



Selftastic

THE COMPLETE COLLECTION

By: Pepper Lowe

What Our Kids Learned After Fostering a Puppy for a Weekend

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Since they were little, my kids have wanted a puppy. They have a dog at their dad's house, by the way. They wanted one at each house.

Like them, and probably every other kid in the history of civilization, I remember assuring my parents that if they let me have a puppy, I'd feed it and take it for walks and make sure it had enough water, and then of course after getting one, my mom ended up taking care of it more than I did. So I knew the hustle.

It's just not the right time for a dog, I'd tell our kids. It was true. It still is, for now at least. My husband and I have been working on our separate businesses for some time and don't have the time that must be dedicated to training and caring for a new family member. One day we will probably add a dog to our household, but for now, we have a cat in the house and a horse in a pasture one town over, and that's enough for now. The kids are now in high school and — before the schools closed and the country largely shut down — had social lives and work schedules that afforded them little time to spend time with a dog anyway, not to mention caring for it.

I did wish that they knew the responsibilities of dog ownership and the *why* behind the *no*. There's nothing like firsthand knowledge based on personal experience when it comes to making a decision on something as important as getting a dog.

Last week my wish came true. I got a text from my daughter informing me that her older brother had found a puppy out in the country. The kids — who are currently staying at my parents' house because I've got an immune deficiency and am under quarantine — decided that they had to at least take the puppy to the house and go from there. They floated the idea of maybe keeping the puppy, but that got shut down immediately. The grandparents, who went through this song and dance with their own three kids back in the 80s, knew the hustle.

She sent me a photo of their new ward, who was black with white-tipped paws and perky little ears. Since my son was busy working and toying with his new Jeep that he'd gotten as a graduation gift, my daughter and her cousin took it upon themselves to take care of this puppy until they found a proper home for her. It probably wouldn't be that hard. Right?

Not surprisingly, the Wonder Twins had their work cut out for them. For starters, the puppy — they named her Winnie — was covered in fleas and her swollen little baby belly was full of worms. When she wasn't sleeping, she was whimpering or pooping or peeing. They bathed her and bought puppy chow and filled her water bowl over and over. They fussed over her and made sure she was as comfortable as possible. One would puppysit while the other drove to the store to get flea shampoo and dewormer or run other puppy-related errands.

Their first night as puppy foster parents was done in shifts in the bathroom, with Winnie and a heating pad in a box placed into the bathtub to keep any remaining fleas from hopping onto my parents' bathroom floor and causing an invasion. Going outside involved tiptoeing downstairs and hoping that Winnie stayed quiet so as not to wake my parents. The girls camped out on the bathroom floor when Winnie was sleeping.

The next day, my daughter told me that this was way more work than she'd expected. That's what I was trying to tell her and her brothers all along, I told her. She was stressed out and frustrated. Her cousin had gotten maybe two hours of sleep. Winnie still had fleas and my parents were not thrilled to find out that the source of the fleas, cute as she was, had spent a good bit of time in their guest bathroom.

The following day, the girls had already had it with puppy fostering. They posted about Winnie on Instagram and Facebook, hoping to find a good home for her. They'd talked with friends who wanted her, but the friends' parents knew the hustle. So as they prepared for the next night shift, they hoped that a solution would present itself. Soon.

As luck would have it, my daughter ended up talking with a woman who owned a rescue in a town located about an hour away. I have a friend who adopted two dogs from this same rescue a couple of years ago, so I assured the girls that Winnie was going into good hands.

The next afternoon, I got a text from my daughter that read, "Winnie is gone." She was a little sad, but she was also ready for some sleep. And she was relieved. She had to get back to focusing on studying for her AP exams.

My relief probably outweighs hers, at least in the long run. Because of this experience that she and her cousin had, I'm pretty confident that, once out on their own, they're not likely to ever decide to get a puppy on a whim. The decision to add a dog to the household will be made only after careful consideration based on the crash course they unwittingly took when they were in high school.

And that dog will be going into good hands.

Am I Really a Secret Hoarder?

By: Pepper Lowe

The line between order and chaos is a tad blurry when it comes to selling things out of your house. I've been an online seller since the early 2000s when I started selling on eBay, and over time I've added more online sales platforms and it's now basically my full-time job.

