

# ***“Your Home Is My Business”***



**by**

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*“Sometimes it’s the journey which teaches you a lot about your destination.” -- Drake*

## **Behind the Scenes**

We all need a small change in our life from time to time. Well, I was ready for one for a long time. But I never imagined that I would have to cross an ocean for it.

Being an immigrant taught me to keep my mind open, especially about jobs, because you can’t be picky. And so at almost 30 years old, I found myself holding a screwdriver for the first time in my life, working in the home service industry.

This unexpected turn in life later would lead me to owning a small successful business, receiving satisfaction from helping other people, and still having free time to do other things--such as writing this book.

“Your home is my business” is the perspective from the eyes of the professional in the home service industry who fixes your lock, floor, roof, pipes, wires, lawn, or anything in between. In this book, I will expose you to other career options that parents usually don’t recommend and that aren’t taught in the university. But they changed my life, and maybe will change yours, as well.

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## **Part 1: The Story Behind**

# Chapter 1

## Running in Circles



*"The first step towards getting somewhere is to decide you're not going to stay where you are."* —John Pierpont "J. P." Morgan

I was born in 1984 in the Soviet Union, the son of Jewish parents who always dreamt of going to Israel. But in the time of the Soviet regime, it was impossible. Fortunately for my parents, in 1989 the Soviet Union collapsed; and a year later, we were on our way to Israel.

On the airplane, I was crying (I was only five years old) because I wanted to go back home. My mother turned to me and told me that where we were going had sun and beaches with warm water. That thought made me happy and kept me quiet for the rest of the flight.

The start in Israel was not easy for my family. My parents were only allowed to bring a small amount of cash and a few personal belongings with them, and the struggle of not speaking Hebrew made it hard for them to start making a living. However, they connected with a family friend, who then helped them find an apartment to rent; and they signed up for a government-assistance program to help them learn Hebrew. After a few months, they left the program and started to work.

My mother worked as a cashier, and my father worked in a warehouse; they worked there until they retired. Though we were living in poverty and I was wearing my brothers' hand-me-downs, I still had everything I needed.

Because my parents worked hard and were underpaid, they constantly reminded my older brother and me how important it was to get high grades in school, as a result of which we would land a good-paying job that would leave us set for life. After I graduated from high

school, I joined the Army and served as a medic. (It was mandatory for men to serve in the Army for three years, and women for two years.)

After I finished my service, I granted myself a short vacation. This left me thinking about my future. I didn't know exactly what I wanted to do; however, I did know that I wanted to know how to make money and become successful. So I enrolled myself in college and joined a business program. Looking back at those three years, I can truly say that it was a waste of my time and money. The real school of life was about to begin.

At that time, I understood that I would have to work a lot because of the high cost of my studies, so I started to look for a job. After sending out many resumes and having many interviews, I found myself working in the telemarketing department of an insurance company. I was amazed at the diversity of people working in my department. My team consisted of college graduates, single moms, high-school graduates, and a variety of different age groups. None of those parameters were relevant to your salary; the more you sold, the higher your commission was. And it just so happened that the best salesperson was a man who didn't have a degree but could sell ice to an Eskimo. Seeing this made me regret the education that I had worked for. I came to the realization that the tools I had gained from school were different from the tools I needed to succeed in this job and in life.

Although the salary I was earning wasn't too high, it gave me a chance to save a few bucks every month. But the process of saving was so slow that I began to think about pursuing other ways to make extra income. When I shared this thought with Asaf, one of my best friends, he revealed to me that he had been successfully investing in stocks for the last few years, and he offered to help me invest my money in the same stocks, as well. He told me that the best thing was to "Let the money work for you." I liked that phrase. Every time he said it, I

imagined a dollar bill serving me a drink while I tanned on the beach. That convinced me to invest almost all of my money in those stocks. The following year, their value was going up, and I was happy. But that all changed after the financial crash of 2008! I lost everything I had invested.

When I went to work the first day after the crash, I tried really hard to make a sale, but I couldn't. I remember thinking that I would have to work for years in order to be in the same financial situation I was in just a day ago. That frustrated me, and at the end of the semester I took two weeks off work and left for vacation on the other side of the world.

In Puerto Rico, I met a lovely blonde girl who stole my heart, and we spent the whole weekend together. On the last Sunday of the vacation, Amber approached me with a heavy heart and told me that it was time for her to go back home to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. She asked me what my plans were. I told her, "For now I'm just on vacation, but if it doesn't frighten you too much, I will change my plans to follow you to Pittsburgh." We were inseparable; and after a month I decided to propose to her.

I never dreamt that I would find myself in such a fantasy . . . but that ended quickly, the day after our honeymoon. Because when I attempted to fill up my gas tank, my credit card was declined. I realized that my vacation had come to an end and that it was time to get a job.

# Chapter 2

## New Beginnings



As a newly married couple, Amber and I moved into an apartment in the center of Pittsburgh. The morning after, as I was on my way out of the apartment, Amber stopped me and realized that I looked uneasy.

The truth was, I *was* uneasy. I was concerned that I would never be able to find a job doing the only thing I knew how to do at that point -- telemarketing. I was new to the country, speaking a new language. It took me two minutes to finish a single sentence.

I told my wife that I was on my way to a local coffee shop to sit and look for jobs online. She offered to join me; I agreed. And as she closed the door, I asked her if she had grabbed the keys. I remember it all happening in slow motion: the expression in her eyes, the door closing slowly and then slamming shut at the same moment I finished my sentence. We had locked ourselves out. She had been sure that *I* had the keys. I had expected her to stay home, and so I did not.

I told her that it would be fine and that the door didn't look too hard to open; I had seen how to do it in many movies. In the next half hour, I learned two things. The first lesson was that it wasn't as easy to pick a lock as it looks in the movies. The second lesson was that when you try to unlock a closed door, use a lesser plastic card such as your Walgreens card and not a credit card, because I ruined mine and the door was still locked.

Just as my frustration was mounting, the elevator door opened and out walked a skinny bald guy. That was the first time I met David. He looked at me, smiled widely, and started to walk towards us. I wasn't sure of the meaning behind his big smile -- but now, looking back, I understand that it was the confident smile of someone who knew exactly what had happened to us.

David walked past us, saying that he would be right back. He went into the apartment next to ours and after only two minutes came out with

a small leather pouch in his hand. He came over to our door and crouched down on his knee. Then he pulled out two small pieces that looked like bobby pins from the pouch, got them into the keyhole, and started to jiggle them around. I'm not exaggerating when I say that he picked the lock in less than a minute. I was relieved that I could get back into the apartment. At the same time, I was frightened that someone could pick a lock that fast.

I expressed my thanks to David for saving my morning. He introduced himself as our neighbor and told us he made his *living* picking locks. When I told him that we had just moved in, and that Amber was working at a local bar and I was looking for a job, he asked me, "What do you think about what you just saw?" I told him it was the first time I had ever witnessed a locksmith in action, and that I was inspired.

"I need some help," David told me. "If you're interested, you can join me for a few jobs to see if you like it."

"Well," I told him, "the truth is that I have never held tools. My only jobs have consisted of working in an office." He stopped me right there and assured me that I would be just fine.

Early the next morning, David knocked at our door. He said, "Put your clothes on. Someone just locked their keys in their car. It's running, and it's parked in the middle of a gas station."

I got dressed quickly and stepped out with him. We arrived at the gas station and stopped the van next to a still-running car that was surrounded by people. There was a man trying to unlock the car with a coat hanger. It looked like he was struggling to open the door.

David stepped out of the van, took out his tools, and went towards the car. After talking with the customer, he started to work on the lock.

Within just a few minutes, he had gotten it open. When he got back into the van, the first question I asked him was, "How much did you charge him?" "Eighty bucks," he answered. I was stunned by how much a person could make in such short time. Later on, down the road, I would discover that you can make much more than that.

After I had worked with David day and night for a few weeks, he asked me if I felt ready to work alone. I wasn't sure, but I said yes anyway. What was the worst that could happen?

Before I started, David said to me, "About your salary: you will get paid by the job -- this isn't hourly -- so don't spend too much time in the same place. In addition, I will send you jobs at different times of the day, so make yourself available."

That very night, I got my first job. I was just about to fall asleep, when I got a call about a lady downtown who had locked herself out of her house. I thought, "Eh, it's only fifteen minutes away. I'll sleep once I get back."

I'll never forget this woman, She was a small, smiling student who was waiting anxiously outside her door. I introduced myself and got started on the door right away. After a moment of trying, I hesitated, realizing that this lock was different from those I had worked on with David; but I started to pick at it anyway.

