



## Lemonade Stand Economics

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## **There is a story behind the cover of this book...**

Or I should say there is a story behind the amazing high school students who created it.

We've all heard the saying, "You can't judge a book by its cover." Well, this is especially true if you've written a book and don't have a cover. People are visual and the cover design is critical in the success of any book. During our research we saw this many, many times while looking at competing titles. Much of the content was good—even great—but the books didn't sell well because of the cover. Maybe the covers were off-putting, didn't convey the content correctly, or targeted the wrong audience. The content in this book will help many high school students, but only if they read it.

I'm a lot of things: a business owner, an entrepreneur, a husband and father, an author. But I am not a graphic designer. I know what I like, and I know what is most likely to resonate with customers. But I am not a designer. However, I do know designers, so I did the logical thing and contacted them.

I met with freelancers, advertising agencies, and graphic design firms to explain the content and vision of the book. I actually gave some of the designers early drafts of the manuscript to aid in the creative process. It was a long road and, quite frankly, expensive and frustrating. Nobody got it. I looked at the graphics and concepts the professionals had produced, and not one of them was even close to the eye-catching and thought provoking cover in my head. So I put the cover on the back burner and moved forward with focus groups and further developing the manuscript and its content.

And that is where the story behind the cover really began. Exactly like I wrote in the book, the cover was all about networking, relationships, and the extending and accepting of opportunities. I was looking for a book cover, but I discovered so much more.

I had been writing for more than a year, and there was no book cover. In one of the weekly book meetings with my editor, I said "Hey, we need a kid to design the cover! After all, the book is written for high school students; but where can we find a kid

who can design a book cover? There are no ads on Craigslist that say, “High School Student Looking to Design Book Covers.”

So my editor and I started where we were. We asked the student who had helped set up the focus groups for us, who happened to be an art student, if she was interested. We thought she’d say, “Yeah, I’d like to design a book cover.” But she is a *fine art* student—sculpture, paintings, and the like—so she wasn’t right for this type of art. However, she knew someone who might be able to help and referred us.

On this student’s referral, we approached the Appleton Career Academy (ACA), which is a charter school inside a large local high school. ACA is a different school, and when I say different I mean *way* different. The teachers teach differently and the students learn in a different way.

The program is very project-based, career-focused, and performance-driven. We met with ACA’s director and immediately saw that she understood the concept behind *Lemonade Stand Economics* and our search for a book cover. We offered an opportunity for her students to participate, and she accepted. She was gracious, helpful, confident, and approachable. We knew we had a good fit.

### **27 students + 35 days + 1 book cover = 1 big opportunity**

We felt good but realized this was a huge risk. I had promised a class of high school design students that the best cover in the class was going to be the face of my book. To state the importance of a book cover is not easy, so there was a risk. Now back to that opportunity...

On the first day of the five-week workshop, my editor and I addressed the class. We discussed how opportunity is a two-way street. Someone has to extend an opportunity and someone has to accept that opportunity. We were there to extend an opportunity: *So here it is, kids. We need the best possible book cover, so let’s get to work.* In response we got a couple good questions and a few blank stares. Later my editor and I said to each other, “Please, just let us have one or two good covers to choose from.”

Ten days later we went back to ACA and met with the students to get a look at their initial designs and be sure they were even close to barking up the right tree. We answered their questions and offered advice, suggestions, and any direction we could think of that would help produce the best damn book cover around. The initial designs were really good, better than what we had expected.

Among the students was a young lady by the name of Mackenzie. When she sat down, she introduced herself politely and then confidently laid her book cover design before us. I looked at her design, and any worries I had felt about the riskiness of this endeavor flew out the window. After about five seconds, I looked at my editor, raised my eyebrows, turned to Mackenzie and said, “I wouldn’t change a thing.” Her design was amazing. Better than anything we could have imagined. But what was *amazing* didn’t end there. Not by a long shot. There were several cover designs that were amazing. These students blew us away.

Initially when we thought of having a student design the cover, we were hoping for two good covers to choose from. But that’s not what happened. There were too many good ones to choose from—one great design after another. All unique, professional, great designs. What we found truly incredible was that the students all had the same material to work with: a book title, a subtitle, and the author’s name. Yet all the covers looked completely different. These students had put their personalities into the project.

We had celebrity judges (local business people, the mayor) come in and vote for their favorites. We had people vote through a Facebook contest, which turned into an unforeseen teaching opportunity.

These students went out and lobbied for their covers. They handed out cards that said *vote for me*, they mass-texted, and one student had her cousin announce the contest on a Texas radio station. Two other students announced via Facebook that they would dye their hair blue and purple if they won. Oh, and we can’t forget one student’s mom. She dominated the Facebook marketing campaign for team 14.

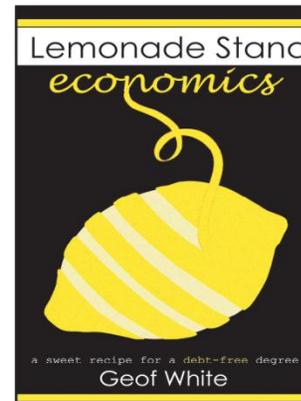
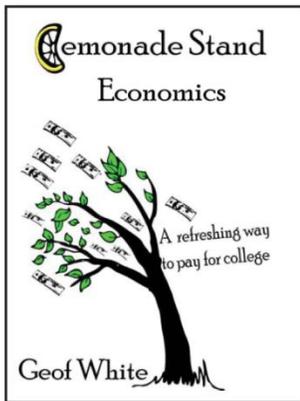
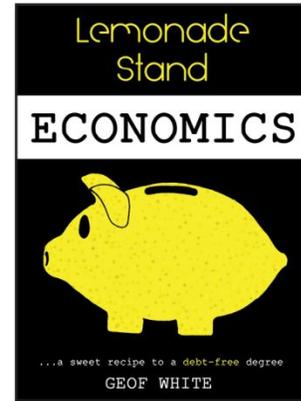
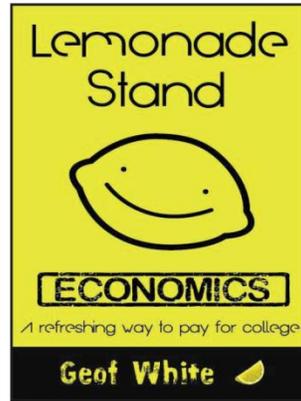
The contest was a lot of work, but it was also a lot of fun and incredibly energizing and educational. You could feel the electricity in the air. These students came up with amazing designs, worked hard and smart at marketing their covers, and left us with a decision to make.

