

An excerpt from

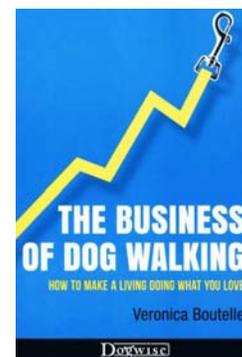
The Business of Dog Walking – How to Make a Living Doing What You Love

Chapter 1

by Veronica Boutelle, Dogwise Publishing.

800-776-2665, www.dogwise.com

Permission to reproduce excerpt with attribution granted by Publisher.



Why this book?

This book is based on the Dog Walking Academy course curriculum and contains all the tips and advice we've developed over the years since we began the program in early 2004. My hope is that the information will help you set up a safe, dog- and people-friendly, enjoyable, and profitable dog walking business that not only provides you with steady income, but is a walking (no pun intended, of course) advertisement for professionalism and responsibility in this growing industry.

Chapter 1 - Dog Walking For Profit

What is dog walking?

Dog walking is an ongoing service for busy people, rather than vacation relief pet-sitting visits or walks. Walkers provide dogs with much-needed exercise and companionship during the long day while their owners work. And walkers provide their human clients with guilt relief, peace of mind, and a well-behaved dog to come home to at the end of the day, one that's ready to curl up on the couch with them instead of demanding a neighborhood marathon.

The service comes in various formats, and which ones you offer is likely to be largely dictated by your geographical location. For example, dog walking in the California Bay Area usually refers to walking small groups of dogs off leash on beaches or trails, or in parks. Dog walking in New York City is more generally associated with walking groups of dogs on leash down the sidewalk. And in most urban and suburban areas, dog walking means single or small group on-leash walks. What is consistent across all iterations is that dogs romp with their walkers on a regular, ongoing basis.

Is it right for you?

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 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 make is how comfortable you are about taking risks. What if you have to dip into your savings or borrow money—as almost all new business owners have to? Does the mere thought of that give you the heebie-jeebies? Starting a dog walking 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 walkers quit or go back to part-time work long before their businesses could reasonably have been 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, self-employment could be perfect for you.

Reality check: do you really get paid to play with dogs all day?

You do indeed. But you also have to do it in bad weather, and even if your feet hurt. There's more driving than most people realize, and no sick pay

when you come down with the flu. And if you like to run off on spontaneous vacations, you're out of luck.

Oh, and don't forget that you have to actually run the business after you come home from your day of playing with the dogs.

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 decisions that made perfect sense at the beginning coming back to haunt you as the business grows, and the press of day-to-day activities stealing away 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 yourself 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.

Can I really make a living?

Absolutely. In fact, of all the dog-related services, dog walking is generally the most easily lucrative. There are a number of reasons for this. One, there's no revolving door. For example, dog trainers who see their clients for a short period of time, hopefully solve the clients' problems, and then send them on their way, have to continually market to fill their schedules with new clients. By contrast, because dog walking is an ongoing service, once you have brought in a client (if you do your job well and nurture the relationship), you should benefit from this client for many years.

Two, you don't need many clients to begin with, because you can only walk so many dogs in a day. Three, start up costs are very low. Other than purchasing a vehicle if you need one, you are not likely to need to borrow money to get started as you might for a daycare, training, or boarding facility. And four, the business carries very low overhead. You don't need to pay rent and utilities for a facility, and supplies are minimal (leashes, treats, good walking shoes, and rain gear, basically), so your main expenses will be gas and vehicle maintenance.

What can you make? The actual number will depend on rates in your area and which type of service you provide (off-leash groups, on-leash individual walks, etc.), but generally our clients make between \$40-60K annually, with many of the larger businesses that employ several dog walkers making six figures.

Veronica Boutelle, MA, CTC, is the author of *How to Run a Dog Business* and co-author of *Minding Your Dog Business*. She is a top consultant in the dog service industry, and a sought-after speaker and workshop leader at conferences around the country. Veronica is the co-creator of the Dog Walking Academy, a comprehensive 4-day workshop leading to professional dog walking certification. Through her company, dog*tec, Veronica and her colleagues help aspiring and existing dog walkers create thriving careers and businesses in the dog service field.