After a long hour of trying, I hesitatingly I phoned David for help. "I'm stuck here with a lock that's not opening," I said, and I described the type of lock it was. "You won't be able to pick it," he told me. "You'll have to drill and replace it."

I hung up and started drilling. But after a while, I started to sweat and wonder why I couldn't open this door. But none of that mattered, I told myself; I was going to keep drilling until I got it open. After two

minutes, the drill stopped working. The battery had died because I had forgotten to charge it.

The customer was anxious and started to cry. She asked why I couldn't get the door open, and that all she wanted was to get inside. By then, I had been there for almost an hour.

I called David again, this time with a knot in my throat. I told him I needed him to come to the job and help me. He arrived shortly after I spoke with him, and finished the job that I started. I didn't end up making any money, but I learned a valuable lesson. *Always charge the drill battery, every night before bed.* That was the first -- and the last -- door that I wasn't able to unlock on my own.

I kept working for David over the next few months, and started gaining more experience from the jobs. Besides picking locks, I was also, installing, changing, and repairing them. There are lots of different locks that look the same, some of which were very complicated. You can only see the difference in locks once you start working on them. In the beginning of this job, I would get stuck a lot and resort to calling David for help. But sometimes he would be too busy to help me, so it was my job to figure out the solution. I used online videos as a guide to help me finish the jobs. These video guides were my true savior.

At first I did my job because I needed the money; but then I started to really like my craft. I was getting a nice salary, and I got paid to learn how to play and pick at locks. Sometimes this job felt like I was putting puzzles together.

After a year of hard work, Amber's grandmother got sick, and asked if we could move to San Francisco so that Amber could take care of her. And so we did. We packed up and moved to San Francisco.

I met with David to tell him the news. I thanked him for all that he'd done for me, and told him I hoped that I had been beneficial to his business. David nodded his head in agreement, and said that he wished all his employees were as disciplined as me. The truth is, it wasn't easy making myself readily available at any point of the day, and it wasn't easy waking up to phone calls throughout the night . . . but I never missed a single job. When I told him that I was moving, he offered to connect me with a guy in SF, Avi, who could get me a few jobs.

When Amber and I got to San Francisco, we checked into a motel, and on the second day there I decided to contact Avi. He sounded nice and welcomed me to the city. He told me that he got a few jobs daily that he could use help with, and that he'd be happy to send them to me.

As soon as the next morning, I got my first job with Avi. I was happy to get a job so quickly, because living in the Bay Area wasn't cheap. But Avi's jobs were different from David's. With David, I only had to drive ten to twenty minutes to my customers, which was a reasonable time for them to wait. But Avi would send me long distances, which required me to drive for one to two hours. There were many things wrong with this. First, the customers were not happy waiting that long; and second, driving took me lots of time, wasted my gas, and was starting to take a toll on my van.

At one point, Avi sent me a job to unlock a car all the way out in Sacramento, about two hours from San Francisco. I decided to decline the job and to text him that it was too far away, that I would end up spending more on gas than I would make for the job. Avi called me angrily, and for the first time I got an ultimatum: "Daniel!" he yelled at me. "You don't get to choose the jobs you get. Do them all, or don't do them at all." I was shocked and couldn't find the words to respond. I ended up doing the job.

At the end of the day, I understood that certain things needed to change. I had to have more control over the jobs I was doing.

# Chapter 3

## Independence



The process of becoming independent wasn't easy, and there were a lot of uncertainties. At that point, I was already a professional in my craft . I

had the knowledge and the goodwill to work with customers -- but one thing I didn't know was how to get them. I didn't want to continue working for Avi, but I knew that making the transition to being self-employed would take some time.

I didn't know where to start the marketing process, so every time I did a job for Avi, I asked his customers how they had found his service. All of them said they found him online through various sites. At night, after work, I would spend my time online, watching videos about marketing and advertising for small businesses. There was so much information on different business types and different ways to advertise and market for these businesses. I built an amateur website. (Today, there are a lot of online sources that will help you do this easily.) As soon as my website was up, I started to advertise it online, especially through the search engines and review websites. In less than a month, I got a call from my first customer.

It was an older lady who had lost her house keys and needed to replace all her locks. She lived only five minutes away from me. I finished this job within twenty minutes, and a few moments later I was on my way home. It all happened so quickly that the tea I had made before leaving was still warm when I got back. I remember feeling proud and relieved that I didn't need to give half my pay to Avi. Every dollar I had earned was mine. And the fact that the customer was from my own neighborhood saved me time. I thought it would take me at least a year to be busy enough to leave Avi, but it took less time than that.

At this point, I was in a position where I was declining taking on my own customers so that I could work for Avi. I decided that I would take fewer jobs from him and focus on my own business, instead. Avi wasn't happy about this, and reminded me that he wouldn't send me jobs if I kept declining to work with his customers. I was afraid to burn my

bridges with Avi, in case my business failed and I needed to turn to him again. But I stood by my decision, and made having my own customers and starting my journey as an independent self-employee without Avi my first priority.

I was loving my life as a business owner and having independence. Everything was decided by me, and I became successful by working hard, giving fair rates, and marketing myself efficiently. My business was progressing and I didn't need to resort to Avi. Yes, I was working hard; but when needed to, I could take vacations without requiring anybody's permission. The uncertainty that I had experienced in the beginning transitioned to certainty and confidence. I knew that I would stay busy as long as I kept up this routine. I was enjoying my freedom, and for the first time in my life I started to experience the **advantages** of being independent without a boss -- advantages such as:

- **Freedom** - The freedom to be your own decision-maker should be important to anyone who wants to be free and believes in himself. As the owner of my business, I can use my creativity and make changes without the need for approval from anyone. Also, I have the option to express myself without anyone telling me not to. I'm free to choose which and how many jobs I go to. There were days when I used to work around the clock; but there were also days when I would make some time for myself.
- **You can't be fired** - Basically there's nobody to fire you when you're the owner. I may find myself more busy on some days, and less busy on others. But there's nobody who can prevent me from working by firing me. The fact that my destiny depends on me, and is not in the hands of another person, gave me confidence. When you're an employee, you can be fired not only because of a bad

work ethic, but also because of a negative relationship with your boss. You can also be let go due to an employee cut.

- **Higher income** - Since working for myself, every lock I picked was worth more than what I made working for David and Avi. Working for myself allowed me to keep all my earnings, unlike having to give half to the other companies I worked for. It doesn't matter which industry you're in: if you provide the service directly to a customer, you will always earn a higher profit than if you work for a company that takes a cut of your pay. (The reason for the cut in pay is so that your employer can pay for all expenses, such as employees' salary, and profit from the job as well.)
- **Self-satisfaction** - The jobs I did for myself brought me more satisfaction than when I was working for the other companies. And it wasn't just because I was making more money; it was also that now I was picking fruit from my own labor tree. Everything I had built and maintained was a success. Watching your business flourish is like watching your child grow. Don't get me wrong, being a business owner also has its cons (*see below*).
- **No boss** - For me, the fact that when you are independent you have no boss and have the advantage of doing what you like is great. But for some other people, decision making and responsibility are not something they prefer. Those people would rather work under an authority and not have the responsibility of managing a business.

However, along with these advantages, I found a few **disadvantages** of being self-employed. Here are a few of them:

- **No assurance of income** - When you're an employee for a company, you're assured a certain amount of hours and income. You can depend on the same or higher salary in the future. This is unlike a self-employed business owner, who may find themselves with a high income one month and the next month with less or even nothing. In other words, it's all in your hands. If you work, then you will profit; but if you don't work, then you make nothing.

Back to our story:

Devin, Amber's younger brother, moved to the San Francisco Bay Area at a convenient time for both of us. I had too many phone calls to handle, and he needed a job, so we made it happen. He was a quick learner with a good work ethic, and after few weeks of training he started to work by himself.

After a year, I knew that Devin was ready to open his own business -- and with a little help, he did. Today he runs a successful business called "Locksmith on Wheels."

# Chapter 4

## So Many More



I was happy with my profession as a locksmith and with running my own business. I was working and fixing things with my hands, and I was getting paid respectfully. I don't know what other kind of job I would be

working if I had never met David. I was about to discover so many other options to get paid by fixing something in a house.

Neil is an old friend of mine who lives in Oakland, not far away from me. He's also a small business owner, but specializes in roofs. One day, he invited me for a dinner on a Friday evening at his house. I told him that would be great and showed up that night.

