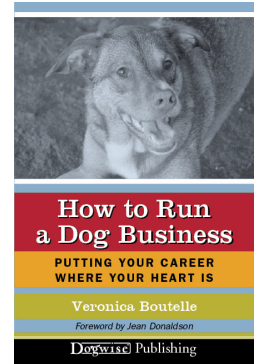


An excerpt from

## ***How to Run a Dog Business. Putting Your Career Where Your Heart Is***

by Veronica Boutelle, Dogwise Publishing. 800-776-2665, [www.dogwise.com](http://www.dogwise.com)  
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### **From the Introduction**

#### **Is It Right For You?**

Some dream of it from childhood—working with dogs for a living. I remember gathering all my stuffed dogs onto a large blanket and pretending to go down a river on our “raft,” encountering all manner of adventures along the way. Or piling the plush pooches into my wagon and then walking down the street for the mail, stopping now and then for a quick training lesson. If someone had asked me at 5 years of age what I wanted to be when I grew up, I’d have said I wanted to be an animal teacher. As it turned out, I became a teacher, but of humans. It wasn’t until I began to cast around for a second career that I stumbled into dog training.

Most dog trainers, walkers, and sitters come to the profession as a second career. Nearly everyone engaged in a dog business has a deep love of animals, and when this becomes combined with a high degree of frustration with (or aversion to!) traditional jobs, the lure of working with dogs full-time becomes strong. Unfortunately for those who wish to work with dogs—as trainers, walkers, sitters, or daycare providers—the choices are slim. There are few jobs available and most rarely pay much above minimum wage. Almost never do they come with health or other benefits. So for all but a few of us, to earn a living as a provider of professional dog services means starting our own businesses.

#### **You, yourself, and you—the role of personality**

Before you start your business or dive deeper into financial and legal commitments with an existing one, take a few moments to consider whether you are truly heading in a direction that is right for you.

It’s easy to glamorize the benefits of being one’s own boss—the flexible scheduling, being able to do things the way you see fit, being in control of your own destiny. When a business is running well, all of this is true. But the downsides are equally important—there’s no one to write your monthly paycheck, no set hours and accountability

to make sure the unexciting but necessary administrative tasks are completed, and the business’s success or failure rests on your shoulders. Many people find working for themselves more of a challenge than anticipated, and it seems that some personalities are better suited to the life of a small business owner than others.

The first self-assessment you need to make is how comfortable you are taking risks. Many new business owners have to dip into their savings or borrow money—what if you have to? Does the mere thought of that give you the heebie-jeebies? Starting a dog training business takes less capital than most enterprises, but you still run the risk of losing money and possibly failing. It takes tenacity and perspective to face such prospects and still work hard and enthusiastically. I’ve seen many dog pros quit or go back to part-time work long before their businesses could reasonably be expected to succeed.

The second self-assessment has to do with your ability to problem solve and your level of self-discipline. You will face challenges and problems throughout your business career. While you don’t have to enjoy solving problems, you need to be willing to tackle them head on and not sweep them under the rug. You also need to be self-disciplined, especially about those parts of the business above and beyond dealing with dogs such as marketing, bookkeeping, and following up with clients. Can you handle a variety of tasks? Do you stick with your plans over time? Could you see yourself doing this in five years? If you’ve answered yes to most of these questions, self-employment could be perfect for you.

You know you want to work with dogs. Now the challenge is to learn to run a company. If you’re already in business for yourself, you’ve probably experienced some of the frustrations and pitfalls, not the least of which is waking up to realize that your business is running you, rather

than the other way around. This common phenomenon can sneak up on you easily, a combination of early systems failing under the weight of increased business, of initial decisions that made perfect sense at the beginning coming back to haunt you as the business grew, and the press of day to day activities robbing your attention from the big picture needs of your enterprise. If you're already knee deep in these stressors, this book can help you dig out and create a fresh start. And if you're just getting started, the aim is to help you start off in control and stay there.

### **Reality check—do you really get paid to play with dogs all day?**

Unfortunately not. Hands-on dog time varies by profession and business type, but all dog businesses entail more than working with dogs. As you'll see, a large portion of your time will be spent marketing your business (which isn't as frightening or awful as it sounds). Then there's the administrative time spent answering and returning phone calls and emails, handling client paperwork, and taking care of general tasks like bookkeeping. And don't underestimate the driving. Most sitters, walkers, and trainers spend a good deal of time in their cars. Another consideration for trainers is the realization early on that in most cases training owners, not dogs, is the primary task.

These are all important facts to face as you decide if a career as a dog pro is right for you. Even so, life with the dogs is a hard living to beat. If you agree, this book is for you.

Veronica Boutelle, MA Ed., CTC, is the former Director of Behavior and Training at the San Francisco SPCA. Through her business, **dogTEC**, [www.dogtec.org](http://www.dogtec.org), she teaches sold-out seminars and consults one-on-one with dog professionals. She writes a column for the "APDT Chronicle of the Dog" and is a sought-after speaker at conferences and dog training schools across the country. She lives with her husband and two dogs surrounded by wildlife in Sixes, Oregon.