This is a good thing. I've built a brand for myself by selling handmade hair ties out of my Etsy shop, and sales of used clothes and vintage items on eBay and Poshmark have been pretty steady.

Here's the problem. Actually, I've got two problems.

I have a history of impulse buying. My inventory is taking over my house.

I can't remember not having a habit of buying too many things. I have ADHD and Generalized Anxiety Disorder, as well as Bipolar Disorder, so the odds are kind of stacked against me when it comes to impulse spending. It also doesn't help that I am an online seller, because I'm almost never out of excuses to buy inventory. Before the coronavirus lockdown, I was dipping in every thrift store I could find, squeezing in time between doctor appointments and trips to the gym to look through racks of denim shorts and dresses. I'd drop a hundred bucks in an hour and bring in bags of awesome finds to flip, sometimes several times a week.

It's hard to resist looking in thrift stores and vintage shops, especially since I've got an eye for what people like and have gotten some great returns on my investments.

I once found a Ralph Lauren comforter for \$15 and sold it for \$300. It was in a vintage pattern that I knew was both rare and coveted. All that happened because I happened to be in that thrift store on that particular day. I've also found a vintage Burberry cap for \$1 that sold for \$100, an \$800 Vince lambskin leather jacket with the tags on that I sold for \$300, and an Alice + Olivia dress for \$4 that I sold for \$140.

I'm not making thousands off my finds, but the possibility of the win, of finding something amazing to flip on eBay, is too much for me to resist. It's like a slot machine. There's enough of a chance to win to give me a reason to keep going to these stores, as often as I can. There are all kinds of reasons my brain can come up with to keep doing what I'm doing. The dopamine rush that comes with the possibility of a reward — finding that one treasure — is the only drug I need when I'm in spending mode.

Besides, you gotta spend money to make money, right?

My one saving grace regarding impulse buying is that my spending ability is limited, because I don't use credit cards (anymore — that's another story for another day). If I don't have cash or money in my bank account, I don't buy it.

In addition to the thrifting habit, I have a history of impulse buying loads of stuff that I thought was a good idea at the time. I went through a phase of buying hundreds of dollars' worth of beads so I could make necklaces and bracelets to sell on Etsy along with my handmade hair ties. And then I had a phase of buying huge 12x12" packs of printed card stock (they were on sale for \$5 each at Michael's!) so I could make handmade display cards for my hair ties.

These days, because people have been buying yardage of fold over elastic from my Etsy shop, I've been buying more elastic by the yard to help meet the demand. And when I say "more" I mean maybe a thousand yards more.

As a result, I've got inventory and supplies in just about every room and closet in my house.

Half my bedroom is filled with stuff I'm selling. The dresser is filled with elastic hair tie sets. The floor in front of the dresser has boxes and bags of elastic. The corner by the dresser is a stack of eight clear storage boxes with hair ties. I have a huge armoire that is packed with hanging clothes, shoes, and purses.

My living room has rolls of elastic in every drawer. Our home office has a large dresser with bigger rolls of elastic, headbands, and all of the card stock I haven't used yet.

Half of my closet is filled with clear storage boxes containing inventory. I have floor-to-ceiling inventory in the hallway closet. I have storage boxes of Disney VHS tapes in one of the bedroom closets.

My kitchen has antique china and vintage Pyrex and collectible Starbucks coffee cups tucked away in cabinets.

In addition to all of the inventory throughout the house, I have boxes of ready-to-assemble boxes from eBay and USPS in my utility room, along with shipping paper, bubble wrap, boxes of shipping tape, postage scales, and empty boxes of all sizes from Amazon. My dining room has stacks of larger boxes, stacked into each other like Russian dolls, that I'm setting aside for shipping.

A friend came over one time, saw all of the boxes stacked in the dining room, and asked if we were moving.

This is one of the challenges of having an online sales business in a not-very-big house that also has an open floor plan. I've hidden what I can, but there are only so many places that I can store things, so I've had to line walls and fill corners with boxes of inventory and supplies when I run out of closet and drawer space.