Besides Neil, there were two of his friends whom I had never met before, Ron and Guy. We were all in our early thirties and had one thing in common: we were all independent in our businesses. We sat around the dinner table and made casual talk about work. I learned that Ron was a plumber and Guy was an electrician. We had a lot of stories in common to share about our work life. Some were about funny situations we had gone through, and even the way we advertised seemed to be similar. It was obvious that we were all happy doing what we did, and there were too many similarities among us to ignore.

The one main thing that connected my, Neil's, Ron's, and Guy's experiences was that each of us fixed something connected to the structure of other people's homes. The focus of our work was different, but the process of our work looked pretty much the same:

- A Customer has a problem with part of their house and needs an expert.



- The Customer then searches for a professional (most likely, online) or calls someone they know.



- The Professional arrives at the customer's location (usually by van) with all the tools/parts.



- The professional resolves the problem, gets paid, and leaves the house.

I made a list (with the help of [homeadvisor.com](http://homeadvisor.com)) of other trades that specialize in home services:



**Additions and remodels:** Bathroom remodeling; basement remodeling; kitchen remodeling; garage remodeling; minor remodeling; major renovation; out-buildings and structures; disaster-recovery services; and specialties for disability features, such as chair lifts and elevators.

**Air conditioning & cooling:** Installing and repairing central air conditioning, fans, window a/c, outdoor mist coolings, and swamp coolers.

**Architects, builders, & engineers:** Architects; builders (new home); engineers; general contractors; land surveyors; construction manager; developer; draftsman/cadd; and permit services.

**Bathrooms:** Bathroom remodeling & design; cabinets and countertops; painting & staining; plumbing; tile; electrical; flooring; glass & mirrors; hot tubs & spas; walls & ceilings; windows and door.

**Carpentry:** Cabinets & countertops; decks; fences & ramps; doors; framing; closets; outbuilding sheds & gazebos; stairs & railing; siding; gutters & exterior trim.

**Cleaning services:** Maid services; carpet & draperies; windows; exterior home; property cleanup; ducts & vents; chimney & fireplace; post-construction cleanup; and waste & junk removal.

**Concrete, brick, & stone:** Driveways & floors; patios, walks, & steps; chimney, fireplace, stove, & bbq; foundations; siding; tile; walls; and other concrete services.

**Countertops:** Ceramic & porcelain tile; stone slab; laminate countertops; solid surface; natural stone tile.

**Decks, porches, & patios:** Build a deck or porch; patio build; clean & seal deck or porch; build an arbor, pergola, or trellis; build a gazebo; and installation & repair of outdoor play equipment.

**Decorators & designers:** Kitchen; buildings; interior decorator; landscape design; interior-space planner; bathrooms design; feng shui; and interior lighting planner.

**Drywall & insulation:** Drywall installation & repairing; batt, rolled, & reflective insulation; blown-in insulation; spray-foam insulation; and soundproofing.

**Electrical & computers:** Outlets, panels, switches & wiring; cables and network & telephones; home media systems; appliances; generators; and home security & alarm.

**Energy efficiency:** Energy-efficient home heating; home insulation & weatherstripping; home solar energy; home energy audit; energy-efficient appliances; home solar energy.

**Fences:** Installation and repair of: wood fence, vinyl or pvc fence, chain-link fence, wrought-iron fence, aluminium or steel fences, barbed-wire fence; and gates for driveway or security.

**Flooring:** Brick & stone; carpets; hardwood; laminate & vinyl; tile; concrete; and sports surfaces as in tennis courts & synthetic.

**Garage:** Build, remodel; garage door installation or replacement; install garage-door openers.

**Handyman services:** Carpentry; gutters; small handyman-projects; painting; and others.

**Heating & furnaces:** Boilers & radiators; central heating systems; electric wall & radiant heat systems; fans; water heaters; ducts & vents; fireplaces; thermostats & accessories and other Hvac types.

**Home security:** Access control systems; alarm; security cameras; and electric locks.

**Home theater:** Installation and repair of home-theater systems; home automation; home theater surround-sound systems; conceal home-theater wiring; tv wall mounts; antenna; electronic drape shade or blind opener; satellite dish.

**Home winterization:** Home insulation & weatherstripping; energy-efficient home heating; chimney or fireplace clean & inspect; winterize roofing; home-energy audit; and snow removal.

**Inspectors & appraisers:** Appraisal for real estate; general appraisal; home inspector; roofing inspector; and waterproofing inspectors.

**Landscaping:** Landscaping design; maintenance of lawn & trees; sprinkler systems; pools & water features; trees & shrub services; outdoor patios; and outdoor walls.

**Locksmith:** Residential; commercial; auto locksmith; safes installation & unlocking; electronic locks & access control.

**Moving & storage:** Moving services; storage; waste material & junk removal.

**Plumbing:** Drain clearing; faucets; fixtures & pipes; septic systems; sewers & water mains.

**Roofing:** Installing, replacing, or repairing a roof; roofs and gutters cleaning; gutters; skylights; inspections for roofing; installation of heating cable for roof; and metal roofing paint.

**Siding:** Vinyl siding installations; vinyl siding repair; wood or fiber cement installations; metal siding; traditional stucco, brick, or stone siding; exterior trim; spray-on siding; synthetic stucco siding installations & repair; and traditional sidings.

**Swimming pools:** Spas, hot tubs, & saunas; gazebo & enclosures; swimming pool decks & patios; swimming pools.

**Tile & stone:** Installations of ceramic & porcelain tile; pavers for driveways & floors; brick & stone for patios; pavers for patios; natural stone installation & repair.

**Walls & ceilings:** Painting & texturing; ceilings; drywall & insulation.

**Window & doors:** Windows installation & repair; door; glass & mirrors; windows treatment & cleaning.

Looking at the list made me understand that the home service industry is much bigger than I had thought, and that there are so many more options for being in the industry.

# **Chapter 5**

## **A Look into the Industry**



Being a small business owner in the home service industry has a few advantages over other small business owners in different industries. For example:

1. **High job-certainty is important for both business owners and employees.** Certainty gives us the option to make future plans, budgets, and to know what we can and can't afford. Most people would prefer to earn a lower salary that is more consistent than to work at a job where the salary is higher but there is less certainty. There are many professions in the home service industry that have a high job-certainty, and where the owners in these industries will keep working until the day of their retirement because of a few important factors:

- Home services is an industry that won't be disappearing in the near future, because housing will always exist and people will always look to invest in their homes. Houses were and will always be our most expensive asset, and they will always need attention, such as remodeling, maintenance, and additions.
- With the progression of technology, a lot of jobs are being replaced by robots and software. But the housing industry isn't so easily replaceable, and it won't be taken over by robots anytime soon. The big advantage of robots and software over humans is that they can do a quicker, more efficient job when the tasks are repetitive and simple. However, home service jobs are relatively complicated and difficult for robots to perform. The robot would need mobility, the ability to perform and solve mechanical tasks, and to combine these skills with human interaction.

One scenario that a robot won't be able to handle is fixing a leak in a pipe. This would require the robot to arrive

at the location, then have the ability to locate the problem and fix it while communicating with the customer. Actually, the progress of technology only *expands* home services, and adds new services and products to the industry. In the past, a locksmith only worked with *mechanical* keys and locks. Due to improvements in technology, today we have more products, such as *electronic* locks and keys in addition to the mechanical ones.

**2. The home service industry is easy to get into**, for a few reasons.

- Low ongoing expenses - To be a home service business owner, you don't necessarily need to have a storefront. By not owning a store, you will save money on rent and employees. A facilitated business may lose out on money during a slow month, due to the expense of having to keep the facility open. But a mobile business owner will neither gain nor lose money if their business is slow, because of fewer ongoing expenses.
- Low investment - While a store, restaurant, or bar may need to invest hundreds of thousands of dollars in remodeling, permits, and equipment, the home services business requires only some basic equipment and a vehicle (I even know a locksmith who uses his motorcycle for transportation).
- Bureaucracy - The papers that are needed to work in the home service industry are different from other professions, but most are easily obtainable. For example, the only papers that a locksmith needs is proof of a non-criminal record. There's no test or other

documents, whereas businesses that sell food, services, and equipment will need more documents, inspections, and fees.