The illustrator, editor, and I met after the contest was over to tally everything up. It was unanimous but not easy. Obviously, if you are reading this book, you have seen the design, which was exactly the book cover we were looking for. So thank you, Bruce, Curt, and Carl!

Yes, I got a great book cover out of this experience, but that was not the best part. The designs were beyond impressive, and so were the students. They took the opportunity seriously. They worked hard. They were excited and got other people

excited, too. After we had our winner, we decided to give credit to some of the other designs.

Any of the designs you see here could have been on the cover. Please take a look at them so you can understand how impressive those ACA students are. You never know...maybe a couple of these designs will appear on future books.



## Introduction

### Lemonade Stand Economics: A refreshing way to pay for college

When you are seven years old, having a lemonade stand is a fun way to spend the afternoon. You stir up some lemonade mix with your mom, create a cool sign with crayons and a piece of cardboard, and stand out on the corner waiting for passersby to stop and give you quarters while you overfill plastic cups with lemonade. Simple enough: sell a few cups of delicious lemonade and earn a few quarters. Provide a tasty product to a thirsty paying consumer.

Although you may not realize it when you are seven, there is much more to that childhood lemonade stand than just handing out lemonade for quarters. The lemonade stand is the most fundamental and understandable model for business. Let's start with the lemonade itself. Mom makes the lemonade unless you make it yourself, but my guess is that Mom's lemonade tastes much better than yours. Mom also paid for the lemonade as well as the cups and everything you needed to make the crayon sign that says, "Lemonade 25 Cents."

All of that is called overhead, and every business has it. Overhead, or expenses, is the term for all the items you need to be able to provide that cup of lemonade to your customer. It's a good investment for your mom. She figures it's worth the \$2.59 she paid for cups because she knows where you are and that you are out of her hair for a few hours doing something safe and productive.

When did you set up your lemonade stand? Did you do it at 8:00 a.m. when the sun is coming up and people are eating breakfast or 8:00 p.m. when it's getting dark and the mosquitoes are out? Did you set it up if it was raining or cold? Of course not. You set it up on a sunny afternoon. You need to provide the product people want when they are most likely to buy it. People don't necessarily say, "Wow, I'm thirsty and hot. I wish I had a tall, cool glass of lemonade right now." But your lemonade stand has the big *Lemonade 25 Cents* sign. You are now advertising by power of suggestion. You are informing potential customers that you can help quench that afternoon thirst.

You set up your lemonade stand where people can see it. Maybe you write "Ice Cold" before the word lemonade on your sign. Maybe you put a couple balloons on the stand to get people's attention. You make sure the *25 Cents* is in big letters so people know that for only a quarter they get a refreshing cup of lemonade.

When a customer does walk up to the lemonade stand, how do you greet that person? Do you say hi? Do you say, "Can I get you some lemonade?" These are the basics of customer service. Are we really using the term customer service with a seven-year-

old's lemonade stand? Yes, except the level of expectation regarding customer service from a child is pretty low. Nobody expects a kid to provide excellent customer service, but that changes as you get older and start charging more than a quarter for something.

What happens if that seven-year-old has a lemonade stand for a couple hours three days a week in a busy neighborhood all summer? Maybe he or she makes a few bucks each day. Saving up for that bike is much easier because those bucks add up over time—especially if Mom keeps buying the cups and lemonade. One person provides the labor and nets the profit while the other pays all of the overhead. The next thing you know, after a few weeks all the neighbors are talking about the kid who has the lemonade stand down the street. Adults love the hard-working kid and will go out of their way to help by buying a cup or two.

This book is not written for the seven-year-old manning a lemonade stand. This book is for high school students who need to make some money to pay for college...using the lessons and principles that began at a childhood lemonade stand.

I started cleaning windows for myself when I was seventeen. When I graduated from college at age twenty-three, I was still working for myself cleaning windows; but I was more efficient, more knowledgeable, and making significantly more money. My cups of lemonade were clean windows and I collected dollar bills, not quarters.

If you woke me up in the middle of the night from a dead sleep and asked me, “Where did you learn most of your business skills?” I would say, “When I cleaned windows as a teenager.” The skills you learn while working for yourself in high school—work ethic, money management, time management, and customer service—are the foundation you will need during your adult career. When I learned to deal with customers at the age of seventeen, I had no idea that, once I graduated from college, those skills would be the most important business skills carried forward into adulthood. Everything I learned in college courses—well, most of it—was important, but I would never have been successful without those basic skills learned as a teenager working for myself.

I provided the best possible service a teenager could, and I charged for it. Eventually I was charging \$50 an hour, and my summer days were booked solid. Back then I thought cleaning windows was a great way to pay for college—because it was. Now I look back and realize that making \$50 an hour wasn't nearly as impressive as the business skills I learned on my entrepreneurial journey. I worked extremely hard and discovered that customers will pay a premium if the value matches that premium price. The better the lemonade tastes, the more quarters in your pocket. Customers

will pay a premium for the best damn lemonade in town. That's how I paid for college and that's why my business is successful now—because of the foundation of sound business practices I learned as a teenager.

So why is it important that I help teenagers work for themselves and pay their own way through college? Because the world doesn't need another college graduate with huge student loans. Did you know that only 5 % of college students work for themselves? The other 95 % work low-paying jobs where the boss tells them when and how to work and then cuts a small paycheck at the end of the week. On top of that, these kids are taking out enormous student loans and thus saddled with years of debt after graduation. Congratulations! You graduated from college. Now here's a bill for \$20,000 or \$50,000 or \$150,000!

With a little hard work and forethought, students can graduate with no debt. So why don't more students do that? Simple. Because most students don't know that it's even possible. Most don't know where to start. I did it, and Lemonade Stand Economics can steer you in the right direction so you can, too. It's easier than you think. If you had a lemonade stand when you were a kid, then you've already got the basics down.