The good thing is that things are, for the most part, organized. My elastic is organized according to color and print. Clothing is sorted and folded and bagged or hanging by color and style. Hair ties are neatly arranged by color and style. VHS tapes are stacked and sorted alphabetically. Things aren't just thrown in boxes or closets. They aren't in piles on the floor. I know where things are and how to get what I need. For the most part.

The bad thing is that there are times when I get overwhelmed by all the boxes and bags and shipping supplies that are everywhere I can see, and I get to where I just don't want to deal with it. Also, I have an immune deficiency that has kept me at home for months, and because I can feel run down pretty easily, I might get a project started and then have to quit halfway and tell myself that I'll put everything away later. And then "later" becomes a week later. By then I've got more inventory showing up at the door that I'd forgotten I'd ordered weeks before. As all this is happening, more boxes from whatever Amazon delivered end up in the utility room or dining room.

I tell myself it could be worse, but anyone can say that about anything. I can just flip on the TV and watch 30 seconds of Hoarders and feel better about myself for a little while. But I don't think that comparing my own struggles with those of someone whose life has been completely absorbed by a debilitating and misunderstood mental illness is helpful. I haven't lost relationships with people over the stuff in my house. I am not in living conditions that cause neighbors to call for help on my behalf.

To me, watching or reading about someone whose struggles are worse than mine in order to feel superior about myself only results in more excuses for me to use to continue my behavior. It also fosters an unhealthy attitude towards people whose problems cannot be hidden so easily because in order for me to feel superior to someone else, I have to suppress compassion and sympathy.

I don't know exactly what drives me to keep stocking up on things to sell despite having so much inventory that I'm having trouble keeping up. It could be the fear of missing out (on something to sell) or the fear of selling out (because it happens). It could be the thrill of finding new ways to make money. It could be because I just enjoy the challenge of selling things, particularly things that I either curated or made myself.

Maybe I'm just growing a business and this is just part of it, and everything will sort itself out over time.

Whatever this behavior is, wherever it stems from, is mine to own. Maybe it's a form of hoarding. Maybe it doesn't have an official label. Humans have had to deal with all kinds of frustrating aspects about themselves that didn't have names. So I'm going to tackle this aspect of myself by focusing more on selling than on buying, in order to get remaining inventory properly stored and out of sight.

If nothing else, the resulting absence of chaos in my field of vision will help create a bit of order in my otherwise turbulent mind.

I look forward to tomorrow.

The Day I Found Out my Ex-Husband was Dying

By: Pepper Lowe

The worst day of my life was October 26, 2011, when the man I was no longer in love with was dying.

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Less than a week before, I was at a tailgate with some friends when my father called me and told me that my ex-husband, Jody, had gone to the emergency room with terrible abdominal pain. It was his weekend to have our two children, and my parents had picked them up from their dad's house before his girlfriend took him to the hospital.

I got another call after the kids were in bed. Their father had been admitted. No one was sure what was going on yet. I tried not to worry. Maybe it was appendicitis, I thought.

It wasn't. He had a case of acute pancreatitis, and things didn't look good.

The next day, I told my son and daughter, ages 10 and 8, that their dad was pretty sick and needed to be in the hospital for a while. They were concerned but took it in stride, as kids tend to do. I looked up acute pancreatitis online and tried not to worry. My ex-husband had been healthy for most of his life, so this diagnosis had come as a shock to everyone.

My parents were still friends with my former in-laws, so I was able to get updates from my dad throughout the day and into the next. Jody's condition became critical, and he was quickly moved to the intensive care unit.

I was told to pray. That was all I could really do.

I was as honest with our children as I could be without alarming them. I found myself saying generic things like, "The doctors are doing their very best to help Daddy get better," and "He's still sick but hopefully he'll start getting better soon." I tried to believe my own words.

My son, who has always asked bold questions, asked me, "Is Daddy going to die?"

I couldn't lie. So I told him the truth: "I don't know."

The next morning, not even a week after my ex had staggered into the ER, my father called. I sat down on the edge of my bed.

It was bad, my dad told me. Jody's kidneys had crashed and his other organs had followed. His pancreas, according to the doctor, was "eating itself alive." He had maybe a 10% chance of making it. If I was going to go to the hospital, I had better go immediately.

