

How to Become a Photography Entrepreneur

Dear friend, if you want to take control of your own life, to live on your own terms, and pursue your passion for photography — here is some advice, tips, or insights I will share with you:

Chapter 1: What is an entrepreneur?

To me, being an entrepreneur is a philosophical thing. To be an entrepreneur is a way of life. It is believing in yourself, having the faith that you can control your destiny, by your hard work, perseverance, and passion to change the world for the better.

I honestly think that 99% of entrepreneurship is based on courage, faith, and bravery. It is to take risks, and to live a contrarian life. That means to not just follow the beaten path. It means creating your own path.

If you're an entrepreneur, you take risks to help improve the lives of others and society. You harness your experiences and personal beliefs to make the change which you wish to see in the world.

Anyone can be an entrepreneur. Entrepreneurs aren't born, they're made.

Regardless of who you are, what your age, or your upbringing— you can train yourself to become more of an entrepreneur. And if your passion is photography, my hope is to share some of my secrets and experiences about being a photographic entrepreneur. And my ultimate passion and hope is to give you the tools, insights, inspiration, motivation, and hope in creating your passion your living — and ultimately for you to give back to society.

Basically, if you want to make a living from your photography, you are a photography entrepreneur.

Chapter 2: Ideas for making photography your living

There are many ways you can make photography your living. Some ideas:

- Photography teacher
- Photography workshop teacher
- Photography YouTuber
- Photography consultant
- Photography engineer (make, build, sell, market cameras)
- Photography blogger, marketer, advertiser
- Professional photographer (wedding, commercial, editorial, lifestyle, product photographer)
- Photography tour guide
- Photography magazine editor (print or digital-based)

- Photography writer or author

Who knows, the future is ripe for all these new “disruptive” technologies. Some very bold ideas you can pursue:

- Photography AI (artificial intelligence) programmer: Imagine creating algorithms that can help beginner photographers make better images, based on image-recognition software, and machine learning.
- Photography VR (virtual reality): Imagine making a future creating tools, platforms, or interfaces regarding virtual-reality photography.
- Photography AR (augmented reality): Imagine creating a camera, tools, or software that will allow people make better photos with contact-lens cameras, smartphones, etc.

The world is your oyster.

Chapter 3: Building the entrepreneurial mindset

Before you actually monetize or make money off your photography, the most important thing is to have an “entrepreneurial mindset.”

a) Don't be risk-averse

The most important thing is to have ****unlimited confidence in yourself****. Because on the way to success, you will fail, over and over again. You cannot get discouraged. You need to be unreasonable. You need to overcome criticism, hate, and self-doubt.

You need to become ***less*** risk-averse. As human beings, we are all wired to be risk-averse. We hate taking risks. Because that is what kept us alive for thousands of years. Think about modern life — what is more painful, earning \$100 at the casino, or losing \$100 at the casino? Modern research has shown that we hate losing 2x-2.5x more than winning. For example, to offset a loss of \$100 at the casino, you probably need to win at least \$200 or \$250.

Risk aversion kept us alive in the past— it is what kept us from making stupid risks that would cause us to be eaten alive by lions.

However in today's world, the chance of dying is very slim. What we fear more is social ostracism (being kicked out of our social communities, and hated on). We fear being seen as a “failure” in the eyes of our peers, partners, and families. We fear looking stupid, or making mistakes. We fear becoming homeless, and bankrupt. And ultimately, we all fear death irrationally.

I know for me, I always fear failure. That is what prevents me from becoming the best entrepreneur. I fear that I won't make enough money, that nobody will sign up for my new

workshops or buy my new products, or that people will call me stupid, dumb, or a fraud.

But what drives me as an entrepreneur is to help humanity. To help other people through educational information, which I hope will empower them. This is what drives me to teach workshops, to sell books, and to sell other products. ****You need to believe in yourself, and what you sell. If you don't believe in yourself, nobody will believe in you****.

b) Following your code of ethics

To build your entrepreneurial mindset, you need to follow your own code of ethics.

The simplest ethic is this:

> Don't do unto others as you don't want others to do unto you.

What will define you as an entrepreneur is what you decide **not** to do— rather than what you decide **to** do.

For example, my passion is photography education. I'm not that into photography gear or reviews. While I still do review cameras and gear, it isn't my focus. I feel I've been able to make my biggest stamp as an entrepreneur by sharing the advice: "Buy books, not gear" (as I don't believe that buying new gear will make you a better photographer).