As a business owner, I get hit up by everyone I know—and everyone they know—who has a teenager looking for a summer job. These kids are willing to work for me for \$10 an hour. And that's great! I am all about a teenager who's willing to work, and I can almost always use another hardworking crew member. On the other hand, I have never had a kid put a flyer on my door that says, "I need to pay for college and I will clean your windows." Or mow your lawn, or paint some rooms, or rake your leaves, or tutor your kids. All of which will pay more than double that \$10 an hour—and all of which I need to have done. This kid wouldn't even have to sell me on the idea. He'd just have to say, "Hey, I can do this for you." and the deal would be done. But to this day, no teenager has *asked* for my business yet.

So where are these students, the statistical 5 % who are working for themselves? The ones who earn two or three times what their peers make. Where are the teens who educate themselves in business skills every summer? All I can do is wonder why no one seems to be doing what I did. There is a market for teens who want to work for themselves and get paid for it. Maybe *you* are one of them.

Working for yourself. . . "That's a lot of work." I hear this all the time. "I'll just get a job; it's easier and they will guarantee me forty hours a week." I get that. You will get your forty hours. It's easier. You show up, punch in, do as much work as you have to, and then punch out and go home. Most of the American workforce does that. So you will make your \$8 an hour no matter how hard you work—or how hard you don't.

You might make eight sandwiches a day or 80 sandwiches. Either way after eight hours you will make \$64. But what if you did things differently? What if there was a way to find your own customers and make \$300 or \$400 in that same eight hours? Would you do it? Is it worth the extra effort?

**You want easy? Put down this book.**

**You want to work smart and make more money? Keep reading.**

When I started working for myself in high school, I never ran out of jobs. Jobs are everywhere. You just need to find them. It takes effort, and most people don't want to exert the effort required to find customers. It's that simple. Most people get a job and receive a paycheck at the end of the week because it's simple...it's traditional...it's normal. Most people are employees, and there is nothing wrong with that. Roads need to be built, papers need to be filed and coffee needs to be served. The world needs employees. Heck, I need employees. I've been an employee a few times myself. Apply for the job, get the job, show up to do the job, and receive a paycheck. But I would much rather make money for myself instead of making money for someone else. I call it entrepreneurial spirit and I'm glad I have it. Maybe you have it, too.

Ask yourself these questions:

- Are you always the person who questions everything?
- Did you ever think, "I wonder what would happen if we did it *my* way?"
- Do you say, "I can do it better than that guy!"
- Do you imagine what other people will say when you are successful?
- Are you willing to take on the responsibility of creating your own opportunities?
- Are you disciplined enough to work your own hours and schedule your own work?
- Would you rather make money for yourself with your knowledge and skill?

If you answered yes to any of the above questions you may just have some entrepreneurial spirit in you. If none of these remind you of yourself, then working for yourself is probably not for you. There is no right or wrong; it's a matter of personal choice. I very much prefer to make my own opportunities, work my own hours, choose the work I do, and keep all the profit for myself. If you think you might, too, harness your entrepreneurial spirit and use your own unique ideas to create opportunities. Utilize your skills, make wise decisions, and squeeze the lemons you were handed. Learn from your mistakes, but keep going. Don't make excuses, just get to work!

When I drive around neighborhoods doing estimates, I never pass a kid's lemonade stand without stopping. Never. I always stop. There is a particular stand that I remember. It's run by a girl maybe nine or ten years old in a suburb where I often work. I have bought lemonade from her five or six times. Not only does she offer lemonade but red Kool-Aid and cookies, too. She has an upsell product: chocolate chip cookies with purple sprinkles. She sells cookies with some lemonade to wash them down—brilliant! She is very polite, and I don't pay her in quarters. I pay her in dollar bills. I know she is out there a lot of the time, so whenever I'm in that neighborhood I drive by her corner to see if she's selling her cookies and lemonade that day. I am a repeat customer. Now the fact that I am paying her a little extra for a few glasses of lemonade isn't going to turn that kid into the next Fortune 500 CEO. But, for a split second, I hope she looks down in her hand and thinks, "Wow, I made this much just by selling lemonade? This is awesome!"

I didn't sell lemonade for quarters. I cleaned windows. I was the best damn window cleaner in town, and I charged accordingly. This book is about learning to charge more than a quarter, to provide a level of service that people will pay top dollar for. You need to charge enough to pay for that college degree. Go ahead and flip your middle finger at the college student loan department. You don't need them. You are smarter and harder-working than that. You aren't selling lemonade now because a quarter isn't enough. You aren't saving for a new bike; you are saving for a college degree—an investment in yourself. Costs are higher and so are expectations, yet the system to pay for that college education is as simple as your neighborhood lemonade stand.

The goal here is to show you how you can make the most dollars per hour doing what *you* want to do, something you enjoy or have an interest in. I did it. I cleaned windows charging \$50 an hour as a teenager. On a good day, I made \$400. On a bad day, maybe \$100. If I were a sandwich artist making \$8 an hour, it would take fifty hours to make \$400. But I made that much in a single day. One day vs. six days.

Lemonade Stand Economics is simple math that makes a big difference. Whether you want to just pay for college or begin a long-term business empire, read on. I'm going to throw a boatload of information at you. Use what you need, remember as much as you can, refer back when you have to...but get to work. There's a lot to do.

We'll work quickly and efficiently, setting goals, marketing, bidding jobs, and serving up a steamin' hot plate of fantastic customer service. Once in this money making rhythm you will make enough to pay for college, graduate with no debt and maybe even have a few bucks left over in your bank account. Let your little brother run the lemonade stand now, it's time to make some real money.

## Chapter 1 Lemonade or financial aid? It's *your* choice

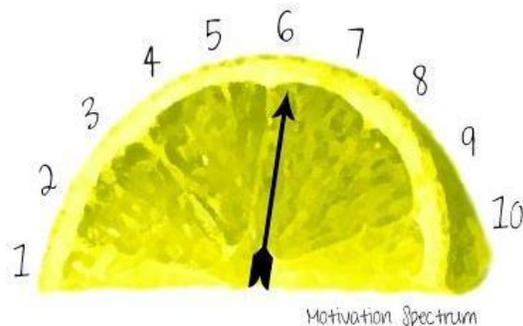
### Don't sign anything until you finish this book

You cracked this book because you don't know how you are going to pay for your college education. Your parents are in no position to pay for it, and your part-time job barely covers gas money. This leaves you with two options: pay for college as you go with money that you earn or take out student loans and pay for it later.

