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If you don't go after what you want, you'll never have it. If you don't ask, the answer is always no. If you don't step forward, you're always in the same place.

---Nora Roberts

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Tips for Women Entrepreneurs

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Tips for Women Entrepreneurs



According to the National Women's Business Council, nearly 8 million women-owned businesses exist in the United States. Women-owned firms comprise 28.7% of all nonfarm businesses and

generate more than \$1.2 trillion in revenue. Interestingly, 88.3% of women-owned businesses have no employees, indicating that many women strike out on their own, perhaps to better balance work and family.¹ If you're considering the launch of a new venture (or know someone who is), the following information may be helpful.

Facing unique challenges

Although there are no gender differences in the steps involved in starting a business, women may indeed face unique challenges when it comes to implementing those steps.

According to a Babson College study, women entrepreneurs tend to have less confidence than their male peers. Among those who have identified new business opportunities, 34% of women admit to a fear of failure, compared with 29% of men, and less than half of women believe they have the capabilities to start a business, compared with 63% of men.²

Women may also face challenges in securing venture capital (VC) funding. In a different study, Babson researchers found that 85% of all VC-funded companies have no women on the executive team, and only 2.7% of VC-funded companies are led by a woman CEO. However, VC firms with women partners were more than twice as likely to invest in firms with women on the executive team and more than three times as likely to fund a company with a woman at the helm.³

Overcoming the obstacles

So what should a woman with a great business idea do?

First and most important, define what success

means to you. Do you want a thriving operation with dozens of employees, or are you looking for self-employment to bring in additional income while allowing more time for family needs? Or maybe it's something in between? Be sure you have a clear vision of your dream before you launch.

Understand that preparation and knowledge are keys to building confidence. Develop a written business plan that describes your business's products and/or services, target market, marketing and sales strategy, opportunities and challenges, competition and how you will address it, and other key success factors. This document and the hard work involved in preparing it will be especially important if you plan to seek financing from lenders, angel investors, VC firms, or other outside sources. The required research will help prepare you to answer the tough questions from potential financiers.

Know that successful entrepreneurs are typically willing to take calculated risks. Don't let fear drive your decision making. Once again, preparation is important, but don't let your analysis end up in paralysis.

Be sure you have enough funds set aside to survive the start-up phase, which can last as little as a few weeks or as long as several years, depending on your business. Having enough money to live on during this period may further bolster your confidence, reduce fear of failure, and support wise risk taking.

Finally, take heart in knowing help is available. The [Small Business Administration](#), [Women's Business Centers](#), and Community Development Financial Institutions ([CDFIs](#)) across the country provide resources and information especially for women business owners.

¹ National Women's Business Council [fact sheet](#), June 2015

² Babson College, *Global Entrepreneurship Monitor, 2013 United States Report*

³ Babson College, *Women Entrepreneurs 2014: Bridging the Gender Gap in Venture Capital*



Taxes, Retirement, and Timing Social Security



**This hypothetical example is for illustrative purposes only, and its results are not representative of any specific investment or mix of investments. Actual rates of return and results will vary. The example assumes that earnings are taxed as ordinary income and does not reflect possible lower maximum tax rates on capital gains and dividends, as well as the tax treatment of investment losses, which would make the return more favorable. Investment fees and expenses have not been deducted. If they had been, the results would have been lower. You should consider your personal investment horizon and income tax brackets, both current and anticipated, when making an investment decision as these may further impact the results of the comparison. Investments offering the potential for higher rates of return also involve a higher degree of risk to principal.*

The advantages of tax deferral are often emphasized when it comes to saving for retirement. So it might seem like a good idea to hold off on taking taxable distributions from retirement plans for as long as possible. (Note: Required minimum distributions from non-Roth IRAs and qualified retirement plans must generally start at age 70½.) But sometimes it may make more sense to take taxable distributions from retirement plans in the early years of retirement while deferring the start of Social Security retirement benefits.

Some basics

Up to 50% of your Social Security benefits are taxable if your modified adjusted gross income (MAGI) plus one-half of your Social Security benefits falls within the following ranges: \$32,000 to \$44,000 for married filing jointly; and \$25,000 to \$34,000 for single, head of household, or married filing separately (if you've lived apart all year). Up to 85% of your Social Security benefits are taxable if your MAGI plus one-half of your Social Security benefits exceeds those ranges or if you are married filing separately and lived with your spouse at any time during the year. For this purpose, MAGI means adjusted gross income increased by certain items, such as tax-exempt interest, that are otherwise excluded or deducted from your income for regular income tax purposes.

Social Security retirement benefits are reduced if started prior to your full retirement age (FRA) and increased if started after your FRA (up to age 70). FRA ranges from 66 to 67, depending on your year of birth.

