

# Your Journey

Practical Advice for the WAHM or perspective WAHM

An E Book by Heather Piehl





I am not writing this book as a "how to"; it is not a step by step in starting a business. I am taking an approach to get you thinking about things that tend to get overlooked both in the beginning and in all steps along the way with women in business. I want to give you just tiny tid-bits to get you thinking, to get you to expand your every day normal way of looking at things. The answers are all so different for everyone; I can not possibly encompass the right answers for all of you. I can get you on the path to thinking in order for you to finish the thought that is right for you. - I hope this helps you see another side of things in one aspect of your business you have not thought of before. There are so many resources out there that will give you the facts and step by step of starting and running a business but very few and far between are resources that give you some real personal food for thought related to starting a running a business. This is just a small book to get you to think and hopefully in that process grow in your business and personal journeys.

With warmest regards!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Hester', written in a cursive style.

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## Is being a WAHM for you?

Working from home can be a scary thing. Going through the motions to get to that point can be even scarier! A ton of questions go through your mind- Can we make it on one income if or until my business takes off? Can I focus enough to get a business off the ground? Am I qualified for what I want to pursue? What kind of business do I want to get into? What if I fail?- These are very scary things. Of course compounded by the fact that you have children to provide for and to complete the circle of these thoughts, the whole reason you are even going through this is so that you can be there for your children.

It is a doable process and is a rewarding venture once you know how to start and accomplish your goal.

First and foremost, I have to stress networking and support!! Those are two words that should not be far from a work at home mom's mind. Not only in your professional life but your personal life as well, these two things are essential. You will find that once you are a work at home mom, your professional and personal lives get somewhat blurred together at times, even more reason to keep those two words close at all times.

**Support-** Having a support team is one of the first steps in my mind because #1, you will feel more at ease as you go through the rest of the steps and #2, you need to know that as you get further down this path, you will not be alone.- Is your spouse on board with you? Have you spoken about the financial cuts this may bring to your family? Is it understood that you will have to invest time in your new venture? That you may have to invest money? Have you discussed the possibility of being away from home on evenings and weekends if you are going into a business that requires you to give home parties? Have you spoke about the fact that though you may be home during the day, you are still working and need support with the household as you would if you were working outside the home?- Do you have friends or family who are willing to step in once in a while with childcare? Do you have someone to lean on when you are frustrated or feel like giving up? Are your friends and family behind you in your venture? Will they understand that what you are trying to do is hard work, deserves the respect of a work outside the home job and that you are in no way taking the easy road? Do they know your reasons for working from home? These may seem like negative, harsh thoughts but they are all things I have encountered over the years with women who wish to work from home or

start their own business. Essentially, you are not doing this alone and you need to have a solid support foundation under you.

**Networking-** For me, networking is an extension of support. It can mean different things in different situations. You want to get a solid foundation of networking underneath you. In this case, women in your situation on all levels. Women who have made it successfully to a comfortable spot with their business, women who are just starting out and women who are still on their journey to success. It is amazing how much you can learn from another woman who is where you are or was where you are. Women seem to be afraid to network, I guess it is in our nature. Afraid of competition, afraid our ideas may get stolen or afraid you will not measure up. I was once there. I avoided networking and support groups like the plague. But you get to a point where you realize you NEED this foundation. It was like a breath of fresh air when I finally took the step toward building my networking base. I found that contrary to my beliefs at the time, women are awesome at motivating, supporting, inspiring other women and are great at getting the word out for each other. I have made many great friends and business connections by opening up my mind and giving my time to other women in business. It is a step that is essential to your success. So where do you start? Get online! Join a yahoo group, there are a ton of wahm and women in business groups. Go to Google and type in key words like wahm, women in business, wahm resources, wahm advertising, wahm blogs, you will find a whole world you had no idea existed! The wahm world is a huge network of blogs, resource websites, advertising websites, radio broadcasts, retail stores, ezines, newsletters and more! Get involved! Join your local chamber of commerce, find other women in your area who own shops or sell for direct sales companies, join an expo or home show. There are endless ways to find other women to add to your networking group. The key here is that you find them and you listen to your instincts when adding them to your networking round table. Not all women get along, not all women are right for each other's networking group, you need to be comfortable with the people you surround yourself with. This is not to say that anyone is a bad person, you just need to surround yourself with people you can get along with, open up to and be able to trust. Don't give away all your trade secrets but have a group (even just one or two people) you can go to to bounce ideas off of, get help when you are in a rut, people who will advertise for each other, do a favor to help out your business, things that will help all involved.