No one needs to preach to you about the benefits of going to college, yet no one is telling you how to pay for it either. It's up to you. Are you going to simply take the loan that is handed to you? Fill out the student loan form, sign the personal guarantee to pay it back after graduation, and go to class? That's what 90 % of the people reading this will do. Or are you part of that smart, bold, creative 10 % that is willing to work hard *now* to make things easier in the future? And when I say easier in the future, I mean much easier—relieving yourself from years of debt. Working for yourself now and earning more money than the next guy is significantly less stressful than being a slave to debt for years after graduation.

Many of you are reading this because someone told you to. You will skim it and toss it aside and never think of it again. However, if you are looking for some real help with your financial future, this book could change your life. The world consists of motivated leaders and perhaps not-so-motivated followers. If I had to put numbers on it, I would say 10 % are motivated leaders and 90 % are followers. The leaders are more confident and harder-working. They create their own destiny as well as creating the destiny of the followers.

Yes, leaders are motivated. I call it *being the 10*. Look at the motivation spectrum below. Are you the teenager who is highly motivated (a 10) or are you completely unmotivated (a 1)? Or are you somewhere in between? There is no right or wrong, and you can always move yourself within the spectrum. If you consider yourself a 10 on the motivational spectrum then you are already one huge step ahead of the rest. Which one are you? Do you have the attitude, confidence, motivation, and—in the same breath—the humility to be the 10?



Fast-forward in your mind to your college graduation. You are standing there in your cap and gown, and someone hands you a well-deserved diploma that you earned after four years of hard work. What a joyous day! You graduated. Your parents are so proud! You are now ready to start adulthood with a college degree in your back pocket. But wait! Remember back in high school, when you wondered how you were going to pay for this education, and you signed on the dotted line? Then each and every semester you signed again...right below where it says, “payments commence upon graduation.” Buzzkill! Attached to that diploma is a bill—a big bill. You owe \$20,000, or maybe it’s \$50,000 or maybe \$150,000. Whatever that total is, it will take you years to pay it off as the interest clock ticks.

Fast-forward even farther—ten or twenty years more—and you are still making a monthly payment on that student loan. Why? Because waaaaay back in high school you decided to take what seemed like the easy road and sign on the dotted line. So back to that crucial moment in high school—*right now!*—you have two options.

**Option One** – Pay for school as you go and graduate debt-free. It’s much less painful for a shorter time frame and will increase your business knowledge exponentially year to year.

**Option Two** – Take out student loans and pay them back after graduation. It’s easier now but will cause financial stress for years after graduation and cost you more over time due to interest. Additionally you will learn your business lessons later in life while making money for someone else.



*According to the National Postsecondary Student Aid Study conducted by the US Department of Education, updated in January 2010, 67% of students graduating from four-year colleges and universities had student loan debt. This is an increase of 27% from 2004.*

### **My story**

In seventh grade I was suspended from school for selling firecrackers to other students. Now, as a father of two young boys, I realize what a huge mistake that was. Fireworks are dangerous, and selling them to friends at school was wrong. What thirteen-year-old Geof would do is find an older kid to buy a brick of firecrackers for about \$20, then turn around and sell them to all his friends by the pack for \$1 apiece. A brick came with eighty packs of firecrackers, which means on each \$20 brick I made a \$60 profit. What did I do with that extra \$60? I spent some of it on football cards, candy, video games, and the like; but I always spent a portion on buying more firecrackers. At the time I didn’t know what profit was. I was just having fun and making some cash doing it. But I did learn from the experience that if I spent \$20 and

added a little sales effort, I could make \$80. That effort was worth \$60. This was one of my earliest lessons in turning a profit.

It wasn't long before I got caught and suspended from school. This was an in-school suspension, meaning I got to spend the day in the principal's office. My mother had to come to school and *discuss* the incident with the principal. Needless to say, my mother was not happy. So what did I learn from this experience? Selling firecrackers wasn't a good idea, especially at school. It's illegal and dangerous. However, on a positive note, I learned that with a little extra effort you can make money off practically anything. While business opportunities are almost everywhere, some opportunities are smart and others are just plain dumb. I put selling firecrackers at school in the dumb category. Mowing the neighbor's lawn for \$25? I would put that in the smart category.

I was a typical kid. I played video games, fooled around playing football, ate snacks, drank soda, and rode my bike. I saw my mother head off to work every morning, and many times she would come home and go back to another job that same night. That's why being summoned to the principal's office to discuss the firecracker incident was even worse. She had to ask her boss for the morning off to deal with her son's escapade. You see, my mother was the stereotypical single working mom with two kids. She could afford food, rent, clothing, Christmas presents, and school tuition but not much more. She worked long hours at two jobs, sometimes three.

Many people would assume I saw this and said to myself, "I'm never going to live that way." But it wasn't like that. What I learned was that it's okay to work hard, to give your best regardless of what you are doing. My mom believed that. She did secretarial work every day and waited tables many nights. She worked hard and did what she had to do to pay the bills. She had a good work ethic, and my work ethic is a direct result of hers. The difference between us was the money. She made less than \$15 per hour. At the same time as a teenager, I was charging upwards of \$40 or \$50 per hour. *An hour of work is an hour of work. If you work hard, make sure you are charging enough for your time.*

### **[Sweet Tip]**

I'm not certain exactly when I started down the entrepreneurial path, but I've always had an attraction to business. Over the years, working for myself brought successes and failures. I want to share these life lessons with you so you can minimize the failures and increase the successes in your own entrepreneurial endeavors. And don't let the term *entrepreneurial endeavors* scare you.

Being an entrepreneur simply means that you are working for yourself and charging people for doing what you choose to do. You are an individual with unique thoughts,

ideas, and skills. The entrepreneur uses those unique skills to make money. You are your own boss playing by your own rules. When I was thirteen posting flyers for yard-work jobs, I was just looking to make some money to buy a bike. I did not realize that in reality I was introducing myself to the world as an entrepreneur.