**3. Highly profitable; relatively quick money.** Below is a list of the average fee and time of some home services:

Appliance repair: \$104 - \$236 for up to 1 hour

Architect and engineer plan: \$2,032 - \$8,290 for up to a week

Attic cleaning: \$875 - \$1839 for 2 hours - 1 day

Bathroom remodel: \$5937 - \$14749 for 1-2 weeks

Carpet cleaning: \$121 - \$233 for 1-3 hours

Countertop installation: \$1871 - \$4084 for 3-5 hours

Decks and porches: \$4061 - \$10,250 for 1-2 weeks

Door and window installation: \$147 - \$340 for 1 hour

Electrical work and repair: \$160 - \$500 for 1-3 hours

Fencing: \$1691 - \$3984 for 2-3 days

Foundations: \$2025 - \$6149 for up to a week

Garage-door repairs/installation: \$250 - \$400 for 1-2 hours

Gutter cleaning: \$106 - \$196 for 1-2 hours

Handyman: \$120 - \$180 for up to 1 hour

House cleaning: \$116 - \$235 for 1-3 hours

House movers: \$485 - \$1347 for 1 day

Inspectors and appraisers: \$178 - \$390 for 2-3 hour

Installation: \$875 - \$1893 for 2 hours - 1 day

Installing security systems: \$716 - \$2075 for a few hours - 1 day

Kitchen cabinets: \$1826 - \$7916 for 1-3 days

Painters: \$971 - \$2722 for 1-3 days

Plumbing: \$200 - \$451 for 1-2 hours

Swimming-pool cleaning: \$121 - \$373 for 1-3 hours

Tree removal and trim: \$380 - \$1019 for 3 hours - 1 day

The cost of the service includes the professional's profit and the expenses, such as parts and materials. The higher cost of the service usually will have also more expenses as you can see in the following table:

<b>Cost for customer</b>	<b>Cost of parts for the expert (%)</b>	<b>The expert's profit</b>
<\$100	<15%	85% or more
\$100<cost<500	15%<parts<25%	75%<profit<85%
\$500<cost<1000\$	25%<parts<35%	65%<profit<75%
>\$1000	>35%	<65%

For example, a home service expert who provides a service that costs the customer \$100 expects to make a profit of at least \$85 from that, and providing a service that costs the customer \$1000 is expected to enrich the expert by around \$700.

Today, home services is a profitable industry, but it took a long time for that to develop. The development of the home services industry went hand-in-hand with the development over time of the homes humans have lived in. In the beginning of civilization, the outer structure of the home developed slowly; and gradually, with advancing technology, the interior of the home developed, as well.

### **Timeline of home development over the course of civilization:**

- 6,000 BC - People in Turkey lived in houses made of mud and bricks. Walls were plastered and sometimes painted.
- 4-5,000 BC- The earliest doors to be recorded are represented in the paintings of some Egyptian tombs.
- 4,000 BC - The first pin tumbler lock was made in ancient Egypt. It was made entirely of wood.
- 2,000 BC - Furniture was used in Scotland.



- 2,000 BC - In the Indus Valley civilization, streets were built on a grid pattern, and networks of sewers were dug under them.
- 100 AD - The Romans were the first to use glass for windows, which was likely produced in Roman, Egypt.
- 1500 AD - Houses with glass and chimneys became common.

By the end of the Middle Ages, crafts and craftsmen were already a part of the early home service industry. Some of those professionals and what they did included:

**Carpenters:** Built flooring, furniture, paneling for rooms, and scaffolding for building.

**Ditchers:** Dug moats, vaults, foundations, and mines.

**Glaziers:** Cut and shaped glass.

**Hayward:** Tended hedges

**Locksmith:** Made and repaired locks and keys.

**Master Mason:** Responsible for the designing and overseeing the building of a structure.

**Peddlers:** Traveling vendors who offered their goods for sale. Also provided handyman services to residential and business owners.

**Roofer:** Fixed, built, and maintained roofs.

And more...

\*The 17th century was the beginning of the early modern period. During this time, there were more advanced revolutions in the home service industry, which made the homes of civilians more comfortable.\*

- 1752 - By tying a key onto a kite string during a storm, Ben Franklin proved that static electricity and lightning were the same. His correct observation of the nature of electricity paved the way for the future.
- 1775 - Alexander Cumming was granted a patent for the flushing lavatory. In the beginning of this revolution, the flushing toilet was a luxury. It only became common in the late 19th century.
- 1810 - The first shower was invented.
- 1854 - Antonio Meucci demonstrated an electric voice-operated device (telephone).
- 1878 - Joseph Swan invented the first incandescent light bulb (also called an electric lamp).
- The next two inventions revolutionized the home service industry.
  - In 1879, the formation of “The National Bell Telephone Company” made communication between people more convenient. It was also beneficial for calling in home services when they were needed.
  - In 1990, the world- wide web was founded. This gave business owners the opportunity to advertise themselves more easily and more affordably. For customers, it gave them easier access to find the professionals and services they needed.

### **Modern homes**

Today, the home service industry consists of a wide variety of professions. Together, they cover a market that is estimated at \$400

billion a year. Today, with the advancement in technology, many high-tech companies and start-ups are diving into this industry. These companies are trying to mediate between the home service industry and the clients who are looking for the service.

Companies such as Google, Amazon, and Facebook are trying to make the hiring process easier, and to offer customers information and pricing before that they can digest before hiring home service professionals. For example, Amazon offers more than 700 different kinds of home services. These different home services employed many people throughout the years. For example:



- **Flooring** - In 2014, the gross sales of flooring in the U.S. was \$19.5 billion, and in the last three years it has grown continuously. 125,000 employees are occupied in flooring and carpeting work, and this is expecting to rise by 5% by 2024.
- **Hvac** - The heating and cooling industry employs around 242,000 people across the U.S. This industry is expected to rise by 14% by 2024. The plumbing industry hired 425,000 people in 2014. Both industries had a total revenue of \$174 billion.

- **Gardening** - Today, the industry is made of 93,000 companies, which, together, hire 900,000 employees and in 2014 had a total revenue of \$50 billion.
- **Moving service** - Today, the moving industry is made up of 8,000 employees. In 2014, its revenue was \$12 billion.

Before the Internet, we used resources such as the Yellow Pages and billboards to advertise. Today, we use the Internet for marketing. This has made a major impact on the home services industry for a few different reasons:

### **The Future:**

The home services industry has grown and developed throughout history, but it has improved tremendously over the past 150 years with the advancements of technology. It will continue to develop in the future at an even higher rate.



People tend to be more home based, due to technological devices. With this said, new professions are being created such as virtual reality experts, home cyber engineers, and smart house developers. Existing

professions will expand their services. For example, an electrician from the 1950s had a smaller variety of services to offer a home, compared to a home today, which has a more complex electrical system. The future will be even more complex for electricians as technology advances.

Electrical components will be integrated in each part of the house, making future jobs for electricians more intricate. In the future, each part of our home will become unique, smart, and advanced, and will need a professional who specializes in certain areas.

I predict that the process of hiring a professional will be automated. The many sensors that we will have in our homes will be able to detect a leak or any other issues, and the automated home will know to contact a professional before the owner of the home does.

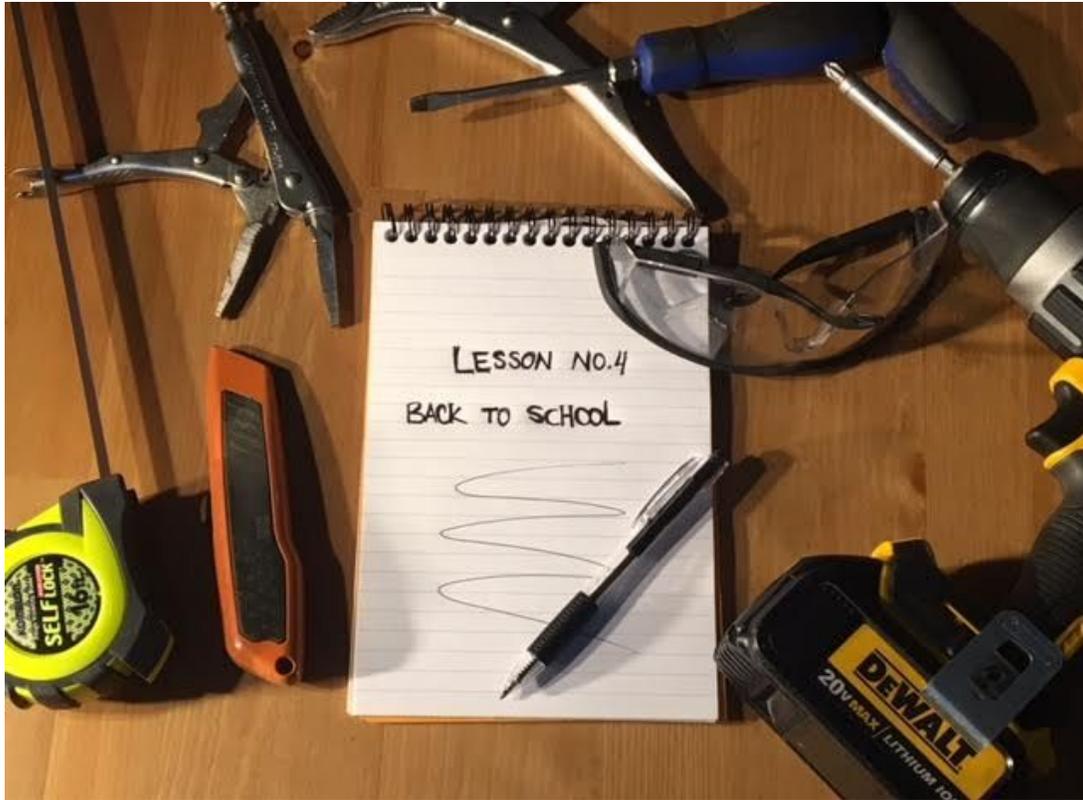
In conclusion, we will continue to see the home services industry develop throughout time, as it has in the past. The home services industry will survive far into the future -- for as long as we have homes (or at least until robots are advanced enough to take over the industry!).