**Research-** I think that this is the step we as women have the hardest time with. We want to work at home, we want to do it now and we run with that. Taking the time to research is something I did not do enough of. I learned from trial and error. That method taught me a lot and I would probably not change how I learned but I like to put this step in to help save other women the frustrations I encountered. When you are deciding if you should be a wahm and what kind of work you should do, research!! Do you want to go into direct sales? Do you want to run an affiliate website? Do you want to start your own online business selling items you make? Do you want to open an online shop using

a drop shipper? Do you want to do other work such as typing or data entry from home? Do you have a talent or degree in graphic or web design or marketing? Get online, go to Google or Ask.com and plug in some key words, read as much of what comes up as you can. I have gone as far as 32 pages into a search reading and taking all I could from other sites. I have checked the page ranks of other wahm sites, I have looked at who advertises with them, how many hits they have gotten, the whole nine yards. I have taken bits and pieces of knowledge from hours and hours of just looking at what other people have done and then translating it into what I have wanted to get across. I have not copied other women, just noted what they have done that has worked or not worked. I have read articles and e-books, blogs and group postings. I have taken in all that I can in the wahm world and there is still so much I have not gotten to yet! Talk with other women who are doing what you want to do. Find out their obstacles, their challenges, their accomplishments. If you find a company you want to work for, research them until you can't read any more! I am telling you, Google is my best friend some days! I use it all the time! Keep a binder of information that you want to refer to later, bookmark sites you have taken inspiration from or would like to learn more from. Do all you can to get as much information about the path you want to take. Then decide whether it is right for you or not.

**Realism**- I like to include this step because it is one we tend to side step. I never had any focus on the "what-ifs" because that was just not positive and I did not want to get myself down. Then reality hit. It is so important to keep a positive attitude, don't get me wrong, you can not be successful without it but it is also important to keep perspective about things. Chances are, you are not going to be a huge success off the bat. It does happen from time to time and that is awesome but don't get discouraged or beat yourself up if it does not happen. It is not realistic to go into the path of being a wahm with the idea that your business will take off, you will be rich and life is going to be a piece of cake from then on. It is a lot of work to work from home and run a successful business whether it is working for a direct sales company or starting a business from scratch. It takes determination, willingness to accept defeat from time to time and a whole lot of "You Go, Girl!". Chances are, you will not succeed at your first attempts. Great, you have learned what not to do and what to do better and you go again. You may have chosen a direct sales company that is not right for you after all. Okay, move on to another. You may have started with one plan for your business and ended up with something totally different. Kudos to you! The most important thing is that you realize you are not a failure ever because you tried and that successful people get that way from falling, learning, adjusting and getting back up again to do it all over. This is the time when your support and networking are so essential!

**Planning**- Once you have decided the path you would like to take. Sit down to form a plan. What will you need for this venture? Do you need to invest money-where will it come from? Do you need to sit down with your family to talk about a new schedule? Do

you have the space you need for a home office, inventory or workshop? Do you have a plan for recruiting your downline or finding customers- or at least a way to find someone who can help you with those things? Do you have a strategy for advertising and getting your name out there? Do you need marketing materials-business cards, flyers, a website? How will you get these things? Have you started looking into forming a solid networking foundation? Do you need to find a mentor in the business you are going into? Do you need to invest in supplies- how will you do this? Do you need to be bonded or have insurance? Do you need to have a business plan written up? Will you write and submit a press release-how do you do this? Do you have a “plan B”? These are some of the questions I have encountered either with the businesses I have run or with women I have helped in finding out where their path was leading them. There are of course a different set of questions for each person but these are some of the most common I have encountered. You need to sit down and write out your plan. Having an informal business plan, maybe just a list of goals and ideas is a great idea! If you have a question you don't know the answer to, get on the computer and find it! There are so many women out there willing to help.