I held many low-paying jobs when I was young, running the gamut of what most kids do for their first jobs. I babysat, mowed and raked lawns, shoveled snow, delivered newspapers, and worked at a gas station, grocery store, and hardware store...you name it, I did it. I needed spending money, so I worked. Then I got a summer job in high school cleaning windows, and everything changed. You see, I did something the next summer, when I was seventeen, that changed my brain. I started cleaning windows for myself. I found the customers, I performed the work, and I kept the profit. I was making money for myself rather than making money for someone else. My specialty was cleaning windows, but I was also happy to do any other side job the customer needed done as well. I cleaned out garages, painted, cleaned gutters, trimmed bushes—whatever my customers would pay me to do. I needed spending cash and I needed to pay for college.

I'll be using my own personal experience as a window cleaner throughout this book. By the end you'll either never want to read the words *window cleaner* and *squeegee* again, or you'll be one and own several. What I did took ambition, creativity, and a lot of hard work, but it was also fun. Yes, I said *fun!* And I met some fantastic people along the way.

Keep in mind that all the hard work you'll do is for *yourself*. You're not putting money in someone else's pocket anymore, just your own. I make no promises that this will be easy. In fact, I guarantee it won't be easy. Working for yourself is just that: work. But the financial and educational reward is much greater than you'll receive from that low-paying job. Isn't it worth the extra effort to make twice as much money working for yourself??

In many ways you'll be learning from two different schools simultaneously during this period. You'll learn important business skills while working for yourself, at the same time gaining academic knowledge through your high school curriculum. You'll be doubling your skill set and will have twice as much to put on your resume when you graduate from college.

Whether you decide to work for someone else or continue on an entrepreneurial journey, the skills you learn now will be valuable, marketable, and real in the future. Plan as we might, none of us knows where our career path will take us or when it will take us there. Never in a million years would I have guessed on that first day I picked

up a squeegee as a sophomore in high school that I would own and operate a large window cleaning business twenty-five years later...or be writing a book helping others realize how rewarding working for yourself can be.

Statistics say that the average college graduate will change jobs every five years. So if you work forty years from ages twenty-five through sixty-five, you'll change jobs at least eight times. From my own experience, I'll tell you that it's not just employers you'll change but job duties and responsibilities as well. To navigate this successfully, you need transferable skills that can be applied to various industries. This is what working for yourself will provide. Customer service skills, time management, marketing, advertising, selling, and dealing with expenses and revenue are all real skills. They are interwoven into every profession in some way, shape, or form. The earlier you learn these skills, the farther you will be ahead of your peers and the more prepared you will be not only for your first job out of college but for life.

### **My training**

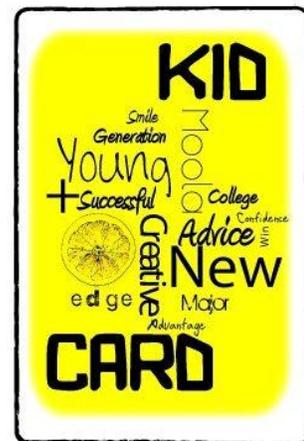
The day I picked up that first squeegee at age sixteen was the day that set me on a path to successfully putting myself through college on my own dime. I didn't know it at the time, but I was getting a valuable education during that summer job. I learned to clean windows working for Rochester Window Cleaning (RWC) in Rochester, New York. The owners, Mark and Steve Wasserman, took me under their wing and taught me the tricks of the trade. All the other employees were seasoned professionals, and this was key in creating the proper mindset and skill training for me to go out on my own. *There is no better way to learn a trade or skill than to work alongside professionals.* **[Sweet Tip]** I can't stress this point enough. To successfully make more money working for yourself, you must be willing to focus on learning rather than earning for three to six months. Go into that summer job knowing you're trying to learn as much as possible in as little time as possible. That summer taught me a whole list of skills that I would call on later when I went to work for myself...at the ripe old age of seventeen.

RWC hired me as summer help and paid me \$3.35 an hour. If I worked a full week, I would take home \$114 after taxes...forty hours of work for \$114. I was lucky. "Lucky to be making that amount of money?" you might ask. Well, sort of. At that time \$3.35 was only minimum wage, but I was truly lucky because I was being paid to learn a trade. It was a top-notch education. I learned to clean commercial windows, residential windows, and high-rise windows. I learned how to deal with customers, how to walk ledges, proper ladder safety, and the list goes on. These guys were pros, and their professionalism couldn't help but rub off on me. Aside from all the technical aspects of window cleaning, I learned how attitude, a good work ethic, and creating a culture of fantastic customer service make the day run smoothly and create profits.

All of these skills came in handy when I started working for myself cleaning windows. In fact, they're all still valuable to this day. I did better in job interviews after college because of these qualities. I advanced my career because of these qualities. I lead employees better because of these qualities. How you conduct business is a direct result of your attitude, work ethic, and values—all of which the customer sees in your level of customer service. Again, all you have to do is add some effort to your skill; and those customers will start paying the profit that pays for your college education.

### Work ethic, customer service, and playing the Kid Card

People have lots of ideas of what *work ethic* means. Certainly you've heard cranky old men saying, "You kids these days have no work ethic. You have it easy! Video games and cell phones all the time. That's all kids do." If you haven't heard this, just imagine an old man saying those words. Got the wrinkly old fellow pictured in your head? Good. Now back to the work ethic. A person with a good work ethic values and appreciates hard work. How you work is important and how you treat the idea of work is just as important. And when I say *hard work*, I don't mean lugging heavy bags of bricks uphill. In any job there is hard work. It may come in the form of tight deadlines or cleaning that one hard-to-reach skylight or getting the images set just right for a website. Farm kids have a reputation for having a great work ethic. Why? Because they were taught to value work from an early age. Farmers and their children are known for starting early, working long hours, and doing hard work on the farm every day.



Are you working as hard as you can? Are you getting your work done the right way and in an efficient manner? Or are you taking a lot of breaks, texting your friends, goofing off, and being lazy? When you have a good work ethic, it shows. Customers see it. Coworkers see it. Everyone sees it. Maybe you offer to stay late on the job to get it done. Maybe you have to work in less-than-desirable conditions, or you go to work when your friends want you to call in sick so you can join them at the beach for the day. Maybe you are pleasant and professional even when you are having a bad day or a customer is rude to you.