## **Part 2: Some Keys**

*“I only do what my gut tells me to. I think it’s smart to listen to other people’s advice but at the end of the day, you’re the only one who tells you what’s right for you.” --Jennifer Lopez*



*Key #1 - Back to School*



*“An investment in knowledge pays the best interest.”* -- Benjamin Franklin

New beginnings can be tough, especially in a different field than we're used to. One of the hardest parts with new beginnings is that sometimes we don't even know where to start -- a result of our lack of knowledge. So the first thing to do when entering a new field is to get yourself educated.

The way I gained my basic knowledge and experience was by working for someone else -- David, in this case. That wasn't easy for me, especially because it was my first job where I needed to use my hands and tools. It took me around three years until I felt I was good at the craft. It felt as if I was back in school -- except this time, I was studying things that matched my interest, and I was *getting paid to learn* instead of paying to learn. It was a good deal. David offered me a job as a locksmith intern. Now, looking back, I realize that I would have agreed to work for

him even if he had offered to train me in a different area of the home service industry. Getting my foot in the door of the industry was beneficial to me, no matter what profession I would be focusing on.

**Step 1: Find someone in the industry.** If you want to get into the home services industry, then the first step is to look for people who already are working in it or are affiliated with it. If you know anybody affiliated with the industry, then there's a good chance that either they or someone they know can help get you in as an intern.

Home service industry companies usually are happy to hire motivated people. The industry lacks employees because most people today would choose office work over hard labor. If you happen have no connections of your own to the home services industry, then look online or call local companies in your area. With persistence, you will find a job in the industry, even without the connection or any experience.

Most businesses in the industry are smaller and pay relatively well. They are typically family-oriented, so you might find yourself comfortable just working as an employee instead of dealing with the hassle of opening and running your own business. For some, that would be the best thing to do.

**Step 2: Put in your time as an employee.** If you decide that you want to open a business on your own, then you'll need to work as an employee for at least 2-3 years in order to gain experience so that you can master your craft in your business. Don't rush into anything before you're an expert, and be fair with the business that hired you and taught you all you know. It is important to stay on good terms with them as well. Because I was a good employee of David's and we ended on good terms, he was still willing to help me over the phone while I was running my own business. (This was even after I had moved to San Francisco and he was still in Pittsburgh.)

**Step 3: Keep on learning:** The knowledge you gain at the beginning will help you to start with your new career choice and get into the industry. But in order to be really good at what you do, you will have to keep learning and so you can be dominant in your field. For people like us, school never ends.

# *Key #2 - Papers & Licensing*



*“Only a fool learns from his own mistakes. The wise man learns from the mistakes of others.” – Otto von Bismarck*

Doing things thoroughly and legitimately starts with the foundation upon which our business will be based -- and that means having the licenses and papers that the law demands. Doing this from the beginning will prevent serious problems later.

Most home service businesses will require a mandatory license. In some of these services, the process and documents that you will need are more simple to obtain, such as proof of a non-criminal history and a simple business license. For others, you may go through a longer process and will have to be certified in your specialty. Some of these services include plumbing, electrical, and general contracting. The reason behind the certification and the longer process involved in obtaining a license is because these professions can be life-threatening, and you are obligated to be ready for any kind of downfall that might occur to you or in your client's home.

Many people have asked me if I had to go to school to be a locksmith. They were surprised when I told them that there is no schooling requirement, and that everything I learned came through my first boss, David, and my own experience. Different states have different laws for the same profession, so I would advise you to check your state's requirements before you start on your journey.

Working as an unlicensed professional is very risky, and many businesses have gotten into legal dilemmas because of that. Besides, the process of getting the papers that we need in the home service industry is usually short. Getting it done at the beginning will let you be focused on the important things -- making your business successful.

# *Key #3 - Small vs. Big Business*



*“In America, small business is a big deal.” -- Bob Beauprez*

In many industries, such as dining or tech, it is usually very hard for a small business to compete against a big business. It's like a small kiosk owner competing against Trader Joe's, or for a developer to compete against Apple or Google. But that's not the case in the home services industry.

When you enter into the home services market as a new small business, your competitors will mainly be small businesses, as well. This will make it easier for you to survive the competition, especially as someone who has just started the business. This is because the unique structure of the industry gives smaller businesses advantages over bigger ones. There are a few reasons why:

- **Pricing:** An independent business owner can ask for prices that will be too low for a larger company to compete with. Unlike a big company, I don't have a secretary and I answer my own phone calls. I don't have to pay rent for a storefront or pay salaries to any employees. This allows me to keep my prices low.
- **Advertising cost:** In addition, these days advertising for small businesses is very cheap -- sometimes even free -- and it can generate enough calls for you so that you'll stay busy. If you're a larger business with many employees and want to increase the volume of calls, then you'll need to expand your advertising, which will be expensive. This creates a situation where the average marketing cost per customer of a small business is much lower than a larger company in the home services industry. They usually average a higher marketing cost per customer, so they have to compensate it within their service price.
- **Service quality:** The quality of service we get from a self-employed businessperson will usually be higher than from a company with many employees. When the owner of the business comes to give you the service, their reputation is on the line. This contrasts with the paid employee sent by a company; this person will try to provide a great service, but won't have the same dedication and motivation as the owner. Another reason for the self-

employed businessperson to provide a higher-quality service is because the work is being delivered by one consistent person. Contrast a company that works with many different employees whose skills, character, and work ethic are all different; this makes it pretty challenging to keep the same service consistent.

- **Personal service:** When customers see my ad “Daniel the Locksmith” and call me, they are happy to hear me answer with: “Daniel the Locksmith speaking, how may I help you?” The fact that I, the owner, am responding to their call personally reassures them that they can trust the person who will be entering their home, and they will pay him to deliver the service they need. Customers who pay a lot for services in their home want the security and peace of mind that comes when they know that they can call the same professional, whom they already have met, every time. This security alone will motivate customers to call the same professional or company again, even if the price is higher than average .

This is all good news for you if you want to start your own business, because the unique structure of the home service industry creates a situation where *small and personable is better than big*. This really helps when you are entering the market, and gives you a fair chance at succeeding in competition with the “bigger fish.”

# *Key #4 - Supply & Demand*



*“Teach a parrot the terms ‘supply and demand’ and you have got an economist.”*  
--Thomas Carlyle

As local owners of a home service business, our income depends mostly on local people. Therefore, we need to provide for the needs of the people who live around us, and to understand what services they are looking for.

Demand for home services can change drastically from one state to another. For example, an air-conditioning expert will sell more services related to cooling in hot states such as Florida and Arizona, while in colder states such as Alaska, experts will have demand for only heating-related issues.