## How do I Network?

Networking is such a fascinating thing! It can be done in so many ways in so many places, your imagination is the only limit! I have found a few specific things to be quite helpful in building a strong networking foundation. It is a hard thing to break into but it can be an invaluable asset to both your personal and professional lives!

First let me define networking as I see it. I think of it as a tightly woven blanket. Layer upon layer of support to create one solid piece. I have found that women are awesome at networking but are often really scared to try as they are afraid their idea will be stolen, they will not measure up to other women or that they will encounter women who are catty. The first thing I always tell women when talking about networking is make sure you size up the group or person in your mind before you get too far into it. You do not want to align yourself with another person or a whole group that you do not flow with or that makes you uncomfortable. You do not want to put yourself or your business in a position like that. It is okay to not want to run out and be best friends with everyone in a group but it is not okay to be threatened by anyone or feel so uncomfortable that you are not willing to share or engage in the group. We have enough stress, why put ourselves through that?

There will always be women who do not see eye to eye and that is my second important point I always make. You can learn so much from someone you don't particularly like because chances are, they are thinking in a totally different direction than you! The biggest part of networking in my book is taking away from other people what you don't see, getting a look from a different perspective. If you personally don't care for someone I bet that professional you will jive! That is not to say that you should try to get along with someone that you just can't be around or who makes you feel anything less than the awesome person you are but step back and take a second look at a person you know you would not hang out with on a personal level. I guess there is a fine line to this. I always tell women it is up to you to go with your instinct. You don't want to give away secrets and invest in a group or person who is going to turn on you and make you miserable.

That brings me to my next point. Networking is not about sitting around a table or in an online group soaking in someone else's hard work and calling it your own. Now again, we walk a fine line here. It is okay to take an idea that someone else has shared with you personally or with a group and implement it in your own way to your business. It is not okay to take exactly what they did and transfer it to your business. The best example of this is with websites. I have looked at literally hundreds of women's websites over the years; I think it is an awesome way to learn and to get ideas. But I have never copied word for word something someone else put the time and effort in to creating without asking for permission. This is not only why we have copyrights on our sites but it is an unspoken assumed practice among the wahm world. Please do not steal from someone else, networking is not about that. You can ask permission to use another person's work

or you can take what they have done and adjust it to fit your business or your needs. Make the work your own!

I always find it amazing how much you can take from other women. Keep an open mind, listen to other's ideas and learn from their successes and failures. Take what you learn from others and form it into something that works for you and your business, something that comes out with your personality stamp on it. In return, give to other women the wisdom you have accumulated on your journey and help them to realize a new direction, a new way of thinking, a way to tweak things or an answer to a problem they are having. It is a circle that keeps going and growing as it goes. Go with your instincts and don't divulge all your trade secrets! Go to your networking group or networking partner when you are frustrated, stuck or just need a pick me up and in return be sure to be there for others who need the same. You will see that in this process you will gain knowledge, confidence, growth in business and friendship. It benefits both your professional and personal lives!

**Find a local group-** Find a local moms group. A lot of mom's group whether through a church, school, sports function or other outlet love to hear about the businesses moms are into. Especially ones that are geared toward them. Be sure to find out if it is okay to do some advertising or promoting to the group. Work it into casual conversation. Host a home party just for your mom's group. Help plan an expo or craft type show to help support the mom's group and showcase your business. Offer to help with a fundraiser for school or other organization through your mom's group; donate your time and business products for the fundraiser. There are so many ways you can get your business introduced to the group and your community! - Join an expo, home show or craft type show. You will find that many of the same women do shows in one area. Get to know these women! Cover a booth for someone while they take a break, strike up a conversation on a down time during the show. Exchange business cards with as many women as you can and keep in touch with them. Maybe just an e mail once a week to see how things are going or if they are doing any upcoming shows. - Check the classifieds and other outlets to see if there is any women in business or wham groups in your area and join one! If there is not a group in your area, start one! Put an ad in the paper, hand out flyers, put ads on bulletin boards, post to local internet classifieds, get the word out that you would like to start a networking group for women in business in your area.