Customer service is the absolute most important part of working for yourself. If your customers are happy—meaning you did what was expected of you (and hopefully more)—then they will continue to hire you. Poor customer service almost always guarantees you will not have a repeat customer. Not only is the chance very likely your customer will not call you back, but it's also very likely he or she will tell others of the bad experience with you. Avoid poor customer service like you would the mystery meat in your school lunch. Avoid poor customer service like the proverbial plague. That is the great thing about working for yourself: it's in your control to avoid poor customer service. You can serve the best damn lemonade in town *and* provide the best customer service—it's completely up to you.

Customers have expectations; exceed them or fail. Customers are the lifeblood of any business; treat them well and you'll succeed. Treat them poorly, and you'll be working for someone else again before you know it.

Treating your customers well means treating them with respect and always being polite. I know, did this guy really just tell me to be polite and respectful? Yes, I did, because I see a lot of teenagers who aren't polite or respectful. And believe me, your customers will notice, too. Customers love the polite, hard-working high school student. Use that to your advantage: play the Kid Card.



Throughout this book you will see the term *play the Kid Card*. Sometimes there is an advantage to being seen as a kid. While referring to you as a *kid* is technically incorrect, it will happen. Obviously it would be more accurate to refer to you as a young adult. However, your customers will undoubtedly be older than you are; and anyone over the age of thirty often refers to a high school student as a kid. My advice is to get past the term and use it to your advantage. Yes, use the fact that you are a kid to these people as an advantage.

Most adults love the ambitious, hardworking kid who is working to pay for college. That appreciation is a huge advantage for you when it comes to working for yourself. Whether it helps you get more business, charge a higher rate, or bail yourself out when you make a mistake, use the fact that you are a kid to your benefit. Admit to being a kid when you need it, but always act like the young adult you are. So play the Kid Card, but don't abuse it. Just play it when it makes sense. It's a great foundation for great customer service.

I can't even count how many new customers I added to my contact list by having a good work ethic and providing excellent customer service to just one customer. If you impress one customer, then that one customer will tell his friends and neighbors what a good job you did and how professional you were as you solved his problems and exceeded his expectations. He might even mention how you thanked him and shook his hand after the job was done.

That old saying, "The customer is always right" has been around so long for a reason. My own version goes something like this: "Although the customer is not always right, treat him/her as though he/she is." Employ the words, *absolutely*, *sure thing*, and *not a problem* often, and of course use *please* and *thank you* all the time. *Customers may be leery of an inexperienced young man or woman doing work for them. Make the customer feel comfortable with you.* **[Sweet Tip]** Use words and actions and a positive, get-it-done attitude to reassure customers that you can and will exceed their expectations.

Customer service is a quickly disappearing aspect of American business. Take notice of how friendly (or not!) the clerk at your local sandwich shop is the next time you visit. It seems today most employees just don't care. They are tired or they hate their job or they didn't get the weekend off as requested. Even if those things are all true for you, don't be that person. Be the opposite. Be the positive go-getter that your grandparents want you to be. Chances are you'll set yourself apart and develop a spotless reputation if you just employ simple customer service skills.

Customer service skills are best learned as you train with a professional, but you will hone those skills once you are working for yourself. You will see firsthand how professionals act with the customer, how representing yourself, explaining job aspects, and resolving issues are best handled. We learn by paying attention, by watching and doing repeatedly. These fantastic customer service skills soon become second nature. Not only will you use them daily with your customers, but these talents and skills will be crucial anytime you are stumped by a problem.

You'll use these talents and skills when meeting with college professors regarding questions or concerns about your grades or projects...when interacting with your roommates—or their regrettable overnight guests...when dealing with a landlord who is slow to fix a leaky toilet...when dealing with coworkers in your future. And I literally could go on forever...

### **From employee to entrepreneur**

On a nice sunny day in my second summer of cleaning windows for \$3.35 an hour, I was cleaning the window in the Rochester mayor's office. His office manager came in and asked me, "Do you clean house windows on the side?" "Sure," I said in a very

unsure tone. I had never thought of that. I wondered if I could do it by myself. I didn't have any tools of my own, and I didn't know how much to charge. At this point everything was very much over my head.

*Like any new experience, something that feels foreign to you can be overwhelming. But if you approach the situation with confidence that first time, it will only become easier with each successive outing.* **[Sweet Tip]** Have some confidence in yourself when you start. Don't let the fear prevent you from even trying.

She gave me her address, and after work I drove to her house to look at the job. I gave her a price of \$60. I had no idea how to price a job. My quote was a total guess. I probably could have charged more than I did. But I was new to this and in complete *fake it 'til you make it* mode. Had I gone into my summer job knowing I would end up cleaning windows for myself, I would have asked the important questions, such as, "How much do I charge per window?" Again, this is just one advantage you'll enjoy by taking a job in your chosen field with the sole purpose of learning as much as you can.

I bought some tools from the local janitorial supply store and entered the great unknown of cleaning windows on my own. I cleaned that woman's windows the following Saturday. She paid me with three fresh \$20 bills. I had worked three hours for \$60. That's \$20 per hour! I remember driving home from that job, and all I could think about was the fact that I had just made \$60 in three hours. It was so easy! I wanted to do it again.

My mind never worked the same after that. I had officially flipped the entrepreneurial switch in my brain. The realization that I could make \$20 an hour instead of \$3.35 was just mind blowing. That was a life-changing moment for me that I will never forget. All I had to do now was find more people who wanted me to clean windows for them. I didn't know how to do it, but I knew I had to do it. And so my journey began.

## **Preparation**

First, I prepared. From my on-the-job training, I knew what I needed in terms of tools. I went back to the janitorial supply store and bought a few more squeegees and some ladders. There was no Internet back then, no cell phones, no GPS. So I couldn't MapQuest the addresses or order supplies online. (There's that wrinkly old man again...) But I was a young man chock-full of ambition, who had just given himself a \$16-an-hour raise. For \$20 an hour, I would use a map and find the addresses.

I had my bucket full of window cleaning tools and I was ready to conquer the world—well, clean the glass of the world anyway. Where did my start-up money come

from? All of my supplies, tools, equipment, and car were paid for with the money I'd earned and saved working those lower-paying jobs I mentioned earlier.

