



8 Steps to Getting Started as a Crafts Designer

by Lisa Galvin

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Graphic illustration by Barbara Brabec.

1. FIRST, YOU MUST BEGIN. *Just do it!* Easier said than done, this can be the hardest part because it requires a conscious decision and commitment of time and money on your part. Both will always be in short supply.

If you wait for the perfect timing, it will never happen. Once the decision is made, know that YOU are responsible for making it happen. It will involve hard work, perseverance, and a willingness to travel down new “roads and paths” that you have never been down before. I’ve often compared it to climbing a mountain; you pack all the gear you think you’ll need and recognize from the start that you will cross many hills and valleys, picking up new tools and needed supplies before ascending to the top.

2. INVEST IN YOURSELF. Scary? Yes, but aren’t you worth it? I would rather try and fail, than regret that I never tried at all. Lack of action means missing all chances of attaining something that could have been.

Ask yourself, “Am I trying to establish a business?” How many businesses are started without an initial investment? I’ve often heard designers say they couldn’t afford to join this or that professional organization, or go to seminars or trade shows. I’ve been there and understand that. Raising a family and meeting the bills each month is a struggle when the economy is at its best, let alone when things get tough. You have to evaluate your own circumstances; no one can judge that for you. But don’t give up. Sacrifices may be necessary as you consider borrowing money or cutting back on extras to set funds aside.

One thing is for sure: If you aren’t attending industry events, you’re missing out on opportunities. Information about hot new products and trends for the coming year and the people who can help you make your dreams possible are going to be there. Many times I’ve had other designers or manufacturers refer work and new contacts to me because we have established a personal working relationship. They know the type, quality and style of work I do. If they don’t become acquainted with you, see your work

or the way you present yourself, you may be losing out on something great. Even in this cyber-oriented society, there is no better way to network than on a person-to-person, face-to-face level. It does make a difference!

3. LEARN TO NETWORK with the people in your industry, whatever that industry may be. Opportunities and information are there and available to you if only you seek them out. Ask questions, share, learn and get acquainted with others with like interests. This helps in many ways. Not only can it help you avoid financial pitfalls and other common mistakes, it will help broaden your network as one person is introduced to another. Many business deals are made by personal referrals. Like having a foot in the door, referrals will give you an inside edge over your competition. Your window of opportunity may be only one personal contact away.

4. AS YOU GROW, try to establish a small support group of other designers or small business owners that you trust. This is extremely helpful. Within the group, discuss and explore self-promotion and marketing ideas, share contacts and resources when applicable, as well as expenses at trade shows, rooming together to split costs. With e-mail it's never been easier to maintain those relationships and establish a long-distance "co-worker" even though you're working alone in your studio environment

5. BE WILLING TO COMPROMISE and explore new areas. You may be asked to do designs in a style or with materials that you are not familiar with, involving research and time spent in creative "play" as you learn the skills needed. Your willingness to go above and beyond to do the job right will be noticed. Bear in mind, there are limits, but initially you may have to put an extra foot forward to get where you want to be.

6. STAY FOCUSED ON YOUR GOALS--both professional and personal. Maintaining a good balance between work and family for any business is a delicate and difficult path to tread. When you work from home, it can be very hard to draw those lines, especially in the beginning. In most cases, if they see that you are serious about what you're doing and working hard to make it happen, your family and friends will follow your lead.

7. PLAN ON MAKING SOME MISTAKES. As much as you try to avoid them, they will happen. Fearing to make them will leave you stuck right where you are. Learning to take a lesson from them and move forward will help you grow and succeed. No one is perfect.

8. ENJOY THE JOURNEY. Wrong turns and all, if you don't enjoy what you're doing, it's not worth it in the end. Have faith in yourself and your abilities. Do everything you can to put forth your very best.



Barbara Brabec

Editor's Note: To the deep regret of designers everywhere, the Society of Craft Designers filed for Chapter 7 Liquidation in 2006, and its members were welcomed into the Craft & Hobby Association as CHA Designer Members. See my thoughts about this in the article, [“The Dissolution of the Society of Craft Designers.”](#)

RELATED ARTICLES: I heartily second Lisa's comments about the importance of networking. When I was just beginning as a speaker, I presented my first keynote address for the Society of Craft Designers and did a lot of networking that year and another year when I was invited to return. I've written about this in [“Networking Can Change Your Life . . . If You Take it Seriously”](#) (PDF document).

Visit [Barbara Brabec's World](#) for a wealth of additional articles and resources on many topics related to home-business startup, management and marketing. Check the Table of Contents for each of my [home-business books](#) to see which ones might be most helpful to you. All of them include advice from me as well as from many successful business owners and industry pros in my network.

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