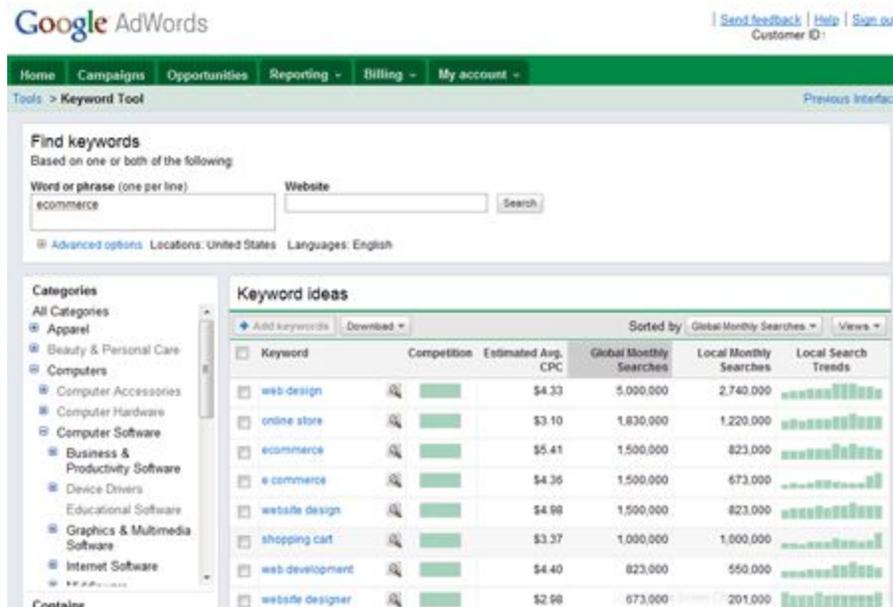
The difference in the demand can occur also between two cities, even if they are geographically close to each other. I live and work in Oakland, California. A friend of mine, Osh, is also a locksmith, and most of his jobs are in San Francisco. The two cities are only 20 minutes away from each other, but the nature of our jobs is different. In Oakland, most of my calls are for small residential jobs; in San Francisco, Osh gets more calls for commercial jobs. We are in the same industry but working with a different population. It even happens that people from different *neighborhoods* within the same city need different services.

A good way to know what kind of services the people around you are looking for is with online keyword search tools, such as the “*Google keyword tool*.” Tools like this are usually free and let you see the keywords people use in search engines as defined by different regions. This tool can also provide suggestions for other keywords and services in higher demand that we hadn’t thought of.



Above: The tool shows the number of times a specific keyword is searched for in a specific area.

Below: The tool shows us different ideas for services that are related to us, with the number of searches as well.



Understanding what local customers want can save you from the cost of investing in equipment that you would never use in serving these populations. This will allow you to focus your energy and marketing towards the services in your field that are in demand.

# *Key #5 - Personal Branding*



*“If you are not branding yourself, you can be sure others will do it for you.”*  
–Unknown

When you open a business in the home services industry, you can have a powerful marketing tool that can be in use the very first day your business opens. It will give you an advantage over competitors and will convince customers to contact you first. That tool is “personal branding.”

Personal branding is the process of marketing ourselves as the representative of the service or product that we’re offering. Some famous examples of business owners that chose this strategy are “Trump,” “Oprah Winfrey,” “Dolce&Gabbana,” “DKNY,” and more.

The first marketing decision I made for my business happened without my understanding its significance. It was choosing a name for my new business. The name I picked was “Daniel the Locksmith.” I felt it would be good to give the customer some information about my name and what I did before they even called me.

In the beginning, I didn't think that choosing a name was such an important decision; but over time, I started to understand its significance. I have a good habit of asking my customers how they found me. In one situation, a customer had found me through Yelp (customer reviews). I decided to ask them why they didn't call the company that had more reviews than me. The answer the customer gave made me understand that *personable branding has its advantages*. They said they chose me because of my name; they wanted to work with an individual.

Since then, I have had many people tell me that they called me because of the association with my name. In their mind, they visualize a small local business owner named Daniel who will be the one to help. I even have photos of me on my website and review sites, so that people can get a good understanding of who they're working with. Sometimes people are surprised when I answer the phone. They ask me, “Is this really Daniel from ‘Daniel the Locksmith’?” I feel like a celebrity every time it happens.

By doing this self-branding, I send 3 main messages to the customer before they even call me:

1. **Personal service:** A paying customer deserves the best service -- and what is better than *personal* service? They have the name of a real person to talk with, who is the one who will be personally providing the service.
2. **Small business:** Customers usually prefer to support small businesses rather than big companies. Many of them have told me that proudly. They already know that bigger is not better in the service industry.
3. **Lower price:** Customers will associate a single business owner with a lower/fair price.

Remember, your name is your reputation in the eyes of the customer. So be honest and deliver the best service that you can. If you do, the self-branding strategy will serve you well, right from the beginning.

# *Key #6 - The Right Price*



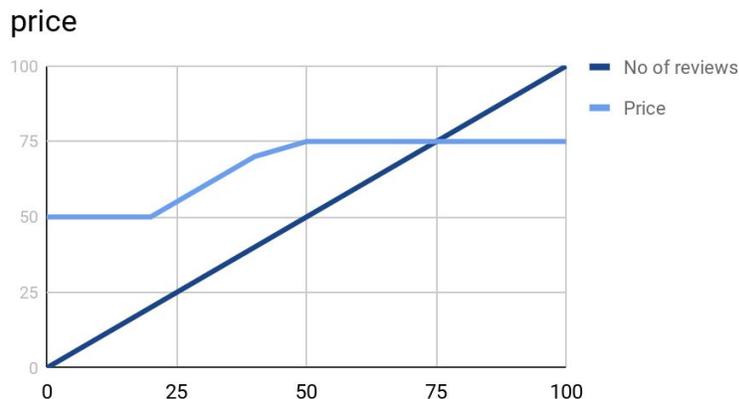
*“Price is what you pay, value is what you get.” -- Warren Buffett*

Pricing our services is one of the most basic steps that we will do when we open our business, and doing it right is essential. The price has to be a fine balance: too high, and people won't hire us; too low will make the business unprofitable. In both cases, it's bad.

Fortunately, in the home services industry we sell services and not products; and for that main reason, we can use Dynamic Pricing. This means that you can change the prices of your services more easily, based on the supply and demand for your services.

When I started my business, I didn't have a reputation or reviews online; and at that point, my prices were at the lowest of the low. I was only trying to build my reputation and my name, and I couldn't do that starting with high prices. The profit for each job wasn't the highest, but the positive reviews that I started to receive boosted my business within several months. Looking back, I realize that some of the reviews my customers left me were more valuable than the cash they gave me.

A good reputation is something that customers are willing to pay for, and so I raised my prices only after I had established my online reputation. People could see what they were getting, based on others; opinions and comments. A combination of fair prices and good service delivery will keep people calling you all the time.



# *Key #7 - Advertising*



*"The most powerful element in advertising is the truth." --- Bill Bernbach*

The skill of knowing how to attract customers to your business is one of the most important things a business owner can have. Without this skill, a business may have a lot to offer in terms of many services and products, but have no customers in line to utilize them. In the home services industry, businesses will advertise very similarly among different professions, whether it's a locksmith, plumber, or handyman.

The knowledge of advertising will help you even if you choose to change your profession. Most people search for a home professional in a similar way. First they usually check with family or friends for recommendations. If none are provided, then online searching will usually be the second option. Our target is to be there for the customers who need services. But if they have no recommendations and are in need of someone asap, we need to be available to them in other ways. As I already mentioned, most searching is done online, and there are many sites and services that will expose us to people who are looking for a professional.

Some of these are:

- **Google Maps:** Every search engine has a map-search result, but Google is the most well known. This function is free and gives a business a location on the map for local search results. People love looking for services through Google Maps results, because it shows them which business is closest to them. Again, people prefer local companies and will usually read their information and reviews before calling them. In order for a business to get on Google Maps, they need to sign up for "*Google My Business*." This allows the business to also write about themselves and to even add pictures. When the company's profile is already established and includes a decent amount of good reviews, then this alone will generate enough calls for your business.
- **Listings:** Business listings have existed since the phone came into use. The most common one was the Yellow Pages book. But since then, the Internet

came into our life, and now the directories and listings are online. We can still find the Yellow Pages website, but today there are many more listings such as Yelp, Houzz, BBB, Angie's list, and more. Most of those sites will let us add our business for free, but with most of them you can pay for bigger exposure . Most of the business listings today will have reviews as well -- a big advantage for honest business owners. To succeed at your business, you will learn that accumulating good reviews, and many of them, is important. A business that has lots of good reviews at a few of these sites can generate enough jobs to keep busy all day, without the need to spend anything for advertising.

- **Google Organic results:** The largest portion of information that we search for will be the *organic results*. You will find these results through the Google search engine page, after the promoted ads and the pictured map of local businesses. The organic results will:
  - Provide sites of top-ranked companies and will continue for many pages; however, most people will stop at the first page, which contains 8-10 different websites.

The *upside* of the organic search results is that, companies that are successful will have their website show up on the first page of the many results found, and the top 4 listings will usually receive a higher volume of calls.

The *downside* of the organic search results is that it takes a few months to a year until your site is promoted to the first page through the search engine.