I don't remember grabbing my bag and keys and telling my fiancé that I was leaving for the hospital to say goodbye, making the twenty-minute drive to the hospital, finding a parking spot, and walking into the ICU. I floated somewhere in space until I landed in the waiting room reserved for families only. Jody's family were good people and didn't question why I, the ex-wife, was among them. The air was thick with fear and sorrow and disbelief.

Suddenly the air was sucked out of the room as Jody's mother entered. She was supported on either side by her sisters.

There is no sorrow that can compare to the sorrow of a mother whose child is slipping away.

Someone asked me if I wanted to see my ex-husband. I had less than five minutes to basically wrap up my relationship with him and tell him goodbye.

This was someone I had known nearly all my life. He had been my first boyfriend. We had dated almost exclusively through high school and college, gotten married a month after college graduation, and had been married for over ten years before our divorce. Even though we'd fallen out of love with each other and in love with other people, we still had a connection because of the two children we shared.

He now lay unconscious in a hospital bed, a ventilator close by. I walked over to him and stroked his hair for the first time in over three years. Even though I was pretty sure he couldn't hear me, I told him that I would always love him and that I would make sure that our children were going to be okay. Or something like that. Autopilot had taken over by then.

I found myself back in the room with the family who had forgiven me and allowed me into this intimate and terrible time. All they could do was comfort one another as they sobbed and listened to the pastor's prayers for their son, their brother, their nephew, their grandson. Everyone waited for the doctor to come in with the news that everyone dreads.

An hour went by and he was still alive. Then another hour, and another.

He hung on for the rest of the day and through the night as we all prayed for a miracle. His survival rate was in the single digits, but somehow he was hanging on.

For weeks it was touch and go as he had surgeries and procedures to fix the damage from multiple organ failure, but his condition finally became stable enough to be moved out of ICU into a regular room. After three months, he was discharged, just in time to make it to the annual Daddy-Daughter Dance with our daughter.

Three years later he married the girlfriend who had been in the waiting room, and they now have a 4-year-old son.

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This is the first time I've written about those events, now almost nine years ago. As I allowed my mind to revisit that terrible day, I remembered the physical pain I had felt. It was like hot lead in my chest. Because there was nowhere for my mind to put the information I was receiving, I could only look at the book of Psalms and stare at the words as the blackness descended.

It was ironic. I was heartbroken but was no longer in love with my ex-husband. How was this possible? It wasn't really my loss. Not anymore.

The grief I felt as he was dying was not for me.

It was for my children, who were losing their daddy and didn't know it yet. It was for his parents, who were going to lose their only son, and for his sister, whose little brother was dying. It was for his girlfriend, whose world was shattering.

The searing pain became unbearable as I thought of my ex and the times he'd miss with his children if he left this planet. Watching his son graduate high school. Walking his daughter down the aisle. Having the chance to marry again and to live a life beyond 40 years.

I'd hurt for others before, many times. My heart went out to people I had never known. I've often cried for people I know only through the news or books or social media. But this hurt seemed to be on a different plane of existence. I felt it down to my core. My soul.

For the first time in my life I was able to see love from this vantage point. As I looked into an unfamiliar lens, I was able to take sorrow beyond myself and feel it for the people who loved him most.

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As I write this, I think about the families and loved ones who prayed as hard as we did and still lost. I don't know why we were spared the deeper and unending grief that comes with death of a child, husband, or parent. There is no known explanation. I do know that I'm incredibly thankful that my ex was given a very rare second chance, and that his children and their grandparents and extended family dodged a bullet that had been fired right at them. At his girlfriend. At me.

As selfish with love as I've been in the past, and as angry and resentful as I was when my marriage ended, I'm thankful that I was somehow able to drop it all and experience love from an angle that I didn't know existed.

It was an exercise in compassion that I will never forget.

The Roommate Road Test

By: Pepper Lowe

Most people who have traveled with any regularity know that things can go from zero to complicated in under a minute. Traveling with a friend is one of the fastest ways to find out if they would make a good roommate or not. It's not a guarantee, but you can at least get an idea of how you'd get along under one roof.

