



SelfInformed

Published by the National Association for the Self-Employed

September 2024



Member Spotlight

**Sunny
Stroeer**

AWExpeditions

Unlocking Success:

Client Relationship Advice for the Self-Employed



Client relationships form the backbone of any successful business. For self-employed small or micro business owners, nurturing these relationships is paramount to sustainable growth and success. Read more for expert advice on client communication, customer service, and retention strategies, catering specifically to the unique challenges faced by entrepreneurs this year.


The Crucial Role of Client Relationships in Self-Employed Business Success

Client relationships are the lifeblood of any self-employed small business. Starting a business is challenging. Establishing and maintaining strong connections with clients is not just a formality; it is a strategic imperative that directly influences the success and longevity of an entrepreneurial venture.

In this section, we'll delve into the pivotal role client relationships play and how satisfied clients become the driving force behind repeat business, positive referrals, and long-term success for small business owners.


Repeat Business

Satisfied clients are more likely to become repeat customers. A positive and memorable experience builds trust and loyalty, encouraging clients to return for additional products or services. This repeat business not only contributes to the financial stability of the business but also establishes a foundation for ongoing collaboration.

 **Pro Tip:** *Implementing personalized loyalty programs or exclusive offers for returning clients can further enhance their inclination to choose your business over competitors.*


Positive Referrals

Word-of-mouth remains one of the most powerful marketing tools, especially for small businesses and those that run a family business. Clients who have had a positive experience with your services are likely to recommend your business to their network. These personal recommendations carry significant weight, as they come from a trusted source and serve as a testament to the quality of your work.

 **Pro Tip:** *Encourage satisfied clients to share their experiences on social media platforms or provide testimonials that can be showcased on your website. This not only boosts credibility but also attracts new clients.*

Long-Term Success

Building a business with lasting relationships with clients is foundational for the sustained success of self-employed small businesses. Satisfied clients are more likely to weather economic downturns with you, providing a stable source of revenue even in challenging times. Additionally, long-term clients can become advocates for your brand, promoting your business and contributing to its positive reputation within the industry.

 **Pro Tip:** *Regularly check in with long-term clients, seeking feedback and understanding their evolving needs. This proactive approach reinforces the relationship and demonstrates a commitment to their success.*

To have long term success, you have to understand that client relationships are not just transactions; they are investments in the future of your self-employed business. By prioritizing client satisfaction, small business owners can unlock a myriad of benefits, including repeat business, positive referrals, and the foundation for long-term success. As the saying goes, a satisfied client is not just a one-time customer but a potential ambassador for your brand.




Establishing Clear and Consistent Communication Channels with Clients: A Blueprint for Small Business Owners

Effective communication is the cornerstone of strong client relationships, and for self-employed small business owners, it can be the key differentiator in a competitive market. In this section, we will offer insights into establishing clear and consistent communication channels with clients, highlighting the critical elements of active listening, prompt responses, and personalized communication to foster lasting connections and enhance the overall client experience.


Active Listening

Active listening is the foundation of meaningful communication. Small business owners must cultivate the ability to listen attentively to their clients, understanding not just the words spoken but also the underlying needs and concerns. By actively engaging in conversations, entrepreneurs can gain valuable insights into client expectations and preferences.

 **Pro Tip:** Practice reflective listening by paraphrasing what the client has communicated. This not only demonstrates understanding but also ensures clarity in communication.

Prompt Responses


In the fast-paced world of business, timely responses are non-negotiable. Promptly addressing client inquiries or concerns not only instills confidence but also demonstrates a commitment to excellent customer service. Whether through emails, phone calls, or messaging platforms, small business owners should strive for responsiveness to create a positive impression.

 **Pro Tip:** Set clear response time expectations and communicate them to clients. This transparency helps manage client expectations and avoids misunderstandings.




Personalized Communication

Generic communication often falls flat. Small business owners can elevate their client relationships by tailoring communications to each client's unique needs and preferences. Personalization goes beyond addressing clients by name; it involves understanding their industry, challenges, and aspirations. By demonstrating this personalized approach, businesses can create a more meaningful connection with their clients.

 **Pro Tip:** Use customer relationship management (CRM) tools to track client preferences, interactions, and history. This data can be leveraged to customize communications and show clients that their individual needs are a priority.