Another challenge with this way of advertising is that the business needs to have an *optimized website* that is adaptable to search engines. There's even a process to promoting a website called SEO -- search-engine optimization -- that can be complicated to create (you may need to get a professional to build this for you). This type of high-end advertising is much more complex than the other ways I presented, but it's definitely possible to build on your own by simply using Youtube. Again, some businesses hire professionals for the SEO

process. Once the website is placed on the first page of Google, then the free jobs that the company receives covers the investment for the SEO process.

- **Google adwords and Google home services:** The Google adwords are the first few results that you will find at the top of the first page, and sometimes on the side or at the bottom of the page. Google adwords is responsible for the main income of Google. If using this service, a business owner will generate calls within minutes after starting the campaign; but it's usually pricy. The system works on ppc (pay per click), and you even pay for the people that call but don't end up purchasing the service.

The advantage of adwords, besides its ability to generate calls immediately, is that it's very flexible: business owners can control their budget, the time of the ads, location, and targeted keywords so that customers can focus on specific services rather than on others. Building a campaign with Google adwords is not easy and will require some knowledge to make it efficient and successful. Otherwise, the average expense per phone call can be really high. There are many professionals whom you can hire to promote your business on adword, or you can resort to free demos online that will explain how to build a good campaign so that you too, will also generate many calls for a low cost. Google adword is based on a scoring system that depends on the content of your website and ad, as well as the keywords used to find your ad. These scores will determine the average cost for every click on your ad.

- **Home services apps,** such as amazon, nextdoor and thumbtack: There are many startup companies today that provide convenient ways to get your service; and we, as service providers, want to be there at any moment. Some apps are run by big companies such as Amazon home services, because of the large market. Frequently these service apps will work on the idea of sending a price offer to a customer for a specific service they need. The use of these apps is usually easy and doesn't require too much technical knowledge. These companies work with customers who need a specific service, and then apply their information to different home services sites or apps to get them price offers from professionals. The payment will be per

lead or phone call and usually will be reasonable. Some services will charge only if the customer took the job -- which is good for the business that is advertising, because no business owner wants to pay for a lead that didn't turn into a job.

- **Social media** (not as effective as many think for home services):  
Advertisements on social media are good for impulsive desires for products or services. Usually, we desire the things that pop up through ads on social media, even though we weren't necessarily looking for them. Unlike buying useless products, a home service is not bought impulsively, but is purchased because a situation in our home needs to be resolved, and we usually need it as soon as possible. People won't call a plumber just because they saw an enticing ad, but they will put in the work to search for one if a plumber is what's needed.
- **Offline marketing:** Most advertising done in the home services industry is online, but there are still plenty who of business owners who print ads offline, using either the newspaper or printed listing books. Sadly, these sources are not so effective anymore, because of technical advances. The home service's main goal is to resolve any home-related issues; and when people are seeking those resolutions, then they usually pull out their phone or computer to search for the best and local services in their area. For this reason, there is only one offline printed marketing that I highly recommend. Business cards.
- **Businesses cards:** That small piece of paper cost just a few cents -- such a cheap price to pay for such a highly effective outcome. If a customer is happy with the job that the professional performed, they will usually keep their business card. Good professionals are not easy to come across, and sometimes to call a business for a first-time service can be a gamble. So satisfied customers will usually contact the last company they used by pulling out their business card. Sometimes, people whom I randomly meet -- who have never even *been* my past customers -- ask me for my business cards. This also is very effective, because they will hold onto your card until

they coincidentally need your service, and then give you a call. Of course, when you give out a business card you, need to be presentable and to perform an excellent service. Otherwise, those cards given out after the service will only collect dust in the back junk drawer of your past [FILL IN].

The following chart compares the benefits of advertising on the Internet with advertising in print:

<b>INTERNET</b>	<b>PRINTED</b>
Content revisions are easy and flexible.	Changes are only possible before printing.
You can advertise in targeted areas and to certain groups.	Targeted advertising is limited.
You can start and end an advertisement campaign whenever you like,	Long commitment due to printing.
You can put more information about your company and your services.	Limited information.
Low cost.	High cost.

In conclusion, use the many advantages of the Internet and online advertising. Today more than ever, there are many available advertising tools that are easy to use, such as clicking on a button.

# *Key #8 - Customer Service*



*“People do not care how much you know until they know how much you care.”*

-- Teddy Roosevelt

Bringing in customers is an important part of a successful business, but *the way in which you handle and serve your customers* is even more crucial and can determine your failure or success.

When someone calls a home services business, you know from the beginning that they are having a problem in their house and would like to repair or change that with your help. The customer-service process starts with the first phone call, continues with the job that is done in their home, and ends with your helping them even after the project is finished. Happy customers are very important for business growth, and are an asset from a marketing point of view.

A satisfied customer can benefit you in two main ways:

1. If they leave you a positive review online, other people will read it (and people *do* read them). Those reviews are so valuable that I wrote a section about it in Chapter 2 of this book.
2. Satisfied customers will boost your business by word-of-mouth recommendations. These in-person positive recommendations influence your service a lot more than online recommendations.

On the other hand, a customer who is unhappy and bitter can bring a lot of damage to the business, especially online, and potentially close you down. The gap between the benefits brought about by a satisfied customer and those undone by an unsatisfied customer is huge, and the cost of repairing their damage will be much higher than satisfying them in the first place.

The subject of “customer service” is a popular one, and you can find many books related to the topic. But there are a few basic ways to handle home services customers that can prevent a lot of bad endings to your jobs.

1. **Listen and understand the customer:** I know it sounds obvious, but it’s easy to forget -- and the consequences can be expensive. The first interaction with the customer is usually when they call us. They will start by describing

the problem and asking for information about the solution, such as pricing, timing, and the process. Many times, I've seen professionals who don't let customers finish their sentences and assume that they know what the customer is calling about. Then, unfortunately, they'll give them a wrong estimate or -- an even worse scenario -- do the job only to discover that it's not what the customer wanted.

2. **Explain the solution:** There's no need to make it long, but explaining to the customer how the process looks, how long it will take, and how the solution will work is important for their peace of mind. When the customer understands that you are knowledgeable about the process, they are more trustful and will let you work alone. If a customer questions your knowledge, they won't hire you; or, if they do, they will check in with you for every part of the process.
  
3. **After-buy service:** Most of the time, when you do a job it's good and can last a long time. But sometimes the customer will call back with some kind of issue where you are needed again. This is where your reputation will be put to the test. It's very easy to be nice and helpful up to the point of payment; but customers want to know that they also will be helped if [FILL IN]

# *Key #9 - Reviews*



*“You can’t build a reputation on what you are going to do.” -- Henry Ford*

Today, a single consumer can influence your business reputation by leaving just one bad review. Many businesses have closed because of a single (or a few) bad reviews. However, others have flourished thanks to them.

The ability to post reviews is one of the best things that has happened for online consumers, because scams can now be prevented. Before online reviews existed, if people needed a plumber or any other kind of home services professional, they would look through the newspaper or Yellow Pages and made their choices based on a gamble -- usually, on factors such as the size of the ad, the location of the page within the publication, or the content of the ad. Either way, they had to respond to information created by the owner of the business.

This new consumer-power is good for home services professionals. Honest professionals who want to make their customers happy will always receive many more good reviews than bad. (Why “*many more* good reviews” rather than “*all* good reviews”? Because no one is perfect; there will always be someone who leaves you a bad review at some point.) On the other hand, scammers -- or businesses that don’t care about their customers -- will get many bad reviews, and as a result will have no business. So the review system enables you, as a professional home services provider, to benefit from both situations.

