

Self employment is a WORTHwhile option

by Heidi Riley

Small Business

Just off the Trans Canada Highway in Bonshaw, **Ann Worth** is combining her love for country living with self employment. Ann owns and operates **Worth Consulting Group**, a business consulting company specializing in export market development, project and event management, training and research.

She works from her home overlooking the Strathgartney Highlands Golf Course. From her front porch, the land drops away in snowy valleys, and she often sees foxes and other wildlife from her desk.

Beginnings

Ann studied Hotel Motel Restaurant Management, which led to private sector work in various hotel operational and sales positions across Atlantic Canada.

Her interest in the food industry led her to positions with the **PEI Food and Beverage Processors Association** and **Atlantic Canada Food Export Partnership**.

“I travelled to many countries helping companies from across the region connect with strategic contacts,” says Ann. “Along the way, I learned lessons and improved my market knowledge. With such incredible work experiences and a busy family life, it was time for a change and to travel a little less.”

Making the change to self employment

In 2005, Ann decided to strike out on her own as a business consultant. “Self employment provided me with greater flexibility to manage projects and balance work and personal schedules,” says Ann. She began working with firms and governments from across Atlantic Canada to help them realize their business and export market development goals.

“It was a little scary at the time. I asked myself if I would find enough work. It’s critical to do your homework, communicate your abilities and develop a clear picture of how you can help clients. You also need to deliver quality service on time.”

“Self employment is rewarding because you have the freedom and flexibility to make your own decisions. It’s very satisfying, but I have never worked harder than I have in my own business.”

Challenges of starting a business at home

When Ann established the business, high-speed Internet was not available in her area. She overcame that obstacle by investing in satellite Internet.

“Although I work from home, work takes me away quite often. It’s important to establish contacts personally. Networking, identifying client needs, training and education are important in growing my business. I need to meet with people, learn new things and be in tune with the business environment.”

Ann also promotes the business through **Linked In**, **FaceBook** and **Twitter**. “These on-line tools help me connect to local and international contacts and provide a way to share information. The internet has transformed my business and removed the barrier of geography. You can be based in rural PEI and run an international company.”

Hiring and partnerships

Ann sometimes hires on a per-project basis but more often works with partners who have complimentary skill sets. “Bringing on partners to create a stronger team is smart business. Partnering also helps develop relationships in your field.”



Ann Worth balances a busy family life with a successful home-based consulting business.

“I look for project partners or employees who have very strong communication skills. Comfort and proficiency with electronic media is also very important. They should also be self starters and independent thinkers who care as much about the client as I do.”

Giving back

Ann is grateful for the guidance, support and friendship she has received in the past, and genuinely cares about the success of others starting out in business. She has mentored small business owners and chaired the **Entrepreneur’s Forum**, a program that coordinates strategic advice to business people. Ann is also a member of a variety of professional organizations.

Ann’s advice for those considering self employment

- **What you are passionate about?** What are your goals? What are the important things you are going to satisfy by having your own business? Does it suit your lifestyle? Does it offer balance with your family?
- **Don’t be afraid to ask for help.** Most people are generous and very willing to help you. Ask for advice from someone who has achieved success. Government business development agencies can also provide support services and programs.
- **Research the the market.** Is there a need for your product or service? Believe in yourself, but don’t be blind to input and advice. Ask for feedback from a potential customer. Then just do it. People can help you get started, but you need to drive it yourself.
- **Work with integrity.** Be honest in your communications with others. Be honest with your clients as to your expertise and understand your strengths and weaknesses.
- **What goes around comes around.** The best way of marketing your business is to do great work, and people will recommend you to others.