Consistency Across Channels

Consistency is key in communication. Small business owners should ensure that their messaging remains cohesive across various channels, including email, social media, and in-person interactions. This consistency not only reinforces the brand identity but also makes it easier for clients to understand and engage with the business.

 **Pro Tip:** Develop a style guide for your business communications, outlining preferred tone, language, and formatting. This guide ensures a unified and professional representation of your brand.

Small business owners can strengthen their client relationships by prioritizing clear, prompt, and personalized communication. By actively listening to clients, responding in a timely manner, and tailoring communications to individual needs, entrepreneurs can create an environment of trust and understanding. These practices not only foster client satisfaction but also contribute to long-term success and help you in growing a business.





Exceptional Customer Service

Exceptional customer service is paramount for self-employed individuals, requiring tailored strategies to meet their unique needs. Anticipating client needs is a key best practice; proactively understanding their goals and challenges enables a more personalized and efficient service. This can be achieved by staying informed about industry trends and engaging in regular communication to grasp evolving client requirements.

Resolving issues proactively is equally crucial. Self-employed individuals often appreciate swift and efficient problem-solving. Small business owners should establish clear channels for clients to express concerns and implement proactive measures to address potential issues before they escalate. This can involve regular check-ins, feedback surveys, and continuous improvement based on client input.

Creating a positive customer experience is the ultimate goal. For self-employed individuals, a seamless and enjoyable interaction with a business can lead to long-term relationships. Implementing user-friendly processes, providing transparent information, and demonstrating a genuine commitment to client success contribute to a positive experience. Ultimately, exceptional customer service tailored to self-employed needs builds trust, fosters loyalty, and positions the business for sustained success in a competitive market.

Client Retention Strategies

Retaining clients for the long term is crucial for the success of small business owners. Implementing effective strategies can foster loyalty and sustain valuable relationships.

Introducing loyalty programs, where clients receive exclusive benefits or discounts based on their continued patronage, creates a sense of appreciation. Personalized offers tailored to individual preferences and purchasing history further enhance client engagement and satisfaction.

Staying top-of-mind is equally vital. Regular communication through newsletters, updates, or personalized messages reinforces the business-client relationship. Utilize email marketing and social media to share relevant content, industry insights, or special promotions. Consistent, thoughtful communication not only keeps clients informed but also strengthens the emotional connection, fostering a sense of partnership and loyalty that extends well into the future.

Best Practices for Self-Employed Small Business Owners

For self-employed individuals navigating client relationship management, tailored best practices are essential to address the unique challenges they face. Firstly, prioritize flexibility in communication. Recognize that the self-employed often juggle multiple roles, making varied communication channels crucial. Offer options such as email, phone calls, and virtual meetings, allowing clients to choose what suits them best.

Next, emphasize transparency in your operations. Self-employed individuals often operate on a smaller scale, and clients appreciate clarity in processes and costs. Providing detailed quotes, transparent timelines, and openly communicating potential challenges fosters trust and reduces uncertainties.

Implementing streamlined and user-friendly client management tools is vital. Self-employed professionals typically have limited resources, so adopting efficient software for project management, invoicing, and communication centralizes information and enhances productivity.

Consider introducing flexible payment options. Offering payment plans or customized billing schedules demonstrates empathy and supports their financial stability.

Lastly, establish a strong online presence. Self-employed professionals often rely on virtual networks for business, making an engaging website and active social media presence crucial. Regularly share industry insights, client success stories, and relevant updates to stay top-of-mind and showcase your expertise.

By focusing on flexibility, transparency, personalized service, efficient tools, flexible payments, and a robust online presence, small business owners can overcome the unique challenges faced by self-employed individuals in client relationship management. These best practices not only strengthen client connections but also contribute to the sustained success of both parties in the dynamic landscape of self-employment.



Streamlining Client Management

Self-employed small and micro business owners can enhance client management with user-friendly software and hardware solutions tailored to their unique needs. Utilize project management tools like Trello or Asana for efficient task organization and collaboration. These platforms simplify project tracking, ensuring deadlines are met and client expectations are exceeded.

Invoicing and accounting software such as FreshBooks or QuickBooks streamlines financial processes. These tools automate invoicing, expense tracking, and financial reporting, saving time and minimizing errors for the self-employed professional.

