

Anything you want

Derek Sivers—2011.

Ten years of experience in one hour

- Don't be on your deathbed someday, having squandered your one chance at life, full of regret because you pursued little distractions instead of big dreams.
- Success comes from persistently improving and inventing, not from persistently promoting what's not working.
- Your business plan is moot. You don't know what people really want to kill you start doing it doing it.
- Starting with no money is an advantage. You don't need money to start helping people.
- **So, I thought that** by taking an unrealistically Utopian approach, I could keep the business from growing too much. Instead of trying to make it big, I was going to make it small. It was the opposite of ambition, so I had to think in a way that was the opposite of ambitious.
- The key point is that I wasn't trying to make a big business. I was just daydreaming about how one little thing would look in a perfect world.
- When you make a business, you get to make a little universe where you control all the laws. This is your Utopia.
- She said, "You set the selling price at whatever you want. We f keep a flat \$4 cut. And we pay you every week." So I went home and wrote, on my new cdbaby.com website, "You set the selling price at whatever you want. We keep a flat \$4 cut. And we pay you every week." I figured if it worked for her, it was fine for me. Because it was taking me about forty-five minutes of work to add a new album to the site, I also had to charge \$25 per album as compensation for my time. (Shows you how much I thought my time was worth in those days.) A few days later, I realized that \$35 feels about the same as \$25, so I bumped it up to \$35 per album, which left: me room to give discounts and still make a profit
- And that's it! Six years and \$10 million later, those same two numbers were the sole source of income for the company: a \$35 setup fee per album and a \$4 cut per CD sold.
- But "revolution" is a term that people use only when you're successful. Before that, you're just a quirky person who does things differently.
- We all have lots of ideas, creations, and projects. When you present one to the world, and it's not a hit, don't keep pushing it as-is. Instead, get back to improving and inventing.
- **Don't waste** years fighting uphill battles against locked doors. Improve or invent until you get that huge response.
- Every event you get invited to. Every request to start a new project. If you're not saying "HELL YEAH!" about it, say "no."
- By not having any money to waste, you never waste money.
- I made the office computers myself from parts. My well-funded friends would spend \$ 100,000 to buy something that I made myself for \$ 1000. They did it saying "we need the very best," but it didn't improve anything for the customers.
- An idea to get big, big, big, it has to be useful. And being useful doesn't need funding.

- Starting small puts 100 percent of your energy on actually solving real problems for real people. It gives you a stronger foundation to grow from. It eliminates the friction of big infrastructure and gets right to the point. And it will let you change your plan in an instant, as you're working closely with those first customers telling you what they really need.
- Never forget that there are thousands of businesses, like Tim's Fish Bait Shop in a shack on a beach somewhere, that are doing just fine without corporate formalities.
- Have the confidence to know that when your target 1 percent hears you excluding the other 99 percent, the people in that 1 percent will come to you because you've shown how much you value them.
- After reading the whole thing, I felt like saying things my old voice teacher would have said;
 - "OK, make a plan that requires only \$1000. Go!"
 - "Now make a plan for ten times as many customers. Go!"
 - "Now do it without a website. Go!"
 - "Now make all your initial assumptions wrong, and have it work anyway. Go!"
 - "Now show how you would franchise it. Go!"
- "When the mafia ran this town, it was fun. There were only two numbers that mattered: how much was coming in, and how much was going out. As long as there was more in than out, everyone was happy. But then the whole town was bought up by these damn corporations full of MBA weasels micro-managing. Trying to maximize the profit from every square foot of floor space. Now the place that used to put ketchup on my hotdog tells me it'll be an extra twenty-five cents for ketchup! It sucked all the fun out of this town! Yeah... I miss the mob."
- When writing an email to everyone, if I wasn't perfectly clear, I'd get twenty thousand confused replies, which would take my staff all week to reply to, costing me at least \$5000 plus lost morale. Even if I was very clear but took more than a few sentences to explain something, I'd get thousands of replies from people who never read past the first few sentences.
- When I first built CD Baby, every order resulted in an automated email that let the customer know when the CD was actually shipped. At first this note was just the normal "Your order has shipped today. Please let us know if it doesn't arrive. Thank you for your business."
- **After a few months**, that felt really incongruent with my mission to make people smile. I knew could do better. So I took twenty minutes and wrote this goofy little thing:
 - Your CD has been gently taken from our CD Baby shelves with sterilized contamination-free gloves and placed onto a satin pillow. A team of 50 employees inspected your CD and polished it to make sure it was in the best possible condition before mailing. Our packing specialist from Japan lit a candle and a hush fell over the crowd as I he put your CD into the finest gold-lined box that money can buy. We all had a wonderful celebration afterwards and the whole party marched down the street to the post office where the entire town of Portland waved "Bon Voyage!" to your package, on its way to you, in our private CD Baby jet on this day, Friday, June 6th.
- That one silly email, sent out with every order, has been so loved that if you search Google for "Private CD Baby jet," you'll get almost twenty thousand results. Each one is somebody who got the email and loved it enough to post it on his website and tell all his friends.
- That one goofy email created thousands of new customers. When you're thinking of how to make your business bigger, it's tempting to try to think all the big thoughts and come up with world-

changing massive-action plans. **But please know** that it's often the tiny details that really thrill people enough to make them tell all their friends about you.

- When I had filled a 5000-square-foot warehouse, I rented 10,000 square feet. When I filled up 10,000 square feet, I rented 20,000 square feet. Even that filled up fast. But no matter what business you're in, it's good to prepare for what would happen if business doubled. Have ten clients now? How would it look if you had twenty at once? Serving eighty customers for lunch each day? What would happen if 160 showed up? Notice that "more of the same" is never the answer. You'd have to do things in a new way to handle twice as much business. Processes would have to be streamlined. Never be the typical tragic small business that gets frazzled and freaked out when business is doing well. It sends a repulsive "I can't handle this!" message to everyone. Instead, if your internal processes are always designed to handle twice your existing load, it sends an attractive "come on in, we've got plenty of room" message to everyone.
- **Contact me anytime:** The coolest people I meet are the ones who find me through something I've written. So if you made it this far, please go to <http://sivers.Org/a> and email me to say hello. I get really inspired by people's questions, so feel free to ask me anything, or just tell me what you're working on. I'm glad to help.