STEPS TO STARTING A SMALL, PERSONAL SERVICE BUSINESS:

If you want to start a business and you want it to be successful, you'll need to think very carefully about your business idea. Is it a great idea that could turn into a major brand or service or will it fall flat at the start line? The team at MOO.COM have created this interactive flowchart that asks all the right questions to put your business idea to the test and then gives you the resources/tools to get going! The folks at MOO.COM have a very comprehensive site and cover all the angles. Yes, all these questions are overwhelming and personally, I didn't go through all of them; I didn't see the need or benefit and if I did, I'd probably still working my way through the list, but that is up to you. Completely going through this list would obviously be beneficial in certain circumstances, but don't "over-engineer" your business if you don't have to.

MOO.COM's How to evaluate your business idea flowchart[1]

MOO.COM's Startup Business Toolkit[2]

MOO.COM's Business Professional's Guide[3]

Once you've made your decision, below are the steps necessary to get your business up and running. You don't have to do these in order – some can be done concurrently and some are prerequisites for others. **This is for a single-person operation.** If you anticipate having employees, there are numerous other considerations that need to be taken into account, but not addressed here – you should consult your CPA, attorney and or business mentor for further guidance.

1. Develop a list of services you want to offer – you can figure out pricing later.
2. Get the appropriate licenses, certifications, etc.
3. Think of a name for your business.
4. Research the name with the respective business licensing authority in your state to see if it is taken/in use by someone else. Then search for it on Google. In Oklahoma, it's the Oklahoma Secretary of State's office[4] where you register your business.
5. Reserve a web domain with a place like GoDaddy.com, etc.
6. Take a free, 3-hour, new business start-up informational class put on by the Oklahoma Tax Commission or your respective agency (see #7). Just search for "Oklahoma Tax Commission Business Tax Workshops[5]" and the link should be the first or second one returned. You will also need this class especially if you plan to sell products – they will show you how to calculate and submit your sales taxes and how to save money by doing it online. Also, the Community Action Agency of Oklahoma City has an excellent small

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[1] http://us.moo.com/startup-business-toolkit/flowchart/
[2] http://us.moo.com/startup-business-toolkit/
[3] http://us.moo.com/business-professionals/index.html
[4] https://www.sos.ok.gov/%28S%28hfi1b155qdirny45spxepd45%29%29/business/default.aspx
[5] http://www.ok.gov/tax/Businesses/New_Business_Information/New_Business_Workshop/index.html

business start-up training seminar that includes 8 – 10 two- hour sessions held over 4 or 5 weeks and the cost is only $25. Just search for, "Community Action Agency OKC small business training[6]" and the link should be the first or second one returned. If you need more assistance/guidance, consider contacting your local SCORE (Service Corps of Retired Executives)[7] chapter. Finally, don't forget the U.S. Government's Small Business Administration[8] – they also have lots of resources.

7. Decide how you want to structure your business – LLC, Sole Proprietorship, Corporation (subchapter S or C), etc. (see #6) (Note: It is important to form a company for liability and tax advantage reasons and it will give your business legitimacy in the eyes of the public and other businesses. Also, banks will be much more likely to extend you credit and let you open business checking and credit card accounts if you are a legitimate company)
8. Discuss forming your company with an attorney or CPA. They can help you decide on #7.
9. Form your company. You or your attorney or CPA can file the papers with the appropriate state agencies
10. Get an FEIN (Federal Employer Identification Number) from the federal government – you will need this for tax purposes and even if you don't have employees or sell products. They are free and very easy to get – just Google "FEIN."
11. Get a business checking account and business credit card. (This is important for personal liability reasons and accurate records-keeping for the IRS. Also, you never want to commingle personal and business funds or assets, especially when dealing with real estate concerns.)
12. Get insurance. (Check with others in your industry to find out how much general business liability insurance will cost; it may be more than you want to spend or are initially able to spend and need to take it into consideration. Obtaining insurance may be one of your biggest obstacles depending upon your business model, i.e., what kind of services you want to offer. Generally, your auto and home insurer will not offer this kind of insurance and you will have to find an independent agency. Many told me "no" only because they were simply too lazy to custom-craft a policy for me. But, I finally found an agent and agency who said, "no problem." If you run into this problem, contact Mr. Jay D. Jones with Glenn Harris and Associates Insurance at 405-842-5385 or jjones@ghainsurance.com and tell him I referred you.)
13. Get printed promotional materials – business cards, brochures, note pads, etc. – I use www.Vistaprint.com. Also market your business via Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, and other social media and send out **brief** informational messages at least weekly to everyone on your contact list. Use a service like Constant Contact or Mail Chimp.
14. Give back to your community - get involved with a charity that provides services to the demographic you are serving, but **only** if you have a true passion for it – DO NOT use it as an avenue to drum up business; you can tell people what you do, of course, but give them business cards ONLY if they ask for them. If they want to talk to you about rates and service fees, be polite and tell them you'd be happy to visit with them later after you depart the charity event, center, etc. This is a good way to make friends and contacts – especially

[6] http://caaofokc.org/community_services_headstart/economic-dev#smallbiztraining
[7] https://www.score.org
[8] https://www.sba.gov/

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contacts you will need to call upon or refer people to in your respective line of work you specialize in.

15. Consider trade marking your business name and or logo. Just search the Internet for government websites that help you with this and you may have to contact an attorney for assistance. It is very important that you do this and probably early on in the establishment of your business and definitely before ordering any promotional material.

Note: As an independent contractor, you are exempt from carrying workers compensation insurance, in most cases. If you are in Oklahoma, to get a copy of the waiver, just Google, "Affidavit of Exempt Status Under the Workers' Compensation Act." It should be similarly titled in other states – be sure to check local laws and ask your insurance agent.

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