Customer Relationship Management (CRM) systems like HubSpot or Zoho CRM centralize client data, enabling personalized communication and efficient relationship tracking. These platforms often include features such as lead management, email marketing, and analytics to enhance client engagement and business growth.

For hardware, investing in a reliable laptop or tablet is crucial for on-the-go entrepreneurs. Cloud storage solutions like Google Drive or Dropbox facilitate seamless file sharing and accessibility from anywhere.

These tools are practical and user-friendly, allowing self-employed professionals to focus on their expertise rather than administrative tasks. These software and hardware solutions not only improve efficiency but also contribute to a more organized and client-focused business approach, ultimately supporting the success and growth of self-employed small businesses.

Conclusion

We have underscored the paramount importance of investing in client relationships for the sustained success of self-employed small business owners. We've explored key facets such as effective communication, exceptional customer service, and client retention strategies tailored to the unique challenges faced by entrepreneurs.

By prioritizing active listening, prompt responses, and personalized communication, small business owners can build lasting connections that lead to repeat business and positive referrals. Implementing client-centric practices, including loyalty programs and personalized offers, fosters loyalty and contributes to long-term success.

Furthermore, we've highlighted the practicality and ease of use of software and hardware solutions designed to streamline client management processes. From project management tools to CRM systems and reliable hardware, these resources empower self-employed professionals to efficiently manage their businesses, allowing them to focus on what they do best.

In a dynamic and competitive landscape, self-employed individuals must recognize that their clients are more than transactions; they are partners in success. By implementing the strategies and tools outlined here, small business owners can create a client-centric approach that not only meets but exceeds expectations. Embrace the power of effective client relationship management, and position your business for sustained growth, client satisfaction, and enduring success in the ever-evolving world of entrepreneurship.



See the Latest Press Releases from NASE



SURVEY: State of America's Small Business Community

Aug 12, 2024

A new, national survey of over 650 small and micro business owners finds America's small business community strong, with 52 percent indicating they are optimistic about their own small business' future.

[READ FULL STORY →](#)



NASE Awards \$15,000 in Scholarships to Five College Students for their Academic Studies

Aug 11, 2024

As students head to college this upcoming school year, NASE announced it is awarding \$15,000 in educational scholarships to five dependents of current NASE members, each granted \$3,000 for their academic studies.

[READ FULL STORY →](#)

[READ ALL PRESS RELEASES](#)

NOW ACCEPTING Growth Grant Applications

Multiple Growth Grants of \$4,000 are Awarded Each Quarter

For the last 40 years, NASE's focus has been on finding the most effective way to bolster success for small business and self-employed members in communities across the country. NASE has awarded over \$1,000,000 since the program's inception and continue to see significant return on our investments in the growth of member-businesses helping to fuel their local economies.

[APPLY NOW](#)



WITH SPONSORS:



Your Business Could be Featured in our Monthly e-Newsletter!

We want to hear from you!

Each month NASE publishes a new Member Spotlight in our e-Newsletter called SelfInformed, a national newsletter sent to over 50,000 members across the country with the latest news about the self-employed and micro-business community. As part of this national e-Newsletter, we want to shine a spotlight on those members, regardless of where they live, who are operating successful businesses that are growing and thriving.

[GET FEATURED](#)





Member Benefits

Visit [NASE.org](https://www.nase.org) to learn more about the following benefits!


Get Answers!

ASK THE EXPERTS

Being the boss often means you are also head of marketing, sales, accounting, HR and more. And sometimes you could use some help.

NASE Members receive 24/7 access to all of our experts.

Meet Our Experts



Expert Advice 24/7

Get answers, advice, and tips from our team of professional experts. Business Law, Business Strategy, Business to Business Leads, Database Management, Finance & Accounting, Grants & Scholarships, Healthcare, Information Technology, Marketing 101, Real Estate, Sales Growth, Sales Tax, Social Media, and Federal/State Tax. Ask a question online 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

[Click Here To Get Started](#)



Guard against identity theft and save up to 52% your first year.

You may take steps to protect your identity, but you can miss certain threats if you're just monitoring your credit and bank statements. LifeLock sees more, like someone taking out an online payday loan in your name or your personal information for sale on the dark web.

[Click Here to View Plans](#)

Plans That Work!



Member Benefits

Visit [NASE.org](https://www.nase.org) to learn more about the following benefits!