**Find an online group-** There are so many online groups out there dedicated to wahms and women in business. Once I started researching a few years ago, I was amazed to discover that there is a whole world out there dedicated to us! I have spent hours with Google and Ask.com! I am not going to endorse any one specific group in this book out of fairness (and because there are so many I would like to give Kudos to it could be a whole book in itself) but I will tell you how to find them. I suggest Yahoo be your first stop. Go to the group search and plug in words like wahn, networking, work at home mom, wahn advertising, direct sales and any other key word that is specific to your business. When you find a group that looks interesting, read over the mission statements and rules of the group. Be sure you are aware of the specifics and are willing to adhere to

them. Google groups would be my next stop and then MSN. Be sure to watch out for groups that allow any and all spamming and advertising (even if they are a wahm specific group) you want to get into a group that truly is women in business to the core. Be courteous and read others posts as you would want them to read yours. Make sure you are not a lurker and get involved in the discussions. Even if it is just a once a week post to say hi or have a good day. You can always leave a group you find is not the right fit with a simple "Thank You but this is not quite for me". – Get on a search engine and plug in those key words again. Look for blogs, chat rooms, messages boards and websites dedicated to networking for women in business. There are so many out there!! Be careful not to get too overwhelmed by joining too many. Once you've looked around and tried a few out for a while, pick a couple that best suit you and run with it! Use good netiquette! Do not spam unless it is a spamming group and do not harvest e mails for your own mailing list.

**Get involved-** If you are in direct sales, get involved in any support groups your company may offer. If your company does not offer such a group, find local reps in your area and form your own group. Although you are competing, you are also working for the good of your company as a whole. This is different than networking with women from different companies as you are working this way more as a team. On the flip side, when you are networking with women from a competing company or a company totally different than yours, you are helping each other out by passing on ideas and implementing them to work with your specific company or you are passing the word on to others for them. When you are networking with women from your company it is more of a training session, more educational than anything as you are not going to send a customer to a rep from your same company to buy a product you can sell them but you might send a customer to a rep from a different company to buy a product you know they carry and you do not. – If you are not in direct sales but own a brick and mortar store or run a business out of your home, find local businesses owned by women and get together with them once a week or once a month and talk. Find out how you can work together to help each other's businesses and increase customer traffic to a local area. Refer a customer to another store that you know carries something or offers a service you do not. Offer to put up an advertising bulletin board in your store for other local businesses. Let another woman owned business place a business card holder on your wrap counter. Exchange flyers with other businesses and use them as bag stuffers. Be open minded to the fact that you are all on the same page and working toward the same goal...bringing customers to your area! Whether you are in direct sales or not, consider joining your local Chamber of Commerce and partake in events and meetings.

**Keep an open mind and open door-** Of course we all remember our junior and high schools days when we were closed off to some groups. Don't let that happen to your networking group when it gets to be a strong place to be. Always keep your mind and door open to others. It is real easy to forget that you, too, started out alone and from the bottom when you are feeling the rewards of success. Stay grounded and humble. Once you have a great group of women who are your foundation and support and who are also

now your good friends that is when you are in the best position to reach out and help others! You are still learning in every phase of business and life, who knows what you can learn from a fresh face. I always tell women that you do not make it to the top alone but you can fall alone. Meaning you have support from somewhere to get you to the top and if you close yourself off to people still at the bottom or in the middle of the hill, it is real easy to fall off and land alone. You need to use your moral compass in your business life, too.

## How Do I Stay Motivated?

The answer to this question can be answered in so many ways and is so different for everyone that it hard to answer but I can give you a few things to think about in finding the direction to go in.

For me, staying motivated ties in to my circle of women I network with more and more. I also draw motivation from my dear husband and my children. I am also a perfectionist which helps at times to keep my drive alive! You can draw on many things to find motivation and a lot of the time you have to have more than one source.

My first suggestion when you feel you need a little motivation is to sit yourself down in a quiet place and reflect on why you are doing what you are doing. We decide to go into business on our own usually for very personal reasons. There was a driving force behind your decision, pull that out and let it soak back in. Set your mind back to the time when you knew your decision was the right one and the way you felt at that time. See if you can still get the adrenaline flowing like you did then. I have found that sometimes some relaxation and reflection is enough of a motivator.

