

# Building a Real Business: A Field Guide for Veteran Founders

## 1. From mission to market

- Write one sentence: who you serve, the problem you solve, and why you are the one to solve it.
- Your service taught you planning, discipline and leading under pressure. Point those skills at a customer's problem, not at your own idea.
- Talk to 20 people who have the problem before you build anything. Listen more than you pitch.

## 2. Pick one offer

- Start with a single product or service you can deliver well this month.
- Describe the result the customer gets, not the features.
- Say no to side projects until the first offer pays its own way.

## 3. Your first 10 customers

- Start with people who already know you: former teammates, your local network, veteran groups and alumni circles.
- Ask for a direct conversation, not a like. Follow up within 48 hours.
- Collect a short testimonial and one lesson from every early customer.

## 4. Price with confidence

- Add up your real costs, including your time, before setting a price.
- Price on the value of the result. Discounting to win work trains customers to wait for discounts.
- Review prices every quarter as your proof and demand grow.

## 5. Money and taxes basics

- Open a separate business bank account on day one.
- Track every dollar in and out weekly. A simple spreadsheet beats a perfect system you never open.
- Set money aside for taxes from every payment, and talk to a licensed tax professional early.

## 6. Legal setup

- Choose a business structure (sole proprietor, LLC or corporation) with advice from an attorney or accountant.
- Get your EIN, required local licenses, and a written agreement for every client engagement.
- Protect your name and brand before you spend money promoting it.

## **7. Veteran resources worth using**

- SBA Veterans Business Outreach Centers (VBOC) offer free training and counseling.
- The IVMF at Syracuse University runs entrepreneurship programs for veterans and military families.
- Look into veteran-owned small business certification for government and corporate contracting.
- Your local SCORE chapter and Small Business Development Center offer free mentors.

## **8. Your 90-day plan**

- Days 1-30: interview customers, set up the legal and money basics, define one offer.
- Days 31-60: make your first sales, deliver well, gather testimonials.
- Days 61-90: fix what customers told you, set prices for the next quarter, and plan one repeatable way to find customers.
- Run it like an operation: set objectives, review weekly, adjust fast.

*General guidance only, not legal, tax or financial advice.*