Email marketing from Constant Contact is designed specifically to help small businesses and organizations reach their customers where they are every day, the inbox. With these great tools from our trusted partner, you'll stay in touch with customers to sell more, grow your customer base, and increase your bottom line.

[Click Here to View Plan Options](#)



Sales training and coaching consultancy, with expertise and solutions for developing new business.

Salesology® is a live, sales mentoring program designed by Wendy Weiss that will change the way you do business forever. Once you're trained to a higher level, you'll be hearing "yes" more – and you'll never look back.

[Click Here to Get Started](#)



SMALL BUSINESS GROWTH GRANTS are Sponsored by Dell Technologies

[View the Dell Sponsored Growth Grants](#)

To access these benefits, visit www.Dell.com/NASE or email NASE's Account Executive at Kelsey_Sewalson@Dell.com



AT&T Business Fiber

Get more speed, reliability, and value from your internet with AT&T Business Fiber®

[Click Here for Best Price!](#)



MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

Sunny Stroeer

Originally from Germany, I attended Harvard College and Harvard Business School before working as a strategy consultant for Bain & Company for several years. Despite the jet-setting career, my heart was always with outdoor adventure – particularly mountaineering and ultra endurance pursuits. At the end of 2015 I decided to leave behind the business world to focus full-time on climbing and running mountains. Over time, my cumulative experiences in the mountains, as a guide, and in business morphed into me launching [AWExpeditions](#): an expedition company for women, by women.

When and why did you join NASE?

I joined the NASE in September 2022. I was at an inflection point; AWExpeditions was a passion project that was becoming too large to be sustainable. I needed to decide if I wanted to call it quits, or go all in.

What inspired you to enter the field you are in?

That is a hard question to answer because I am in many fields. I am a mountaineer, a guide, an adventure athlete, a photographer and storyteller, an MBA, an entrepreneur, and so many more things. The reason that I decided to go all in on forging my own professional path in the mountaineering space is because I care deeply about the transformative power of mountaineering and sharing it with other women. And, thanks to my training at Harvard Business School and Bain & Company as a consultant, I have confidence in my ability to build a business.

When and why did you start your business?

The idea for AWExpeditions (or AWE for short, like the first syllable in ‘awe-inspiring’) was born in 2014 while I was solo on Aconcagua. Aconcagua is the second tallest of the Seven Summits, located in the Andes of Argentina, and my presence on the mountain as a solo woman evoked strong reactions both in other climbers and amongst the local guides and staff. That seemed both surprising and unnecessary to me. Instead of simply lamenting the sexism that I encountered, I decided to do something about it: I started **AWExpeditions** as a mountaineering company for women, by women.

How do you market your business?

AWExpeditions’ initial market presence grew out of my personal brand as a mountain athlete, and out of my advocacy for women empowerment. In the early days most of AWE’s marketing was via personal connections and word of mouth. Nowadays the focus of our marketing efforts still rests on social media – Instagram primarily, as well as a few Facebook groups.

What challenges have you faced in your business? How have you overcome them?

Since AWE grew out of my personal brand, my biggest challenge has been to scale the business without my own capacity becoming a bottle neck. Since many of AWE’s early guests had a personal connection to me, the expectation was initially that I would personally guide each expedition. As AWExpeditions grows, that clearly is not sustainable. It’s why I have worked hard to pivot AWE away from ‘expeditions with Sunny Stroeer’ to ‘supportive, empowering expeditions for women, by women’.

Do you have any employees?

I have one (wonderful) year-round part-time employee at this point, and several terrific expedition leaders who are in-house employees but only work specific times of the

year on their scheduled expeditions. I would love to get to a point where there are two year-round full-time roles that could alleviate my personal workload more and – but to support the salaries that those roles require, AWE needs to scale more.

What’s your schedule like, what’s a typical day for you?

This is a cliché answer: I truly don’t have a typical day. Part of that has to do with the fact that AWExpeditions is not the only business I run. I also co-own and manage **Dreamland Safari Tours**, a large hiking guide service based out of Southern Utah with 20 employees and around 6,000 annual guests. In addition I also serve as the executive director of the **Summit Scholarship Foundation**, and I’m a **professional adventure athlete and photographer** – the latter of which is the ultimate manifestation of self-employment. To say that my plate is full is an understatement – but then I try to remind myself that other people manage to juggle kids and career; I merely juggle a few adjacent career tracks.