Furthermore, I **don't** believe in elitism in photography. I don't believe in charging money for information. I don't believe in hoarding. I believe in sharing information, resources, or anything that can help empower others become better photographers.

Regardless of what your ethics are, there will always be a naysayer out there who will call you "unethical." And it is impossible to be 100% ethical to 100% of people out there.

Be ethical in your own eyes. Then pursue your passion with 100% confidence in yourself.

c) Focus on action

The last thing is as an entrepreneur, you don't know what will succeed or what won't succeed. You might have certain guesses, and hunches— but nobody can predict the future.

Therefore, you need to focus on ****action**** as an entrepreneur. Don't be a theorist. Theories don't do anything. Thinking doesn't do anything. Putting things into action by experimenting, tinkering, publishing, and sharing is going to put you one step closer to your goal.

For example, if you have an idea for a blog post, don't ask others whether they think it will be good or not. Just write it, hit publish, and share it.

If you want to become a professional photographer, don't ask others for their advice. Rather, just share your services online, set your prices, and try to advertise yourself as much as you can, and try to get paying clients.

Whenever you have an idea, concept, or theory — think of how you can put it into action in the “real world.”

Every time you try something, think of it as an “attempt” — rather than a “win/lose” scenario. If you only think about your actions in terms of “success” or “failure” — you will go nowhere.

Therefore, follow your hunches. Follow your own curiosity.

The more you “attempt” your entrepreneurial ideas, the more likely you are to hit a home run.

I have friends who had to “attempt” 10-20 businesses, before they found 1 that really succeeded. Think about it this way — if you attempted 100 photo businesses, don't you think you would get at least 1 that is a success?

Chapter 4: What does it mean to be a “successful” entrepreneur?

To me, my only definition of success is this: **do what you love without being homeless**.

Being successful doesn't mean you have a million followers, a billion dollars in the bank, and the world bowing down to you. Rather, being successful is to be humble, simple, and do what you are passionate about, every day of your life.

Success is a metric that is self-reinforced. You cannot let the rules of society dictate whether you are successful or not, based on some arbitrary external metric. Don't use page views, comments, followers, or money measure your success.

Your first goal as an entrepreneur is to *not* be homeless. To be able to do what you love, while paying the bills.

You need to make money as an entrepreneur to pay the bills. But once you're able to pay the bills and “make a living” — additional money will not bring you additional happiness or success.

a) How to not be homeless

Our first mission is to pay the rent as an entrepreneur.

The easiest way to *not* be homeless is to reduce your living expenses to the bare minimum.

For example, that might mean moving in with your parents, it might mean reducing your living expenses, moving into a cheaper neighborhood or apartment, it might mean eating out less, it might mean living abroad in a developing country, or it might mean feeding yourself on the bare minimum.

Reduce your overhead as much as possible. Don't rent a private office or desk— just work from your apartment or at a local coffee shop.

Don't invest in yourself by “upgrading” your camera, lenses, or tools. Having a better laptop or camera won't help you get more paying clients. The only thing is to invest in yourself by improving your knowledge— by studying business books, by marketing yourself on social media and your website/blog, and by offering your photography-related services.

I can't stress this enough — I feel the most important step as being a “successful” entrepreneur is to simply making a “living” — not a killing. And the quickest way to make a living from what you love isn't by earning more money, it is by ****lowering your expenses****.

b) Treat each day as if it were your last

I've been thinking a lot of what makes a good entrepreneur — and I think one of the best motivators can be death.

Death is awaiting all of us. When we know we are going to die, we know that we cannot waste time. We cannot delay our passion, our hopes, or our wishes. We treat each day as our last, and we do everything in our power to build what we wish to see in the world.

For me, my primary occupation is blogging. That means to write articles, ebooks, record videos, or share information which I hope others will find valuable. And I don't always feel “motivated” or “inspired” to do work. But the best kick in the pass is imaging like today were my last day on the planet.

When I think that today is my last day on earth, I don't waste time. I don't check pointless social media or do work that I don't truly believe in.

Thinking of death gives me ****focus**** (another most important mental attribute of being an entrepreneur). And to focus isn't to force yourself to focus. ****To focus is simply to prune away distractions****. To not check your email every 5 minutes, or social media, or get distracted by the internet.

If you knew today were your last day on earth, what would you ***not*** do today? And what is the most you can do today to pursue your entrepreneurial passion?