Distributions from non-Roth IRAs and qualified retirement plans are generally fully taxable unless nondeductible contributions have been made.

Accelerate income, defer Social Security

It can sometimes make sense to delay the start of Social Security benefits to a later age (up to age 70) and take taxable withdrawals from retirement accounts in the early years of retirement to make up for the delayed Social Security benefits.

If you delay the start of Social Security benefits, your monthly benefits will be higher. And because you've taken taxable distributions from your retirement plans in the early years of retirement, it's possible that your required minimum distributions will be smaller in the later years of retirement when you're also receiving more income from Social Security. And smaller

taxable withdrawals will result in a lower MAGI, which could mean the amount of Social Security benefits subject to federal income tax is reduced.

Whether this strategy works to your advantage depends on a number of factors, including your income level, the size of the taxable withdrawals from your retirement savings plans, and how many years you ultimately receive Social Security retirement benefits.

Example

Mary, a single individual, wants to retire at age 62. She can receive Social Security retirement benefits of \$18,000 per year starting at age 62 or \$31,680 per year starting at age 70 (before cost-of-living adjustments). She has traditional IRA assets of \$300,000 that will be fully taxable when distributed. She has other income that is taxable (disregarding Social Security benefits and the IRA) of \$27,000 per year. Assume she can earn a 6% annual rate of return on her investments (compounded monthly) and that Social Security benefits receive annual 2.4% cost-of-living increases. Assume tax is calculated using the 2015 tax rates and brackets, personal exemption, and standard deduction.

Option 1. One option is for Mary to start taking Social Security benefits of \$18,000 per year at age 62 and take monthly distributions from the IRA that total about \$21,852 annually.

Option 2. Alternatively, Mary could delay Social Security benefits to age 70, when her benefits would start at \$38,299 per year after cost-of-living increases. To make up for the Social Security benefits she's not receiving from ages 62 to 69, during each of those years she withdraws about \$40,769 to \$44,094 from the traditional IRA--an amount approximately equal to the lost Social Security benefits plus the amount that would have been withdrawn from the traditional IRA under the age 62 scenario (plus a little extra to make the after-tax incomes under the two scenarios closer for those years). When Social Security retirement benefits start at age 70, she reduces monthly distributions from the IRA to about \$4,348 annually.

Mary's after-tax income in each scenario is approximately the same during the first 8 years. Starting at age 70, however, Mary's after-tax income is higher in the second scenario, and the total cumulative benefit increases significantly with the total number of years Social Security benefits are received.*



Six Life Insurance Beneficiary Mistakes to Avoid



Note: As with most financial decisions, there are expenses associated with the purchase of life insurance. Policies commonly have mortality and expense charges. In addition, if a policy is surrendered prematurely, there may be surrender charges and income tax implications.



Note: While trusts offer numerous advantages, they incur up-front costs and often have ongoing administrative fees. The use of trusts involves a complex web of tax rules and regulations. You should consider the counsel of an experienced estate planning professional and your legal and tax advisors before implementing such strategies.

Life insurance has long been recognized as a useful way to provide for your heirs and loved ones when you die. Naming your policy's beneficiaries should be a relatively simple task. However, there are a number of situations that can easily lead to unintended and adverse consequences. Here are six life insurance beneficiary traps you may want to avoid.

Not naming a beneficiary

The most obvious mistake you can make is failing to name a beneficiary of your life insurance policy. But simply naming your spouse or child as beneficiary may not suffice. It is conceivable that you and your spouse could die together, or that your named beneficiary may die before you. If the beneficiaries you designated are not living at your death, the insurance company may pay the death proceeds to your estate, which can lead to other potential problems.

Death benefit paid to your estate

If your life insurance is paid to your estate, several undesired issues may arise. First, the insurance proceeds likely become subject to probate, which may delay the payment to your heirs. Second, life insurance that is part of your probate estate is subject to claims of your probate creditors. Not only might your heirs have to wait to receive their share of the insurance, but your creditors may satisfy their claims out of those proceeds first.

Naming primary, secondary, and final beneficiaries may avoid having the proceeds ultimately paid to your estate. If the primary beneficiary dies before you do, then the secondary or alternate beneficiaries receive the proceeds. And if the secondary beneficiaries are unavailable to receive the death benefit, you can name a final beneficiary, such as a charity, to receive the insurance proceeds.

Naming a minor child as beneficiary

Unintended consequences may arise if your named beneficiary is a minor. Insurance companies will rarely pay life insurance proceeds directly to a minor. Typically, the court appoints a guardian--a potentially costly and time-consuming process--to handle the proceeds until the minor beneficiary reaches the age of majority according to state law.