# Key #10 - Self-Learning



*“Develop a passion for learning. If you do, you will never cease to grow.”*

-- Anthony J. D'Angelo

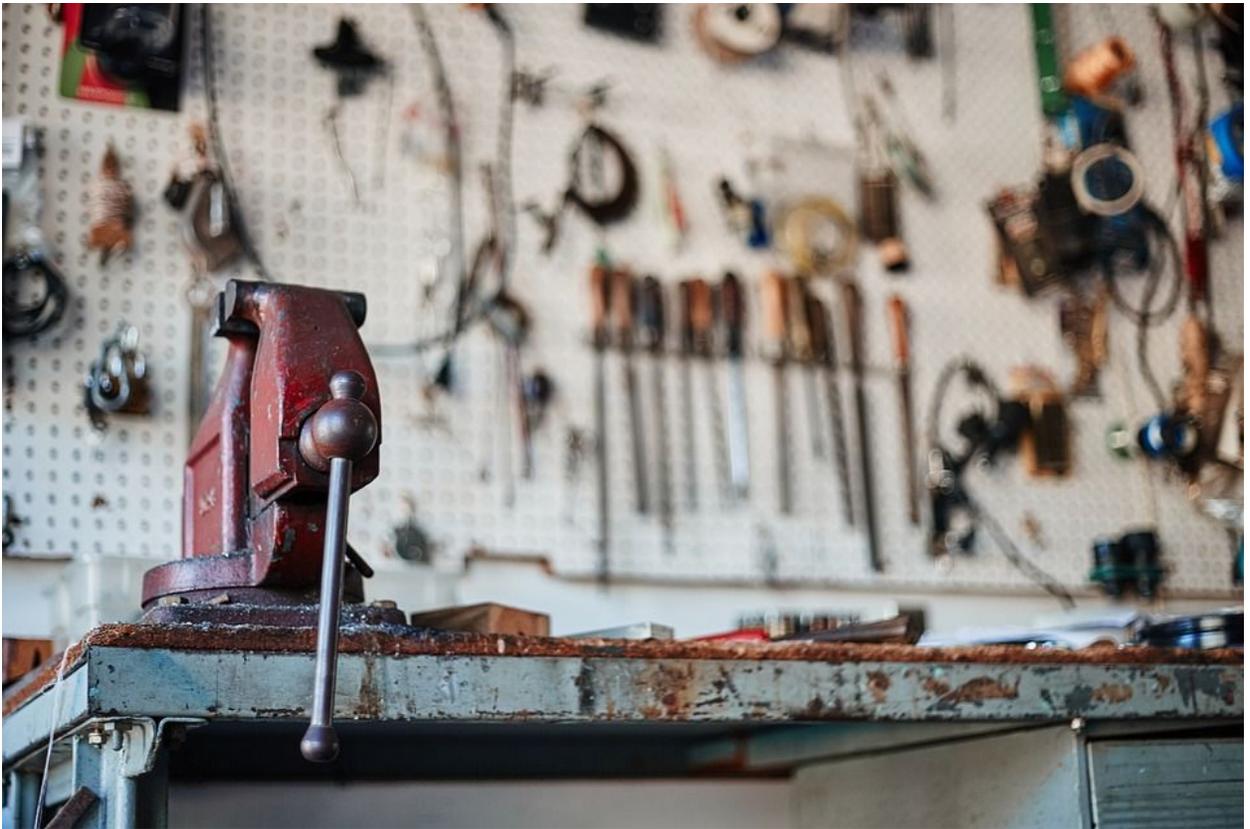
Our professional knowledge is a big factor, if we want our business to flourish. Surprisingly, you won't learn most of this knowledge from someone else, but by self-directed knowledge: learning things on your own.

Self-learning is the skill of studying and understanding a subject without having anyone directly teach you. In the past, we only had limited learning tools, the most basic being a book. Today, however, we have limitless online learning resources, such as videos, ebooks, and forums. Self-learning is a skill you should develop when you enter your field, because you will need to take initiative under new situations. Expanding your knowledge will allow you to be able to provide additional services.

David, my first employer, brought me only residential locksmithing work, because that's what he knew and was comfortable with. But when I wanted to acquire knowledge about automotive locksmithing jobs, I had to learn it by myself. Luckily for me, I found many ebooks with videos about how to make car keys. Some I had to pay for, but it was well worth it. I had to research forums for advice in order to know what equipment to buy. After a while, I got my first auto key-cutting machine, and started to train on cars in the junkyard. Within a few months, I was able to offer a new service, which I never had experienced in my dealings with David. Having this breadth of capacities made a significant difference in my income.

A business whose owner stops learning and improving will not go forward, and eventually will start to die. By embracing ongoing self-learning, you will bring your business to the top. It will always be updated and will put your business above many others.

# Key #11 - Getting Tools



*“If you need a machine and don’t buy it, then you will ultimately find that you have paid for it and don’t have it.” -- Henry Ford*

I used to think that buying stocks was a good investment. But when I lost my money in the stock-market crash of 2008, it was clear to me that it was no more than just an overrated gamble. I didn’t think I would get rich from the stocks, but I did expect to just make a higher yearly percentage. I had no idea that one day I would find a way to invest in something that makes me a profit of a hundred, and sometimes a thousand, percent profit. This can all come from investing in your business.

Having the right tools gives you the ability to complete jobs. Sometimes they may not be required, or sometimes you can’t complete a job without them. In that case, if you have them, they can save you a lot of time and hardship. I had many jobs where I depending on having the right tools to complete those jobs. I earned back the money that I spent on them from their very first use. This means that it’s better to get the tools you need in the first stage of your business.

By having and using new tools, you learn how to provide new services or making your existing ones better. Remember to never turn down a job because of missing inventory or lack of tools. Having the tools you need will pay off faster than any investment.

# Key #12 - Competitors



*“It is nice to have a valid competition. It pushes you to do better.”*

-- Gianni Versace

We're usually going to feel uncomfortable with competition -- not only in school, work, and our love life, but in our business as well. The main reason for our fear is the view that competitors will take business away from us. But with the right approach, competition actually can help boost our business greatly.

There is competition in every industry. Some companies will be more successful than others, and usually the top-rated are the ones making high profits from their business. Knowing the competitors in your field, especially the successful ones, will be beneficial to your company for a few different reasons. For example, we can learn from other successful businesses about new marketing ideas, and get a perspective on how customers are finding them.

The Internet gives us easy access to information about our competitors.

- **Search engine and review sites:** The best way to find successful businesses in our area will be by searching the name of the profession on search engines and review sites. The most successful businesses will usually be ranked at the top of the results, and will have a lot of reviews, indicating the business's long-term experience.
- **Business websites:** On the businesses' websites, we can find more information, such as prices, services offered, and sometimes the history of the company.

In the beginning stages of your new business, it's important to use the example of successful businesses and, to some degree, imitate their style. It's also important to be creative and compare your tactics to those of other businesses, so that your business will survive.

Today, some of my competitors have become my friends. We help each other -- say, if someone is missing an item they need, or if they have a question. I even recommend other competitors to people looking for a home services professional if I'm busy or can't accept a job for any reason. They do the same for me; sometimes I'll get calls from customers because other companies couldn't help

them, and the companies recommended me. This cooperation eventually becomes a win-win situation for all.

# Key #13 - Final Destination



*“Be practical as well as generous in your ideals. Keep your eyes on the stars, but remember to keep your feet on the ground.” – Theodore Roosevelt*

An airplane that flies in the sky without a destination will eventually run out of fuel and crash. So will running a business, if we do so without having a final destination.

When starting a home services-based business, it's important to know how you want your business to look at its most successful moments, and what income you want to have. Your goals should be always high. Once you have a clear picture of where you want the business to be, then the way to get there is much easier.

It can seem overwhelming to think about where you want your business to get to, and seem impossible because of the big distance between the reality and the dream. But there is a solution for that.

Several years back, I found myself holding a screwdriver for the very first time. Now, I look back at my long journey and understand that it was actually created in many stages. Your big dream is made from many small ones that come together.

My advice is to think big about your business, but try to break it up into many smaller tasks and focus on them one by one. If you want to be a professional then take a notebook and write yourself a business plan, including all the steps. Another advantage of breaking your final-destination goal into many smaller ones is that achieving even a small goal in your business plan will boost your energy towards the accomplishment of your next small goal.

I have not yet arrived at my destination and don't know if I ever will, But I do enjoy the journey.

-- Daniel the Locksmith

# Resources

<https://www.brainyquote.com/topics/supply>

<https://fitsmallbusiness.com/customer-service-quotes/>

<https://www.entrepreneur.com/article/28787>

<http://www.smallbusinessreporter.org/how-the-little-guys-can-win-in-todays-david-and-goliath-business-world/>

<https://pixabay.com>



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# Key #14 - Time Management

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As a self-independent businessperson rather than an employee, I found myself having free time -- especially in the beginning, when I didn't get many calls for jobs. There were many empty periods between the very few jobs I had, and I was doing nothing besides waiting for calls to come in.

Time management is important habit to develop as a business owner in the home services industry. Having free time is common, at the beginning of the business, and your ability to use this time for the benefit of your business will pay off substantially.

One good way to use this time is to spend it on marketing. Marketing your business is one of the keys to success. (That's why I wrote a chapter about it in this book, including examples of marketing your business for free.) All it will cost you is some of the free time you have plenty of, anyway.

Very quickly, I started to get bored just waiting for calls. Instead of watching movies on tv and playing games on the computer, I started to be more proactive. I began to watch beneficial videos on Youtube and used my free time to look for ways to grow my business. It took few months until I started to feel the results of my actions, but it definitely paid off.