If you are a wahm, your decision was a very personal one. Your children can be awesome motivators. There are days when I put the kids in front of a movie, go into my office and get lost in my work only to come to with a kid on my lap or fighting over a toy. Just taking a break and hugging my kids is sometimes enough of a motivation to keep going that day. Of course we have times when we need more but the small daily struggles are sometimes best fixed by walking away from your work and reminding yourself why you are doing what you are doing.- On the days when you need more, it is important to lean on your support network. Your spouse, your family and friends and that awesome group of women you have to network with. Sometimes you hear the words you want to hear and sometimes you hear words you don't. Either can be a motivator in the right conversation. Remember, always keep an open mind, you are always learning on your journey!

The first thing I always tell women who are needing more motivation than they are getting with the above strategies is to sit down with a paper and pen and evaluate the situation as a whole. By whole I mean your business, your plan, the way you have been doing things thus far, your plan for the future of your business. Is this working for you? Are you not motivated because you are frustrated? Did you choose the wrong company to rep for? Is your business just not what you had envisioned it to be? Is it time to set a new plan, go in a new direction? Or is it time to get out all together? These are things you should sit down and evaluate when you are really struggling for motivation day after day. Your dream, your vision, your passion should be motivating you if you are on the right path. I know that sounds kind of corny but it is true. You chose to work for yourself for a reason and it was not to have to struggle to get through your day as if you were punching a time clock and sitting in a cubicle. What can you do with your plan or your business to get motivation to be as natural as breathing? If you can't come up with

answer, sit down with someone else and have them evaluate it with you. Someone you trust to tell you the truth and maybe some things you don't want to hear in order to make things better. The one thing that we don't let ourselves see a lot of times is that nothing is written in stone! If things are not working, change them. Of course it is easier for the woman who is repping for a company they do not directly own than it is for the woman who owns the cute boutique up the road. There are different degrees of change that can happen in each case but in both cases, it is easy to sit down to evaluate and make changes that are best for you. You chose the path you did to be fulfilled, to feel accomplished and maybe even to prove to yourself or the world that you could do it. Why would you continue to do it in a way that was not working? You deserve to be fulfilled and for your dream to come true!

Some women let fear of failure be a motivator. If that works for you without negative effects, go for it! Sometimes you can take the negative and turn it into positive motivation. If you are a person who runs on competition, this will especially work for you. These are also the kind of people who can be motivated by setting goals for themselves because they have the discipline to hold themselves accountable. If you aren't the type of person who can set a goal and hold yourself to it, find someone who will hold your feet to the fire! Compete with someone. I have found that competition is a wonderful motivator. Set some goals with another woman or your networking group and go at it. This is especially useful during the down times of the year. We all know there are months when we work extra hard for those sales, this is a great time to compete in sales goals or other goals. Compete for dinner or a small prize or simply bragging rights, the prize is not important but the feeling you get from the work you have done and the business you received is the best prize of all!

Motivation is really a very personal thing and there are people who just don't have it in them to motivate anyone, even themselves! As a woman in business, though, you made a decision that did not come without a huge burst of motivation. It is so important to hold on to that during your journey. If you are struggling with it, there is nothing wrong with asking for help and there is nothing wrong with coming to the conclusion that you are just on the wrong path. Sometimes a pep talk is just not enough, those are times when you should really stop to evaluate your situation. I think as women we tend to overlook that and just continue on. The fulfillment you get should be your best motivator!! I am not saying you won't have a bad day when you need some TLC and the shoulder of a good friend but those days should not be the norm.

## What if I fail?

I would love to start this out by saying “so what?” but I know better. I also am probably not the person to be giving advice on this subject; my husband would say something about the pot calling the kettle black... On a serious note, I have been there! I actually was right on the verge of huge success with my last business after almost a year of hard work on a web site, planning, and tweaking. I had late nights and long days and it was finally falling into place. I took an idea and formed it into a great thing, my dream was coming true. Then I packed it all up. I did, I sold my site, my inventory and justified it all with the fact that it was just not the right thing and it was taking too much of my time from my family. Boy, what a chicken I was! I actually was afraid of succeeding and not so much of failing. Or maybe I was afraid of succeeding and then failing, I am not quite sure. I do know that it was not quite the thing I wanted to be doing and it led to the path I am on now which is so much more fulfilling but when you get down to it, I was afraid of failing.