Some ideas of things you can finish in a day:

- Start building your photography website (I recommend wordpress.org as a platform)
- Send at least 1 email to potential prospects
- Publish 1 blog post
- Upload 1 video to YouTube
- Advertise 1 product you're selling
- Try to get at least 1 new subscriber (I recommend using mailchimp.com to build an email list, where you can advertise your services)

c) Create value

The most important thing as an entrepreneur is to create value for others.

If you create something that is truly valuable, useful, or informative— how can you not make a living from what you love?

For me, I would define value as something that informs, uplifts, educates, or motivates someone.

For example, if you write a blog post which inspires someone in photography, that is valuable.

If you create a YouTube video that educates someone to make better photos, that is valuable.

If you take great photos for your clients which brings them happiness and joy, that is valuable.

Chapter 5: How to make money as a photography entrepreneur

How do you make money as a photography entrepreneur?

The secret is to ****promote your value — not your prices****.

Value is the ***benefit*** you will give to your customer.

What does that mean?

For example, if you're selling a photography book for \$20 — you're not just selling a book. What is the value of a photography book?

For \$20, you can offer people the ***benefit*** of inspiration. Most photographers spend hundreds (if not thousands) of dollars on camera equipment, because they want to feel more creative, inspired, and motivated. If you can sell the benefit of a \$20 book to re-inspire, motivate, or help

a photographer be more creative— that has massive value. Spending \$20 for inspiration via a book is a better “bang for the buck” than spending \$2000 on a new camera for inspiration.

Create a product or service you’d want to buy

Another idea: if you don’t know what product or service to sell, create what you’d like to buy. Here are some personal examples of products I’ve created, or services I’d offered based on my personal wants/needs:

Case Study #1: Street Notes**

For example, when I started off in photography — I wish I had a small, practical, handbook that would give me assignments, ideas, and resources to make better photos.

Therefore I worked with Cindy to create “[Street Notes](<http://erickimphotography.com/blog/street-notes/>)” — a pocketable street photography handbook/manual, that fits in your back pocket. Street Notes costs around \$20, but has massive value. It contains assignments, tips, and lessons that is usually shared in my workshops (which cost hundreds of dollars).

If I started street photography all over again, I wish I had a copy of street notes.

Case Study #2: Photo Journal

Street Notes has been selling quite well. Cindy and I then thought to ourselves— what is another handbook, or book we could make that could help empower photographers?

Street photography has always been my passion, but as of late— I’ve been focusing more on “personal photography” (photography that is about documenting your own life, rather than the lives of others). Personal Photography as born out of my personal frustration in terms of *not* being able to shoot street photography all the time. I started to take more personal photos of Cindy, because I lived in the suburbs for a while, and couldn’t shoot street photography.

Not only that, but I started to philosophize a lot about the meaning and purpose of photography. I got caught up in the social media photography treadmill — only shooting photos, in the hope of getting external affirmation on social media via likes, followers, and comments.

I started to challenge myself— and wondered to myself, “*Why*” do I take photos?

Therefore “[Photo Journal](<http://erickimphotography.com/blog/photo-journal/>)” was born — a manual that challenges you to reflect *why* you take photos. Once again, I create a photography book/product which would have met my personal needs. Photo Journal includes space to journal about your personal philosophies about photography, and challenges you to

uncover the hidden purpose behind your photography.

For example, some prompts include:

- Why do I take photos?
- Who am I as a photographer?
- Do I need to take photos everyday?
- How can I photograph like a child?
- What do I want my photo-legacy to be?

I've personally blogged a lot about these topics in the past— as a way for self-therapy, and self-guidance. And I created [Photo Journal](<http://erickimphotography.com/blog/photo-journal/>) with Cindy to hopefully help others who have had similar troubles as myself.

Case Study #3: Conquer Your Fear of Shooting Street Photography Workshops

When I started shooting street photography, I was scared shitless. It took me about 6 years before I was able to overcome my fear of shooting street photography. I experimented with dozens of different techniques — asking for permission, shooting candidly, and pretending like I was photographing something else.

I then learned the personal tools and techniques I needed to overcome my personal fear of shooting street photography. Then one day I wondered to myself, “I wonder if there is any other aspiring street photographers who would also like to conquer their fears of shooting street photography?”

Therefore I tested this assumption by offering [street photography workshops on conquering your fears](<http://erickimphotography.com/blog/workshops/>). And they have been extremely popular.

