

OR

“Hi, this is Paul Casey, please leave a message.”

Don’t feel compelled to say “leave your message at the beep tone.” I know this is being picky but if your caller hasn’t figured that out by now, you don’t want to business with him/her anyway.

On the subject of voice-mail, if you go out of town on business or vacation, don’t feel compelled to let the whole world know about it. Again, when I go out of town, I still check my e-mails and phone messages at least twice a day. Technology has made it possible for me to conduct business effectively no matter where I am.

Here's another odd voice-mail message that I recently came across:

“Hi this is Fred. I will be out on vacation the week of April 1st. Please leave your name and number and I will return your call when I return.”

This wouldn’t have been so bad—except that I called on May 25th!