This subject is a hard one because how do you tell someone to take a leap of faith and not be afraid? I suppose there is always you don't know if you don't try and it is very true but it is still a scary thing. I believe that we are taken down different paths for a reason. The reason may not always be the right one or a real great one but never the less; we were on that path for a reason. Maybe it was to learn what not to do; maybe it was to get us to appreciate the right thing when it comes along. Or maybe it was to learn some things that you can apply to the right thing when it comes along. In any case, I truly believe that every experience in our lives leaves us with something to take away from it to apply to things down the road. If you look at your experiences good and bad with the intent of learning from them, failure does not seem so scary or traumatic when it happens.

The first thing we have to realize is that we will fail at one point or another. I think as women this is a horrible thought we just can't bear sometimes. Especially if you are like me, a people pleaser and a perfectionist. It will happen, you will fail. There are very few rare exceptions when someone has instant success and lives happily ever after. For the rest of us, I think we need to not look for failure but be prepared for it when it happens. When it does happen as hard as it might be we need to learn from it, adjust and move on. No fulfillment can come from falling down and staying there. Whether it means you try again or you move on to something entirely new, you need to get back up. Of course this is easier said than done in some situations but it is so important to have that mind set even in times of success so that you are not totally left in shock if something goes wrong. If you take the good and the bad, turn them into lessons learned and move on, you have not failed, you have gained knowledge and experience! There is only failure if you do not get back up and realize you have not really failed. I know, you're saying what did she just say? Read it again, it really does make sense!

The other thing I want to stress is that failure or the fear of it does not have to be a fore thought or a stress in your life. You can take some time to think it through as you would your business plan. Of course when you have to put the plan in action you may not

follow it to the letter but you will at least be prepared for the things you should be doing. So many times we are left stunned and not sure what to do next. Take some time to at least think it through as a “what if”, come up with a plan and go from there if you ever need to. – I also want to stress that fear of failure can be a great motivator and a great tool for personal growth. The fact that we fear failure means we care, we are invested. That is a great thing! Take that and harness it into positive energy, you would not believe the motivation and learning that can come from that. At the same time, you are facing a fear head on and growing not only as a business woman but as a person in general. If you are truly invested in your business or in anything for that matter, fear of failure is a natural thing. Face it head on and make it work for you, don’t let it hold you back!

## Summary

I am not sure that there is any one right answer as to how we go about being a wahm! It is such a personal choice and in that you have to expect that your journey is going to both be different and similar to other's journeys. You have to make the choices that are best for you and your family at any one given time. The path on your journey is going to change as your family grows and changes and as you start to realize your true potentials and desires for your business. It is okay to take detours, side roads and occasionally the "scenic" route on your journey. Don't be afraid to pull over to the side of the road to read a map or reanalyze your path!

Be open to other women's ideas, thoughts and help. At the same time, don't feel like you have to "Keep up with the Jones's"! Your journey's path should be what is right for YOU and YOUR family, not what someone else has figured out. You may take pieces and parts from someone else but no two journeys are the same. Be open to networking with other women, don't be afraid you won't be perceived as good enough and don't be afraid that someone else will steal your good ideas! It has been amazing to me to see how well women network with each other and how much we can learn from that experience.

Remember to allow room for failure! It will happen whether in small doses or large. It is OKAY to fail as long as you get back up and start again. It is a great learning experience! Not having off the bat success and not having everything go perfectly the first time in many ways can be a blessing in disguise. It is a true test of yourself, your resolve and your openness to learning from your mistakes. It will help build a more solid foundation if you take it as a learning experience and not let it eat at your foundation!

Some days you will feel like you're running down that path and some days you will feel like you are crawling. It is okay to do both! Take the time to enjoy the sights along the way – absorb all that you are offered along the way and don't be afraid to ask for directions!! You will have good days and bad – the most important thing is to make sure you feel that you are doing the best you can- the best for yourself and your family! You can not ask anymore from yourself than what you have to give!

Enjoy your journey – Be sure to wave when we pass each other!

Heather Piehl is a WAHM to 5 beautiful children. She has almost 10 years of experience being a WAHM including two original businesses, working in direct sales and as founder of [Minnesota Women's Source](#) and the Minnesota Women's Small Business Expo and Sale. This e book may be reproduced online and in print as long as the author information stays intact.





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- [A Little About My Mission To Empowe...](#) ([mn\\_mama](#) created on 3/31/07)