I had no idea they would be successful, but I just created a workshop experience which could have helped me when I started off in street photography.

What needs can you fulfill?

So if you want to create a product or service based on your past needs, what would you want to see?

For example, have you ever faced these following challenges?

- Wanting to make better photos (improving your composition, technique, lighting)
- Wanting to learn how to use your camera (learning technical settings, tips, guidance)
- Wanting to travel and take photos

- Wanting to get more social media followers for your photography
- Wanting to make photography your living

Create a product, service, or solution to the problems you (currently) have, or problems you have had in the past as a photographer.

Find what annoys you, pisses you off, or frustrates you. Then find a solution to your own problem.

As a side-note, that is what inspired me to write this guide— I’ve always wondered, “How can I make a living as a photographer?” I therefore am writing this guide to help you with my personal difficulties.

How much money should I charge?

As a general principle— don’t under-sell yourself. I think most entrepreneurs tend to underprice whatever product or service they’re selling.

Have confidence in yourself. Sell what you think you’re worth.

And as a general tip, ****when in doubt, charge more****.

In today’s society, we are told that money is the root of all evil. That somehow if you sell your art, services, or passion for money — you’re “selling out.” That “true art” isn’t mixed with money.

Honestly, I think that is all B.S. Money is just a tool, like fire — which can be used for good or evil. Money is necessary to pay your bills, to feed yourself, and (most importantly of all) — buy you coffee.

If you’re starting off as an entrepreneur, trying to figure out what to charge for your services, try this tip out: ****charge 25% more than you think you should charge****. The more you charge, the more profitable your work, the quicker you can make a living out of your passion in photography.

Should I ever do work for free?

Another practical tip in photography: ****either do work for free, or charge a lot of money for it****.

For example, if you want to “build up your portfolio” (and not worry about fucking up and disappointing your client), just offer to do it for free.

But if you really want to make a living out of what you love, you need to charge money.

Therefore when my friends or family ask me to do photo-related things for them, I will either do it

for free, or not do it at all.

When clients or business-folk ask me for my services, I will either offer it for free, or a lot of money.

Avoid the middle

You want to avoid the middle of “middle-pricing.” Because when you charge just a “moderate” amount— nobody is happy (neither your client, or yourself).

Also the irony is that people value things that are more expensive.

Think about it — we generally don’t value anything which is free. If you sign up for a free online workshop or course, you are less likely to finish it, compared if you spent \$1000 on it.

When you’re buying medicine— what would you trust more, the medicine you got for \$1 or the medicine you bought for \$20?

If you charge more money for your products or services, people will think that it is worth it. If you charge too little, they won’t think it is very good.

For example, if you’re offering wedding photography services, who would you trust would make the better photos?

- The wedding photographer who charges \$50 for a 2-day wedding
- The wedding photographer who charges \$5000 for a 2-day wedding

Of course you will trust that the wedding photographer who charges more money will do a better job— which might or not be true.

So to wrap-up, charge more than you think you should. Value yourself higher in your own eyes.

Chapter 6: How to market yourself

One of the most important things about being a photography entrepreneur (or any sort of entrepreneur) is to know how to market yourself.

Apple has great products, but they also invest millions into marketing.

The same goes for all great artists, brands, or companies— even though they have great services, products, or things — they still need to pour a lot of money, time, and resources into marketing.

****If you don't market yourself, you don't exist**.**

The secret is knowing how to market, advertise, and promote yourself— without being “overly” promotional.

A practical suggestion: ****only market yourself 10% of the time****. For example, if you're a blogger, for every 10 blog posts, just write 1 blog post that is advertizing your services or products.

Not only that, but ****only market or advertise what you truly believe in****. Marketing and advertising is based on trust, and a long-term connection and relationship you have with someone else. If you market what you don't believe in, you are a phony.

How to deal with haters

If you try to make your passion your living, and charge money for your products or services, you will always find some “haters.”

And honestly, don't hate your haters. Rather, just ignore them.

When you are following your heart's passion and purpose in life, you will always find someone who doesn't agree with you. Someone who doesn't believe in your mission statement.

And many people aren't “hating” on you because they have ill-intent. Rather, according to their personal code of ethics, they don't believe in what you're doing.

But the rule of being a great entrepreneur is to not please the masses. Rather, it is to please a small audience — your “core following.”