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Travel is, by nature, an activity that pushes people out of their comfort zones. If someone is out of their comfort zone and they have a personality trait that doesn't mesh well with your own, you will know pretty quickly. Even a short weekend trip can test someone's patience. Traffic, decisions on where to eat and stay and who brings what all come into play when you travel with someone, and you can get an opportunity to see if you're compatible with that person. If at any point they get irritated with you (or you're annoyed with them), make note of that. People are usually on their best behavior when the journey starts, so you can observe how they act around you.

Based on my one positive experience and a lot of negative ones, I'd plan a weekend road trip with any friend I was looking to share an apartment with so I'd know if we were compatible to live together in order to speed up the process and see if they were really someone I wanted to share a lease with. It's easy to assume that since you've always gotten along well, you'd make great roommates.

My sister and a good friend of hers decided to live together once they started college. They had known each other since elementary school but had never traveled together before, so my sister had no idea how picky and passive-aggressive this friend of hers was until they started sharing the same apartment. Within a few months, her friend would get mad at her for something trivial and would leave Post-It notes here and there — on the kitchen counter or on my sister's bedroom door — with whatever grievance she had that day.

Or my sister would come home and her friend would give her the silent treatment. In the end, they broke the lease because they couldn't stand living together. My sister was tired of getting tickets for whatever rules she had broken, and her friend was tired of being mad at whatever pissed her off, so they called it quits. Unfortunately, their friendship was never the same after that. If they had done some traveling together beforehand, they probably would have found out that they weren't compatible as roommates.

By contrast, I had a friend I had accidentally road tested when I went on a spontaneous trip with her and some friends. We shared a hotel room and got along great. She was positive and easygoing in spite of some of the pains that come along with any road trip. She was incredibly thoughtful and just went with the flow. She didn't boss me or anyone else around or try to dominate conversations. It was great. We had zero fights or disagreements during the entire two years we were roommates. It was about time. I had been through a few roommates by then who were either unpredictable and moody or terrible at remembering to pay rent on time and clean up after themselves. I've got a bad habit of being a doormat so I'd avoid them or not say anything when I'd find out that my roommate had borrowed my clothes — and sometimes, my car — or that my leftover Kung Pao had mysteriously disappeared. If I had road tested roommates-to-be before I agreed to live with them, I would have spared myself about four years of being annoyed.

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This method can also be used if you're looking for dependable travel buddies. My husband and I have done this a lot over the years by going on short cruises with friends. Sometimes we'd go with a group, and other times we'd travel with one or two people. Even though we don't share a room with anyone, we can find out if we want to travel regularly with them. It's pretty easy to know who's not a good fit.

For example, a few years ago we went on a cruise with six other people, all couples. One of the couples seemed to be really fun and upbeat like everyone else, but after the day, we noticed a pattern that made us uncomfortable. We'd only just met the boyfriend, and he was really pleasant to be around, but his girlfriend — someone we were pretty good friends with before this trip — would get drunk and then annoyed with him over petty things and then get loud. She was rude and belligerent not only with her

boyfriend, but with the server and other staff. She made at least four scenes during that trip. Once was when we were all walking around one of the islands, but the rest were when we were all at dinner. She kept ordering drinks and yelling at her boyfriend, especially when he tried to cut her off. Everyone was embarrassed by her and felt terrible for her boyfriend, and by the 4th day we knew we would never ask them to go with us on a trip again. It was a shame, because we really liked our friend's boyfriend, to the point where we totally would have traveled with him in the future. In the end he dumped her and so did we.

On the flip side, we've traveled at least six times with a friend of ours who gambles so much on cruise ships that the cruise line comps him a trip and gives him a \$500 credit every time he cruises. We've done the 5-hour road trip down to the port city the night before and stayed in a hotel suite with him, and once we were onboard we'd see him here and there when he wasn't at the blackjack table.

He's laid back and would do his own thing, and we would do ours. No one has ever felt obligated to meet for dinner or see a show, and there is no itinerary because we all left our scheduled lives and are just fine doing what we want. That first road test years before turned out to be a good friendship and guaranteed good travel experiences.

Because our travel usually involves airports and navigating around other countries, we don't want to risk going with people who easily freak out, spend most of their time drunk, make it glaringly obvious that they are tourists, or only eat American-style food. Travel is unpredictable as it is, so we don't want to add one more challenge. We like to go with the flow and try new things while not being drunk, so we'd rather travel with friends who are more like-minded, and for us, the only way to find out is using this method.

