**Portable Career Panel, 2019 AWAG Leadership Conference**

8 May 2019

**Panelists:**

*Candra Burns:* Communications and Social Media Consultant and founder of Talking Tree.

*Jaime Chapman*: **​**Jaime Chapman is the Founder & CEO of Begin Within, a career consulting firm that launches high-performers and rising stars to their career peak

*Natalie Hayek:* Natalie Hayek is a freelance writer, providing content writing services for nonprofit and education clients, specializing in white papers, blogs, newsletters, and articles; also focuses on military spouse issues.

**Introductions:**   
*Natalie:*

As with many military spouses, I found the path to success is flexibility. I started as a teacher but was stationed in places that didn’t having those opportunities so I began working in other fields. I was a grant writer for a non-profit and started thinking about an approach that would allow a life balance between taking care of my young children and remaining professionally active. I wrote first for myself and as my portfolio grew, I decided to pitch articles to Military Life and eventually was published and received a regular column. From there, my freelance writing has continued to grow.

*Candra*:

I am from a low-income background and was the first in my family to attend higher education. My initial focus was to earn money and I worked hard and pursued every opportunity. What I learned was the need to ASK: to be proactive and ask for opportunities. I have also found volunteering to be a great method to get a foot in the door and prove my value. Finally, I found a niche: my area of interest, Forestry, has few women and I am the only woman doing a podcast for this subject.

Being a military spouse has been a transition. Previously, my focus was on income generation and now I am focused on investing in my business for the future.

*Jamie*:

I grew up in a rural area and got an education in communications. After six years in the military, I got out to get my Master’s and began working with a non-profit that specialized in helping special needs adults get employment. When I married and became a military spouse, I transitioned into career counseling for TAPS, a military program; I was successful and received promotions, but suddenly in 2016 the program was cut and all jobs were cut as well. While they were eventually restored, I felt at that point the need to establish my own path and created a business based on a blog I had started as a hobby. This transitioned to an online career counseling business that is now a team of 5 people and still growing.

**Question:**

How do you turn this into money? How do you determine what to charge? How can you start actually earning income?

**Answer (Jamie**): I charge real money! I provide a real service and charge accordingly. I started at $50/hour and realized I was losing money. I adjusted the pricing structure and started having more confidence in my product. I compare with other firms to see what they charge and solicit feedback from my customers.

**Answer (Candra):** I established an hourly rate, though I am realizing the hourly pricing I began with needs to increase. I also put together package deals.

**Answer (Natalie):** Regarding writing, good resources for understanding the market rate include [AWAI](https://www.awai.com/) (American Writers & Artists Inc) and the annual [Writer’s Market Book](https://www.amazon.com/Writers-Market-2019-Trusted-Published/dp/1440354359). These help establish rates. There are a lot of “content mills” that have lowered the bar for what writers’ should be paid—it is important to make sure you get a payment that makes your time worthwhile. There are freelance websites that allow people to bid based on your resume/experience.

**Question:** Regarding Grant Writing: How can you make that portable? I lost a client when I moved and could no longer be present for meetings .

**Answer (Natalie)**: If you know you have a particular aspect of writing that you want to sell, AWAI is a great place to start. They have particular sections on being a fundraising writer. The Writer’s Market book is published annually and lists publishers, contacts, where to pitch ideas, and divides areas by genre so you can find the niche that fits. It also offers a pricing guide.

**Question:** How to you manage schedules?

**Answer (Candra)**: I researched automation and always leverage as much technology as I can (i.e., scheduling platforms like Hootsuite, Google Drive, One Note). This also helps give me the familiarity to use these with clients as well. However, I still use some old-school approaches, like I do my invoicing through a excel spreadsheet.

**Answer (Natalie)**: I also advise you understand what stage of life you are at. I have little kids and full time for me is not realistic. I only have a few hours a day to spend working right now, and that keeps me engaged and productive and I expect as my kids get older, I will be able to work more.

**Question:** Where do the majority of your referrals come from?

**Answer (Jamie):** Mainly word of mouth—from satisfied customers—and LinkedIn.

**Answer (Natalie)**: Referrals from current customers

**Answer (Candra):** Referrals from current customers.

**Question:** How do you mange referrals? How do you manage your pipeline?

**Answer (Jamie):** I manage this very carefully. I do ongoing communication during the service and ask at the end “How would you describe our service to a friend” to get better feedback. I touch back on a regular schedule to make sure my services aren’t forgotten.

**Answer (Candra):** I keep “bugging” people—ongoing outreach to develop contacts.

**Answer (Natalie):** I follow publications I am interested in and when I see a good fit, I send out queries about how my ideas could suit their needs.