Now that I had all of the proper equipment, I was officially working for myself. I didn't really think about what I was doing or how I was doing it. I just did it. Everyone I knew thought it was really cool that I was running around cleaning windows and making a sweet dime doing it. Note, however, that none of my friends wanted to give up their after-school TV time or weekends to do it...that's an illustration of the 90 and the 10. Of course I didn't see it that way at the time. Back then I was just a high school kid doing what he needed to do to make some cash. See, you can be the 10 and not even know it.

Next came advertising. I needed more customers. I didn't take out an ad in the phonebook or buy a month on a billboard. Heck, I didn't have the money or any idea how to do that. And, like I mentioned, there was no Internet—no websites, Facebook, or Craigslist. What I did to advertise was logical, simple, and cheap. I distributed flyers. I posted and handed out what seemed to be thousands of flyers. My flyers were simple. They said "Residential Window Cleaning. Call Geof White." And I included my home phone number and a picture of a window that I had drawn. (Yep, I drew it. Not cut-and-paste or drag-and-drop, but drawn with a good old-fashioned number 2 pencil.)

### **It worked!**

Distributing flyers paid off. It really didn't take long, maybe a week, before I got my first phone call. I was excited and scared to death at the same time. At that point I had \$20 per hour stuck in my head, and after working hard every day at \$3.35 an hour I was ready to make some real cash. You see, after that first \$20-an-hour job, I didn't want to make \$3.35 anymore. My perception of my worth had changed. My standard quickly became \$20 an hour. I'd given myself that raise, and I didn't want to give it back. Potential customers were calling, and I was thrown into all kinds of situations with customers. The customer service education that I had received while at my low-paying jobs really came in handy.

While in training I had encountered customers in office settings, in the mall, on the street, or in their homes. Some people were nice, and some were not. That's just the way it goes. People in different settings expect different behaviors. In an office setting, it was best to be polite and quiet. However, in someone's home I was more apt to carry on a lengthy conversation because people were much more interested in developing a personal relationship. This makes sense considering I was spending several hours in their most private and personal space: their home. Some of my

customers became even more than just a paycheck; they became friends and mentors. Connie Gisel was one such customer.

Connie had gotten one of my flyers and very much appreciated clean windows. She had me over to her house three or four times a year to keep them that way. I remember she had a dog, a boxer that wore a green collar with Louie Gisel on it. I would clean Connie's inside windows first. After the insides were all sparkle and shine, I'd hop outside and clean the exterior glass. As I cleaned the outsides, Louie would follow me from room to room, window to window. With every room and every window, Louie left a big wet and drippy nose print on the inside glass as he stared at me intently. Connie would say, "If he doesn't make that print now, he'll just do it later." But, wanting to provide the best possible customer service, I quickly changed my routine. For future visits I cleaned the outsides first and made sure to remove Louie's personal stamp of approval from the insides later. Problem solved. *Another lesson: don't be afraid to change your ways to improve your system. [Sweet Tip]*

Connie was a great customer. She was the sweetest lady, had fairly simple windows to clean, and she would feed me. Oh, yeah, feed me. Now what makes a person's day (especially a constantly hungry teenage boy) more than being paid and fed at the same job? I'm pretty sure that's having your cake and eating it too...almost literally. With Connie's cooking, it was like being paid twice.

She worked during the day, so she always had me come clean in late afternoon or on a weekend. After Louie and I would finish our window waltz, I'd make my way to the back porch. Connie, her husband Brad, Louie, and I would all sit down and eat dinner—usually spaghetti. Sometimes when I think back, I can still taste Connie's famous spaghetti.

Jean Massare was another customer I remember. I had put out flyers in her suburb. It was a good area to advertise in because it had larger homes with lots of windows. It was also close to where I lived. I didn't know it then, but I was targeting demographics by picking areas that were both close to my home and where my most-likely customers lived. I received several calls from that batch of flyers, and Jean was one. She had some tall windows in her house that overlooked a huge wooded ravine. This was the focal point of the house, so she liked to keep those windows clean. I always cleaned the inside and outside of those monsters. Outside I had to ladder off the porch, which was built on the side of the ravine. I would be on the top of a twenty-foot ladder looking down eighty feet into the woods below. The view was amazing and the windows weren't too difficult once I got up there...a perfect combination.

The first time I visited Mrs. Massare's house, she asked me where I went to school. I told her McQuaid Jesuit High School, which immediately made her eyes widen. She told me that her son also attended McQuaid but was a couple of years younger and that her daughter went to the same school as my little sister. Small world, right? She was ecstatic to help out a McQuaid boy by hiring me to clean her windows. (There's that Kid Card again.) Keep this example in mind when you're starting out. *Don't be afraid to develop a personal relationship with your customers.* **[Sweet Tip]**

After a while I cleaned the windows of almost every house on Mrs. Massare's street. It turned out that she was kind of like the neighborhood lookout. If there was a barbecue happening on that street or a car accident in the area, Jean had the details. She was on a first-name basis with everyone on the street and, luckily for me, she told everyone what a great job I did on her windows. Why did she do that? Because I did a good job. It's as simple as that.

If I had done a poor job, if I was late, or if I had a bad attitude, then she might have spread the word *not* to hire me. That's an important lesson and one you should learn early on. Satisfied customers will bring you more business. So do a good job. Do your best job. Exceed their expectations. Make the best damn lemonade around.

I remember how I would pull up on one end of the street in that neighborhood around 8:00 a.m. I'd park my car, pull out my gear, and clean windows until five or six o'clock at night. Then I'd come back the next day. I would clean maybe six or eight houses in two days. Every one of those houses was in the \$175 to \$250 price range. So if we take the low end, \$175 per house, and multiply that by six, we have \$1,050 in two days! That was enough to pay for a full trimester of college tuition—in two days). All that because I first handed out some flyers in a targeted neighborhood and exceeded one customer's expectations by being courteous, showing up on time, and cleaning a few bathroom mirrors for free.

By the time I was a senior in high school I had figured out how to bid jobs and how to work so efficiently that those \$20-per-hour jobs were rare. At this point I almost always made \$50 an hour, and that adds up fast when you have virtually no expenses. After all, I lived at home with my mom and younger sister. No rent, no food bill. I just paid for gas, concert tickets, and squeegee rubbers. So there I was, *Geof White, the Window Cleaner*. In fact, that's what I would say when I called customers. "Hello, this is Geof White, the window cleaner, returning your call. How can I help you?"