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If you want to do a road trip with a potential roommate, housemate, or travel buddy, I'd recommend that you start small — even a short weekend stay at an Airbnb or a day trip to the beach— because the last thing you want to do is to sign a lease with somebody who turns out to be a jerk. Or a drug dealer. Or a really loud snorer. Or a complainer. Or a really messy person. Or a cheapskate who always has excuses when it's time to pay the tab. Because every annoying trait you find will come with them as soon as you move in together.

The road test method is not foolproof (is anything really foolproof?) but it should give you some idea of what to expect if you decide to sign a lease with your friend. Hopefully you'll get enough of an idea to be able to make an informed decision. If you're still on the fence after one trip, you can always take another. And another. At some point you'll know.

Or they will. Because they might be road testing you too.

Are You Selling Yourself Short?

By: Pepper Lowe

During dinner at Cracker Barrel not too long ago, my husband David, a programmer and web developer, was telling his father about the deals he was giving his clients. After a while, my father-in-law leaned forward and asked him, “Son, don’t you think you’re selling yourself short?”

Yep.

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I will never forget walking into a local boutique with David, who had built up a few hundred dollars’ worth of trade in exchange for his monthly website services. After an hour of picking out and trying on clothes, we went to the front with our finds, and with a sour face, the store owner informed us that she felt like she was giving away her clothes. David explained that he’d been paying for her website’s hosting and that he’d maintained her customized shopping cart in addition to making website updates all year. She rolled her eyes. He added that the cable company charges a monthly fee whether you watch TV or not. She kept acting like we wanted her clothes for free. I stormed out and sat fuming in the car until he came back, empty handed of course. That person had been a client of his for years and knew exactly what the trade agreement had been. She’d been fine with him paying for hosting and updating her website — until he dared ask for compensation.

On another occasion, we took the kids to the restaurant of another long-term client. After we got our food, one of the owners came up to us and yelled that he wasn’t giving away this amount of food to us. My husband told him that we hadn’t been to his place in over three months and that he had provided services to them that was worth way more than the food we’d ordered. It didn’t help that the owner was drunk, but he’d tried to embarrass us in front of other customers.

We got the food to go and left. Since that guy had made it clear that he didn't want David's services, David waited until the month was over and then deleted the restaurant's website. Then, since he owned the domain name, he sold it to a place over in California who was happy to pay the hefty price tag he'd put on it.

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My husband has been a programmer and web designer since websites made their debut a long time ago, and because he's a nice guy who likes a good deal himself, he has had a history of charging clients for his website services and consulting work for next to nothing compared to the average going rates. He felt like his cheap prices would give his clients a reason to stay with him. Yet in spite of these good deals, he's lost many clients over the years.

What's interesting was that some of those clients left him in favor of companies who did similar work for a big monthly fee. They'd rather pay \$1000 a month than to stick with him in exchange for trade or \$100 per month or some other ridiculously small fee for his hours and hours of work. After a while, it dawned on me that even though my husband's services were top-notch, those former clients had not seen their value because he wasn't charging enough.

The whole thing drove me crazy. I knew how hard he worked for his clients — on Sundays, at night, on holidays. What really irritated me was the way he devalued his own work by stating that he was getting “free food” from his restaurant clients. After hearing this for a long time, I told him, “This isn't free food. This is your payment in exchange for your services. You either get food in exchange, or you invoice them.”

Several years ago, a mentor of mine, who is in sales, told me, “People don't value things they got for free.” At the time, it made no sense to me. But that was before I was married to a man who routinely gave his valuable services away and saw for myself how people tend to devalue the things they got for free — or for a ridiculously good deal. Some clients bend over backwards for us, but others, like that boutique owner, forget that they aren't paying him when they withhold their payment — in those cases, payment in the form of products— for services rendered.

Why do people tend to devalue services from others that cost them little to nothing?

In many cases, cheap or free = disposable. Those former clients ended up paying serious money for similar web services because they saw the value in those other companies. All other things being equal, the other web design companies let people know that they were worth the investment.

In her article *Why Free Is Too Expensive*, Lisa Larter says, “When your time is free, the other person’s time will always be more important and more valuable than your time.”