**Question:** What books/resources do you recommend that inspire?

**Answer (Natalie):** The book *Write with Persistence.* I also recommend [Ed Gandiya](https://b2blauncher.com/) podcast on freelancing and Corey Weathers [Lifegiver](https://corieweathers.podbean.com/) podcast and book [*Sacred Spaces.*](https://www.amazon.com/Sacred-Spaces-Journey-Military-Marriage/dp/1934617334)

**Answer (Candra)**: I prefer podcasts and books on Audible. I recommend [*You are a Badass*](https://www.amazon.com/You-Are-Badass%C2%AE-Doubting-Greatness-ebook/dp/B00B3M3VWS). Also Mel Robbins [*5-Second Rule*](https://www.amazon.com/Second-Rule-Transform-Confidence-Everyday-ebook/dp/B01MUSNFOO/ref=sr_1_1?crid=Y4K9RSL2BS0R&keywords=mel+robbins+5+second+rule+book&qid=1557308571&s=digital-text&sprefix=Mel+robbin%2Cdigital-text%2C233&sr=1-1)*.* Books by Gary Vaynerchuk, to include [*Crushing It*](https://www.amazon.com/Crushing-Great-Entrepreneurs-Business-Influence-ebook/dp/B072DV2GHG/ref=sr_1_1?crid=2YO9WQX9DMT7T&keywords=crushing+it+gary+vaynerchuk&qid=1557308624&s=digital-text&sprefix=Crushing+It%2Cdigital-text%2C222&sr=1-1)*.* I recommend resources that promote self-development. I also recommend identifying influences relevant to your business and following them.

**Answer (Jamie)**: [Business Unusual](https://www.podbean.com/podcast-detail/fwigt-6b7e7/Business-Unusual-with-Barbara-Corcoran-Podcast) podcast by Barbara Corcoran. The Nicole Walter’s [podcast](https://www.stitcher.com/podcast/nicole-walters/the-nicole-walters-podcast). [*Thrive*](https://www.amazon.com/Thrive-Redefining-Success-Creating-Well-Being/dp/0804140863)by Ariana Huffington. [*Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*](https://www.amazon.com/Mindset-Psychology-Carol-S-Dweck/dp/0345472322) by Carol Dweck. Resources by [Simon Sinek](https://simonsinek.com/).

**Question:** Lead generation: how do you get work? Is that the priority?

**Answer (Jamie)**: I treat my work as full time. I put in the time and treat my home office like a real business. I work 40+ hours a week on what generates income. It is important to identify what will earn money—social media might not be the best initial focus.

**Question:** Does work come to you or do you seek it?

**Answer (Candra):** I am investing in my building my business now. It involves taking risks and investing for the future. I spend time and invest in clients even when the money might not be there to establish myself in my field.

**Answer (Jamie)**: I used to really hustle to get customers, but as I have established a quality product, it results in referrals and I don’t have to focus on that aspect as much.

**Answer (Natalie):** I always network. Connections are important. I have gotten work from having the most unexpected conversations.

**Question:** Women often undervalue their worth and professional contributions. It is important to be confident and overcome those feelings. Cheryl Sanburg’s “[Sit at the Table](http://www.mmryan.net/archive/idea/ted/sandbergsheryl/transcript.pdf)” talk is a great motivator.

**Question:** How do you manage the irregular schedule of the military member? Unexpected four-day weekends, for example?

**Answer (Natalie):** We try to anticipate and plan to both have those as off days, but I also rely on him for understanding and accommodation when I have a schedule to meet.

**Answer (Jamie)**: I also remind him that instead of watching a move or doing something frivolous at that moment, I am earning $400! Priorities!

**Question:** How do you handle time management? How do you maintain a focus when working in a home office? Do you use the 15-minute increment approach?

**Answer (Candra):** I block out time and schedule exact to-dos very specifically. I have a white board to keep track

**Answer ( Jamie):** I use an egg-time to keep me on track. I have very specific separation of my office and hoe space and keep a strict schedule. It is important for me to mentally separate so I don’t start on a domestic task instead of focusing on work just because it is nearby.

**Answer (Natalie):** I typically create and maintain a strict structure, but I know from experience it can be derailed by things like holidays. This past winter I got off track and it affected my whole attitude—I felt like I just could not get organized and back on top of things so I researched productivity planners and highly recommend the [Full Focus Planner](https://fullfocusplanner.com/?utm_source=direct&utm_medium=url) by Michael Hyatt.

**Wrap up: What is your final piece of advice?**

**Jamie:** Don’t be afraid to take risks and to fail.

**Candra:** ASK!! There is unlimited knowledge and money and opportunity—you need to reach out and ask for it. Volunteer—it leads to referrals and business.

**Natalie:** Immerse yourself in the things you love. Continue to educate yourself in your area.

**Moderator: What are you doing to take care of yourself?**

**Natalie:** I always need to be reading or listening to something that fills my soul—I start the day with something I find spiritual or inspirational, something that provides growth and reflection.

**Candra:** Well I have a large German bathtub… I need time to relax and listen to podcasts, to decompress. I need to allow time for personal space as well.

**Jamie:** I teach “self-care” as an aspect of employment—if you aren’t taking care of yourself, you are not confident. Everyone needs to figure this out. I use my dog as an excuse to get out of the office, get some movement, sun, fresh air.