If you’d like to gain insight into my schedule... well. I have many weeks if not months each year where I am entirely off-grid because I am either guiding an expedition, or out on an athlete/photographer adventure like the **Iditarod Trail Invitational** in March. When I am at my desk, I typically work from 8 in the morning until well into the night, on whatever business and issue is the most important and urgent at the time. Unfortunately, that means a lot of task switching which is not ideal.

What’s the best thing about being self-employed?

I love being able to determine my own schedule, but the biggest perk of being self-employed is the creativity that goes along with it. The ability to direct my path, and the path of the businesses that I have my hands in, is satisfying and enriching – at least in the intellectual sense of the word.





What’s the best compliment you’ve ever received from a client?

AWExpeditions has lots of amazing, heartfelt testimonials from past climbers. That said, the most heart-warming compliment I have received and continue to receive is to see the mother of an adult AWExpeditions alumna sing AWE’s praise in online communities even years after her (again, adult!) daughter’s experience with AWE. If that’s not a real compliment, then I don’t know.

What’s the most important piece of advice you would give to someone starting their own business?

You should be in love with the idea of running a business more than with the idea of whatever it is that you are building the business around – in my case, mountaineering. Building and managing a business is hard, and in some ways it doesn’t matter if you’re running a guide service or a dry cleaning store (I have done both) – the desk-based and administrative elements are very similar same for all small businesses no matter the product or service that your business is built around. Running an expedition company doesn’t mean that I

am running expeditions; it means that I am dealing with insurance and permitting, organizing logistics, building a website, marketing trips, training expedition leaders, and answering customer questions.

Which NASE member benefit is most important to you?

This may be an odd one but my decision to invest even just \$120 in a professional membership was an important step for me affirming that I was serious about my path as a small business owner. In addition, the ability to apply for a Growth Grant and the term life insurance included with the membership were big factors in my decision to join.

Any other information you would like to share?

Running a small business is hard, it’s exciting, and it’s volatile. What’s more: our expectations shape outcomes – the validity of the Pygmalion effect has been well-established. As a self-employed small business owner I take that to mean the following: your dreams will become your reality, no matter if they’re nightmares or dreams where you can fly. Better be deliberate about what those dreams look like!



Government Shutdown Unlikely and Yet, Very Possible

As the September 30th deadline for FY25 government funding approaches, Congress is locked in a contentious battle over spending priorities. The House and Senate remain deeply divided on how to allocate limited resources, raising the specter of a government shutdown if a deal cannot be reached.

Speaker Johnson has proposed a six-month federal funding extension, pushing the funding fight to the new Congress (and a new President!) with the dead-on arrival inclusion of the SAVE Act, the bill would require individuals registering to vote in federal elections to provide documentary proof of U.S. citizenship. Speaker Johnson does not have the votes to pass this proposal, and the Senate would immediately reject the bill.

Areas of Current Dispute:

- **Defense vs. Domestic Spending:** Republicans are pushing for significant increases in defense spending, while Democrats are advocating for greater investments in domestic programs like education, healthcare, and infrastructure.
- **Debt Ceiling:** The ongoing debate over raising the debt ceiling continues to cast a shadow over the funding negotiations, with some Republicans linking the two issues.
- **Emergency Funding:** Congress is also grappling with requests for additional emergency funding to address various crises, including the ongoing war in Ukraine and domestic disasters.

Worst Case Scenario:

- **Disruption of Government Services:** A government shutdown could lead to delays in essential services, such as Social Security payments, Veterans Affairs benefits, and national parks operations.
- **Economic Impact:** A prolonged shutdown could have negative economic consequences, including job losses and a decline in consumer confidence.
- **Political Fallout:** The shutdown could have significant political implications for both parties, with voters likely to hold elected officials accountable for any disruptions.

As the deadline looms, pressure is mounting on lawmakers to find common ground and avoid a government shutdown. Many are strongly recommending that the House advance a “clean” continuing resolution for three months, which would set up a contentious battle post November and with a Lame Duck Congress.

The outcome of these negotiations will have far-reaching implications for the nation’s economy, its citizens, and its international standing.

Katie Vlietstra is NASE’s Vice President for Government Relations and Public Affairs; You can contact her at kvlietstra@nase.org.