If you want the life insurance proceeds to be paid for the benefit of a minor, you may consider creating a trust that names the minor as beneficiary. Then the trust manages and pays the proceeds from the insurance according to the terms and conditions you set out in the trust document. Consult with an estate attorney to decide on the course that

works best for your situation.

Per stirpes or per capita

It's not uncommon to name multiple beneficiaries to share in the life insurance proceeds. But what happens if one of the beneficiaries dies before you do? Do you want the share of the deceased beneficiary to be added to the shares of the surviving beneficiaries, or do you want the share to pass to the deceased beneficiary's children? That's the difference between per stirpes and per capita.

You don't have to use the legal terms in directing what is to happen if a beneficiary dies before you do, but it's important to indicate on the insurance beneficiary designation form how you want the share to pass if a beneficiary predeceases you. Per stirpes (*by branch*) means the share of a deceased beneficiary passes to the next generation in line. Per capita (*by head*) provides that the share of the deceased beneficiary is added to the shares of the surviving beneficiaries so that each receives an equal share.

Disqualifying the beneficiary from government assistance

A beneficiary you name to receive your life insurance may be receiving or is eligible to receive government assistance due to a disability or other special circumstance. Eligibility for government benefits is often tied to the financial circumstances of the recipient. The payment of insurance proceeds may be a financial windfall that disqualifies your beneficiary from eligibility for government benefits, or the proceeds may have to be paid to the government entity as reimbursement for benefits paid. Again, an estate attorney can help you address this issue.

Taxes

Generally, life insurance death proceeds are not taxed when they're paid. However, there are exceptions to this rule, and the most common situation involves having three different people as policy owner, insured, and beneficiary. Typically, the policy owner and the insured are one in the same person. But sometimes the owner is not the insured or the beneficiary. For example, mom may be the policy owner on the life of dad for the benefit of their children. In this situation, mom is effectively creating a gift of the insurance proceeds to her children/beneficiaries. As the donor, mom may be subject to gift tax. Consult a financial or tax professional to figure out the best way to structure the policy.



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I've recently changed my legal name. Do I need to change my name on my Social Security card?

Whenever an individual legally changes his or her name, it is important to contact the Social Security Administration (SSA)

as soon as possible. Failure to notify the SSA of a name change could prevent your wages from being posted correctly to your Social Security earnings record and might even result in a delay when you file your taxes.

To obtain a new card with your new name, you need to provide the SSA with a recently issued document that proves your identity and legal name change. Acceptable documents include:

- Marriage certificate
- Divorce decree
- Certificate of Naturalization showing new name
- Court order for approving the name change

If the document you provide doesn't offer enough information for the SSA to identify you in their records, you must also provide an identity document in your old name (expired documents with your old name are allowed).

In addition, if you were born outside the United States or you aren't a U.S. citizen, you typically must provide documentation to prove U.S. citizenship or lawful noncitizen status.

Once you have gathered the appropriate documentation, you need to complete the SSA Application for a Social Security Card. However, Social Security card applications are not accepted on the SSA website. As a result, you need to take or mail your application, along with your supporting documents, to your local Social Security office.

For more information on applying for a new Social Security card or finding a Social Security office in your area, visit the Social Security Administration website at www.ssa.gov.



How can I protect my Social Security number from identity theft?

Your Social Security number is one of your most important personal identifiers. If identity thieves obtain your Social

Security number, they can access your bank account, file false tax returns, and wreak havoc on your credit report. Here are some steps you can take to help safeguard your number.

Never carry your card with you. You should never carry your Social Security card with you unless it's absolutely necessary. The same goes for other forms of identification that may display your Social Security number (e.g., Medicare card)

Do not give out your number over the phone or via email/Internet. Oftentimes, identity thieves will pose as legitimate government organizations or financial institutions and contact you to request personal information, including your Social Security number. Avoid giving out your Social Security number to anyone over the phone or via email/Internet unless you initiate the contact with an organization or institution that you trust.

Be careful about sharing your number. Just because someone asks for your Social Security

number doesn't mean you have to share it. Always ask why it is needed, how it will be used, and what the consequences will be if you refuse to provide it.

If you think someone has misused your Social Security number, contact the Social Security Administration (SSA) immediately to report the problem. The SSA can review your earnings record with you to make sure their records are correct. You can also visit the SSA website at www.ssa.gov to check your earnings record online.

Unfortunately, the SSA cannot directly resolve any identity theft problems created by the misuse of your Social Security number. If you discover that someone is illegally using your number, be sure to contact the appropriate law-enforcement authorities. In addition, consider filing a complaint with the Federal Trade Commission and submitting IRS Form 14039, Identity Theft Affidavit, with the Internal Revenue Service. Visit www.ftc.gov and www.irs.gov for more information.