### **Learn from my mistakes**

After high school graduation, I attended Michigan State University in East Lansing, Michigan. I became Geof White, the Spartan. When I arrived at school, I started

taking low-paying jobs again. *Big mistake!* I didn't have the customer base that I'd established in Rochester and didn't know the area all that well, so unfortunately I let those things stop me from continuing on my profitable window cleaning path.

Often I'd make the weekend trip from Michigan back to New York, clean some windows, and then return to school on Monday for class. Usually I'd make enough on those trips to not only pay for the trip itself, but pay for a few weeks of school living. My big mistake was I didn't put out flyers in East Lansing. I didn't network. I didn't hand out business cards and ask for referrals. I didn't serve the best damn lemonade in town in East Lansing; I didn't serve anything! I signed on the dotted line. I took the student loan, I worked low-paying jobs, and I regret it.

I wish I had started cleaning windows again when I arrived at college. I just fell into the easy, low-paying job cycle again. That's how easy it is to be an employee. Even with my experience, I started working for someone else...until people in the office building where I was the maintenance guy saw me cleaning windows and were impressed. They were impressed enough to hire me to clean their house windows. I didn't have to go find the opportunity; it found me. I'm not kidding. Opportunities are everywhere!

Foolishly I just cleaned their windows and did not pursue referrals. I took window cleaning jobs when they came in, but never pursued the opportunities like I had in high school. I was a complete jackass! I had the tools and the knowledge and did nothing with them in East Lansing. I could have asked for referrals. I could have played the college Kid Card. I could have been the best damn window cleaner in East Lansing. But I didn't. You know why? I was tricked by the ease of the student loans, lulled into acceptance of living off the loans. The student loans made it easy; they gave me a false sense that everything was being paid for.

I paid for my college education myself. No family help at all. And if you are in the same boat, you know how stressful and challenging it is. Although I did take out some student loans, I had no other financial support. If I sound proud of this fact, that's because I am. Putting yourself through college financially is a huge accomplishment any way you slice it, and if you can make \$50 an hour it's much less painful to write that tuition check every semester. If you make \$8 an hour, you might not be able to write the check at all. You'll know exactly what I'm talking about in a year or so after you are out there working for yourself.

The total cost for my college education was somewhere in the \$40,000 to \$50,000 range, including classes, room and board, car expenses, and all that other stuff that comes along with college. (It's important to note that this cost is now \$85,000+.) Isn't

that kind of sad? Such a huge investment, a really large amount of money, and I cannot remember exactly how much it was. See how easily money and the cost of things can get away from you? I graduated with \$15,000 in student loans. (Looking back that number should have been \$0). My little sister, Natalie, who is now a doctor, went to Michigan State as well. However, we paid for college two different ways. She took out student loans and worked low-paying jobs, whereas I borrowed, worked some low-paying jobs, and worked for myself.

Natalie had wanted to be a doctor ever since she was helping me with my lemonade stand as a kid, and I have to commend her for doing it with no family financial help whatsoever. With the same financial disadvantage I had, she always had to work. She had jobs as a waitress, babysitter, security guard, fish monger...okay, no fish mongering. And of course she had student loans. Don't forget, to become a doctor takes a lot more work, time, and money than your typical four-year degree. So her student loan bill was significantly higher when she graduated. It was ten times my student loan bill. Yes, she graduated with a six-figure student loan. Ouch! Even more painful is how common that really is.

I remember one blistering summer day when the differences between our methods of making money became very apparent. It was one of those hot humid days when it seemed like anything and everything would melt. At any moment I expected to see a Dali-like clock dripping down the wall. I was home from college for summer break and cleaning windows every day. Natalie was about to start her senior year in high school. Each of us finished with work at the same time, somewhere around four o'clock. We lumbered in the house and plopped down on the couch. We were both dog-tired in the dog days of summer.

Natalie was working as a security guard at the time. This meant she sat at a desk and read books all day, waiting for someone to walk up and sign in. Natalie was an avid reader and studier. This job was quite well suited to her since it allowed her to get paid to read. The only problem was that she made like \$5 or \$6 an hour sitting at that desk. I, on the other hand, had just cleaned the outside windows of a very large house owned by an attorney in town. I'd probably lost a few pounds due to how much I sweated. The house took me two days to complete. Two days to clean just the outside windows of a house in the heat of summer is a very long time, but my payment at the end of those two days was \$900! It was a job well worth the effort.

So we were sitting there—me with a large glass of ice water, Natalie with an ice cream sandwich—and I asked her, “How much did you make today?” She took a bite of her ice cream and through a mouthful said, “I don't know, forty dollars.” I pulled out nine one-hundred-dollar bills and said, “I made \$450 today and \$450 yesterday.” She made

a face, told me to shut up, and threw the remainder of her ice cream sandwich at me. I'm pretty sure it hit me on the forehead and then slowly dripped down and landed in my water as I sat there in a state of shock. Yeah, I deserved it. I'm not saying I worked any harder than she did that day, though physically I probably did.

The point I'm trying to get across is that we both spent all day working. I came home with \$450 and she came home with \$40. The difference was that I found a customer willing to pay me \$450 for nine hours of work, and she found an employer willing to pay her \$40. My poor little sister put up with a lot of my shenanigans. But you know what? Kudos to her! She put herself through medical school with absolutely no help. She worked years of low-paying jobs and took out plenty of student loans to accomplish her long-term goal. She became the doctor she always wanted to be.

Well, that's my story. I started cleaning windows at the age of sixteen. By seventeen I was working for myself. I was the boss; I did things my way. I kept at it through college and paid my own way. That was my lemonade stand. I served up my own recipe, and customers seemed to really like it. I strove to become the best damn window cleaner around so I could charge enough to pay for college.

You can do the same thing. Earning your own money and paying for things yourself is awesome. I took some detours and hit some bumps along the way. By sharing them with you, I hope you won't run into the same problems. But if you do, you'll know better how to handle them. Next we'll be looking at the true cost of college and getting you started on the path to working less, making more, and becoming the 10.