In a *Forbes* article, author Selena Rezvani argues that when we say yes to free (or greatly reduced) services, “we say to people that our time, energy, and discretionary effort are worth-less.”

Of course, the “people don’t value free or low-cost work” is not an unyielding rule. David does work in trade for restaurant owners who appreciate his work and pay for it in the form of whatever trade they agreed upon when they signed their contract with him. There are always exceptions, and we are grateful for them.

One of those exceptional clients is named Jim, who owns an audio-video company. He and David met for lunch a few months ago and talked shop. David asked Jim how he manages to keep his clients. His reply: “I charge a premium, and they pay for it because they value my services.” He explained that his prices, which he has gradually raised over the years, naturally weed out the people who don’t want to pay for his services, so he ends up with quality clients who don’t bat an eye at paying what he charges for his quality services. That really got David’s attention.

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I feel that in order to get others to value your work that you do for them, you must value it yourself. You must value yourself.

I have a friend who was so good at his work that his boss started giving him more responsibilities, but after a while, he was doing the work of three people. He went to the boss' office and pointed this out, and then he asked for a raise to compensate for all this extra work. The boss declined.

So he quit.

Actually, he gave his two weeks' notice. He spent those two weeks training his replacement. After his job officially ended, the guy who took his place still needed training, so his former boss called to ask him if he could come back and continue training. He knew that his job had required some serious technical training because he'd held it for 11 years. He knew that he was the only one who could really train the new guy. So he said sure, as long as they paid him \$100 an hour for consulting fees.

Because he'd excelled at his former job, my friend knew his worth, and that if that company wanted him as a consultant, they were going to pay for it.

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I strongly believe that when you think a certain way, your actions are likely to follow. In order to get out of the "I want to give them a deal so they will continue to be my client" or "I have to take on these extra responsibilities with no additional compensation" mindset, you must actively tell yourself that your time has value. But you also have to already be doing a really good job at what you're doing.

Many people can't quit like my friend — who was able to quit only because he'd been developing a business in his spare time. If you're interning for a small paycheck (or no paycheck), you have to put in the required work and gain some experience. If you're just starting out, it's probably not a good idea to demand a pay raise or try to charge a premium for your services until you've proven yourself. The people I used as examples have been doing their jobs long enough to know what's fair and what's not. They are confident in what they do, but they don't set their sights unrealistically high. There's a balance, and it can sometimes be hard to know what that is.

I'd advise to do what my husband did — he talked to people and researched going prices for the web services he offered, taking consideration that different regions in the country may charge more or less for the same services, depending on factors such as cost of living. He picked people's brains. He asked questions to people he considered to be mentors. Through them, he figured out what was realistic and what wasn't.

After he got the information he needed to make an informed decision, he changed his posture for new clients. He now charges the going rates for building and hosting websites, providing backlinks, and doing updates when they're needed. He also vets potential trade clients to make sure that they understand up front that trade is a form of payment, and that they can change that form of payment to a check if they'd like to retain his services. So far, these methods have worked.

. . .

You are worth the time it takes to climb that hill towards success. Until you define your own worth for your skills, other people are likely to tell you what they think you're worth. Check your mindset, because your actions will most likely be determined by the way you think about yourself. If you need practice or more experience, that's okay. Nearly all of us need that.

Know. Your. Worth.

7 Free Books on Blogging for Beginners

By: Pepper Lowe

Starting a blog when you have no experience can be daunting, especially when you're looking at making your first website. Because there is so much involved in building a successful blog – picking the right name, finding a domain name that hasn't already been taken by someone else, finding a way to get your blog seen, and making money on your blog – it's easy to get overwhelmed and frustrated.

Below is a list of 7 free ebooks on Amazon that address all of these aspects – and more – to help newbies get started. Almost all of them are under 100 pages and include external links, and sometimes free courses, that point to further blog-related resources.

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How to Start a Blog Today

This 48-page ebook (2017) by author and blogger Scott Chan will help you get your blog started in under half an hour. You'll learn how to:

- Get a domain name and hosting for your blog
- Use WordPress to create and customize your blog
- Market your blog
- Monetize your blog.

The author includes links to more tutorials so you can expand your knowledge on the ins and outs of blogging, and he also gives his contact information if you have any questions.

