

From permie to contractor to small business owner

Contractors often ask about how to build their businesses from single contracts to multiple ones.

A Good Employee...

Kylie Sullivan is one contractor who went from permanent employment to contractor to small business owner very quickly, and with a singleness of vision that is truly rare. Sullivan also had the original idea of combining maintenance work organisation for the aircraft industry with accounting work for the same clients.

Sullivan was an accountant at a local business. As the opportunity arose, Sullivan began taking on a little part-time work for some of the businesses in the Sherborne, Dorset area where she lives and works.

"It was about one year before I made the final leap and handed in my notice. I'd been working part time in the evenings doing extra work for local clients, and it got to the point where I was working many nights until 3am (not good!) and I was making more money doing part time work than the full time job. After 6 months of doing the late nights it was time to do my own thing," Sullivan says.

Becomes A Successful Contractor

Sullivan wears two hats: one is as a maintenance organiser for the aircraft industry, and the other is as an accountant for the same kind of companies. Sullivan decided to combine the two specialities, offering repair and paperwork organisation at the same time.

When Sullivan had tested this combination on a part-time basis, Sullivan went solo--got rid of the boss!--and sent out 100 flyers to potential clients in the area asking if they didn't need the kind of two-pronged help Sullivan could offer. "I knew the companies in the area, and I was convinced there was a gap to be filled here," Sullivan says.

Making the Leap

When Sullivan finally switched from permanent employment to contracting, the usual issues arose. Sullivan was both relieved to be rid of all the extraneous worry related to having a boss, and worried at the same time that enough clients would turn up. "That concern was very short lived, and I certainly don't look back now," Sullivan says. "I already had some clients, and also some lined up whom I couldn't take on because I didn't previously have time. Most new work was found through word of mouth."

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Kylie Sullivan-Kulula Supplies

The Clever Idea

One thing that made Sullivan special was a clever idea. Sullivan's business combines maintenance for aircraft--running the people who fix them--with maintenance for business administration--running the paperwork for the same kind of businesses.

"I'm unlike the contractor who does a 6 month contract at a time, and finding work is not done via agents or the use of job board sites. My business is more of a small business than contracting. Initially I sent out 100 flyers to local small businesses with my CV and business card - I got around 60 positive responses and the client base grew quickly," Sullivan explains.

One thing that clearly sets Sullivan apart is a perfect understanding of the client base in the area. Located near a large concentration of the aircraft industry, Sullivan has gauged with great accuracy what their needs are.

How To Start Out

Sullivan doesn't recommend that contractors start out by taking on loans or financing as they launch their own small businesses. Sullivan didn't start this business that way. "You should only take financing if you need special equipment to make your business work," Sullivan says. "Engineers, for example, who need expensive tools should find ways to lease them with financing. But otherwise, start out on your own and think it all through carefully."

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Kylie Sullivan-Kulula Supplies

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