Find your 1,000 true fans

Kevin Kelly wrote a fantastic essay titled: “1,000 true fans.” The basic concept is this— if you want to make a living out of what you're passionate about, you just need 1,000 “true fans.”

What is a “true fan”? Essentially someone who is willing to spend some of their income on your products or services.

For example, if you're a musician, a “true fan” is someone who will attend your concert, buy your merchandise (CD, t-shirt, stickers, etc), and will also spread the word about you with their friends.

If you try to please everyone out there, you will end up pleasing nobody.

Create for 1 person

For me as a blogger, it is hard for me to write information or content for a mass audience. Rather I treat blog posts like personal letters to just 1 person, 1 friend, or 1 “true fan.”

By creating for one person, you make it more personal. One “true fan” or friend I consider is my buddy Amit. He supports me 100% percent, and whenever I decide to write something, or share something, I think of him. I wonder to myself, “Will Amit like this?” This is what guides my thinking.

I also consider my buddy Amit a “true fan” because he has read a lot of my articles, ebooks, shared my blog with his friends, and also attended some of my workshops. He has also followed my personal recommendations in terms of what camera to shoot with, and I feel a strong emotional bond with him. When I met him in Sydney, we had so much in common, had similar life philosophies, and equal amounts of passion.

Who is your 1 true fan?

Who is that 1 person for you?

If you don’t know who your 1 true fan might be, just think of creating things for your past self.

If you started photography all over again, what information, content, education, products, or materials do you wish you had access to?

Or create for yourself today. What are challenges, struggles, or difficulties you currently experience? And how can you overcome these challenges?

Create what you would want to share

There are a billion social media strategies out there, marketing strategies, and advertising strategies.

The thing that has helped me the most is this: ****create what you would want to share****.

For example, you don’t know the social media behavior of other people. But you know your own social media behavior.

What causes you to “like” something on social media, or share it with your friends? Generally for me, it includes things that:

- Are informative
- Are educational

- Are funny, strange, or outrageous
- Are personal, authentic, emotional
- Are relevant, timely, and related to current-events

Generally content that I share is ****emotional and useful****. If I cannot relate with a piece of content with my heart, it won't stick. And if I don't think it will be useful or beneficial to others, I won't share it.

The same goes with your images that you share on social media. If you saw your own image on someone else's social media feed— would you “like” it or share it with your friends?

If you made a blog post or a YouTube video, and you saw someone else create something similar, would you want to share it?

I once read a saying online (think I got it from Ryan Holiday), “If it doesn't spread, it is dead.”

Chapter 7: How to stay motivated

One of the most difficult things about being an entrepreneur is to stay motivated.

It pertains to all fields. How does an author stay inspired to keep writing? How does a photographer stay inspired and motivated to keep taking photos? How does a teacher keep their passion to keep teaching? And how does an entrepreneur stay motivated, regardless of failure, upsets, or difficulties?

For me, think of entrepreneurship as climbing a great mountain. If you want to reach the top peak, it will be really fucking hard. You will have to constantly march forward, one foot in front of another, dealing with frostbite, cold, hypothermia, lack of food, lack of supplies, extreme exhaustion, fatigue, and wanting to give up each step of the way.

Entrepreneurship isn't for the faint of heart. Entrepreneurship is also like being a boxer. Even if you're a world-class boxer, you will be punched in the face, you will get bruised, bleed, and have to train your body and mind for countless hours. You need to be mentally and physically tough, and constantly work to keep yourself fit.

What keeps me motivated? The desire for me to help.

I feel I was put on this planet not for myself, but for others. To benefit others as much as I can during my short period here on earth.

And for me, being an entrepreneur is to control my time, attention, and resources— to best use my life to benefit humanity.

This guides my entrepreneurship decisions. This helps me decide what kind of workshops to teach (I wonder to myself, "What kind of workshops will best benefit others?") When I make photography books, I try to create books which I genuinely feel will best help other photographers. I also do the same when writing blog posts, or make videos.

To be an entrepreneur is to be a servant to mankind and humanity. You have to shoulder risk, to help reward others.

But of course, you need to help yourself before you help others. If you're suffering in poverty, how can you really help others?

For me, I seek to be profitable enough that I maintain a basic living. Then once I don't need to stress out about rent, I can focus on delivering free information, content, and resources to help empower others. Or deliver reasonably priced products or workshops to those who are willing to pay.

****Live for others, and you will make a living for yourself.****

Always,
Eric