Starting a Successful Blog when you have NO CLUE!

This ebook (2020) by Gundi Gabrielle is a little over 100 pages and covers:

- How to get started from scratch
- How to avoid making “rookie mistakes”
- Going about getting a domain name and hosting
- The steps to getting a WordPress website for your blog
- Secrets to making your blog successful

This book also provides links to a free course and more free ebooks on marketing and making a business out of your blog.

How to Start a Blog – Free Step-by-Step Beginners Guide to Building a Blog for Those Interested in Making Money and Having Fun!

This blog guide (2018) by Lauren McManus and Alex Nurney gives beginners the tools to build a blog with little to no experience in just 82 pages. You will learn:

- All the reasons that having a blog is a good idea
- How to conquer fear of blogging
- Steps on exactly how to create the perfect blog using WordPress
- How to get traffic to your blog
- Monetize your blog

As with the other ebooks, this has various links that point to other free resources for bloggers.

5,000 Words Per Hour: Write Faster, Write Smarter

This 73-page ebook by Chris Fox will show you how to be efficient and more productive with your writing. It's geared toward authors who are writing books, but I've been using it to learn how to get faster at writing content in general. You will learn:

- Writing exercises in order to "train your brain" to write faster

- Editing skills

- The importance of being track of your progress

- How to avoid burnout and create incentives to write more

There is one section (chapter 5) that is geared specifically toward people who are writing books, which may not be relevant to your needs.

Also, this ebook was published in 2015, but it's on the list because as a blogger, you'll need to develop skills that will enable you to write a regular stream of blog posts.

How to Make Money Blogging – How We Made \$103,457.98 Our First Year and How Our Students Are Earning an Extra \$100, \$1000, or Even \$10,000 Per Month!

Also written by Lauren McManus and Alex Nurney, this 87-page ebook (2018) has similar material to their book above, but it provides more details on:

- Creating content for your blog

- Utilizing social media to get a fan base

- Building an email list of subscribers

- Finding the right audience for your blog

- Making money, which includes affiliate marketing

- Building your brand

- What worked (and didn't work) for the authors

The book provides inspiration and encouragement to bloggers by using examples from their own experiences as well as those of others.

Follow this link for more tips and updated information from the authors.

Blogging: How To Start A Profitable Blog: A Guide To Create Content That Rocks, Build Traffic, And Turn Your Blogging Passion Into Profit

Written by David Lim, this 36-page ebook focuses on blogging aspects such as:

- Creating quality content that makes your readers want to keep reading
- Brainstorming that results in success
- Making sure your blog has a good look and is easy to navigate
- Getting your blog out there with social media, emails, and word of mouth
- Making money with affiliates, AdSense, sponsorships, and more

Even though this ebook was published in 2015, it has detailed tips on writing content, brainstorming, and other aspects that are helpful to new bloggers.

How to Work for Yourself: 100 Ways to Make the Time, Energy and Priorities to Start a Business, Book or Blog

This ebook by Bryan Cohen is just 47 pages long and is a companion book to his online course. His advice includes a guide on:

- Time management and tips on marketing so you get results
- Steps on how to get into the right mindset that frees up your mind
- How to be more creative
- Setting specific goals and challenging yourself
- How to brainstorm more effectively so you can succeed at projects
- Working at meeting financial goals (crowdfunding is one of them)

Note: the tips in this ebook are more general and not specifically about blogging. It definitely focuses on how to work for yourself.

Another note: this book was published in 2013, but because it mainly discusses things like time management, creativity, and where to focus your energy, it's not a book that necessarily needs to be updated for 2020.

All of these books offer some great advice for beginners, but keep in mind there may be a learning curve. It's necessary to be thoughtful when making choices that can affect your blog's performance. It takes time to determine the essentials such as having the right domain name and an appealing blog design that is also easy for your readers to navigate. After getting your blog made, it takes time to get into the groove of creating quality content so that your blog will be successful going forward.

Also, keep in mind that most of the books on this list were published prior to 2020. Some of the links may not work, and there will likely be some outdated information regarding WordPress. For instructions on getting your blog using WordPress in 2021, here is a YouTube step-by-step [video tutorial](#) on how to create a blog in as little as 30 minutes.