

Emma Bates
KidsCashAndChaos.com

Emma Bates has been juggling kids, cash, and chaos for years now. She runs a successful blog by that name, works as a virtual assistant, and coaches moms who wish to become business owners while staying home with their kids. Her website is a treasure trove of truly valuable resources from discovering your passion to creating a simple business plan, from technology tips to legal protection considerations.

Caitlin: Well, hey, everybody! Welcome back to the Work-At-Home Summit. I'm here with Emma Bates. She's a blogger and small business coach who loves to help moms become mompreneurs. She lives in New Hampshire with her husband, three kids, and a betta fish named Pomato Dragon?

Emma: Yep.

Caitlin: Yeah. When she's not working on Kids, Cash, and Chaos, which is her blog, you can find her still trying to figure out Pinterest. Awesome. So welcome, Emma. Glad to have you with us today.

Emma: Thank you. I'm really excited to be here.

Caitlin: Yeah. Well, before we dive into how to set up the all-important business plan which is your area of expertise – I'm really excited to get into that with you – I want to know a little bit about yourself and how Kids, Cash, and Chaos started. Where were you before all that happened, and then how did you get started?

Emma: About six years ago when I had had my second child, I started kind of randomly baking for my local farmers' market, and my granola really took off. People would call me ahead of time and be like, "You need to save me some." Eventually, that business grew so big I had to rent commercial kitchen space, and I was selling wholesale, and it became this pretty big business. But it took up all my time, and with two kids, I was out of the house too much. So I ended up selling that business a few years ago and decided I would take my knowledge that I'd gained in running a small business and hiring employees and all of that stuff, and I would start a blog. So that's how I got to the point of starting Kids, Cash, and Chaos.

Caitlin: Cool. So tell us a little bit about that blog. Who's your ideal audience? Obviously, moms, and you're working to help them to mompreneurs, but what kind of people read your blog?

Emma: A lot of different people. People who are sort of interested in starting a business, and people who are small business owners. A lot of moms need to make some money while they're staying home with their kids. So I have everything from people who make products, soap, or a food product, to people who are virtual assistants. It kind of runs a wide gamut, but everybody who's interested in business, running a business, and how to market their business and brand their business.

Caitlin: Got it. And you've had some great success with your business. It's really cool how you sold your physical business, and now you have an online business. And I know that you attribute a lot of your success staying organized and keeping your business successful to the use of a business plan, so that's what we're going to be talking about today. Tell us first what exactly a business plan is.

Emma: Well, most people, I think, when they talk about a business plan are thinking this big, huge document that's 50 pages long and includes charts and graphs and all of this stuff. But I've actually found that it's much easier to think about a business plan, when you have a small business, as sort of setting the goals for your business. It's a way to think about the future of your business, where you want to go, and it's also a way to really think about who your customer is and how your product is going to help them. I mean, I've also started a couple of other businesses and every time I do, I sit down and I fill this out. I really think about where am I trying to get to because, I think, with a small business, you have to know how to pivot, and you have to know what needs to change. And when you're just starting out, you're kind of going with the flow, and what happens in the beginning is not always where you end up in the end.

Caitlin: Yeah. Do you think a business plan is necessary for every type of business? And I'm in my home office right now. I can hear my husband using the blow dryer. We won't go into what he's using it for. But I always like to say, if you hear a weird noise in the background, it's because I don't just work at home, I home at work. We just kind of have to do that sometimes. So that's what you hear right now is a blow dryer in the bathroom next door. So with every business, do we all need a business plan? Should we all have one?

Emma: I think everybody should sit down at the start of their business and at least yearly after that, if not every six months, and think about the future of their business. I don't think that most small businesses starting out need to do the huge business plan. I think that's great when you get to the point of needing to borrow money or find investors, that when you need to prove your financials, then it's very important. But in the beginning, it's more about you and what you want and what you can get out of your business. So I think the one-page business plan is perfect for that because if you take the time, it really makes you think about where you're going.

Caitlin: Yeah. You mentioned investors and physical products and inventory and stuff like that, and there's somebody at home thinking right now, "Well, there's no way I'm ever going to get an investor. I don't have any capital to get started. How am I ever going to get found?" You and I

both know that you do not need inventory to start a business. So this business plan thing is relevant to an online business – service providers, which is what we focus on here at Work-At-Home School, developing skills that you can use to help others make more money, help others solve problems which is usually related to making more money, just helping people's lives be easier using your own skills. So that's what we're focusing on at Work-At-Home School. It doesn't mean you can't have a physical product business. We're highlighting several – several contributors within Work-At-Home School have or have had in the past physical product businesses. It's absolutely a way that you can work at home. It's just a little bit more complicated, but the point here is that a one-page business plan can work for everybody.

So you recommend doing that, and when you first get started, just sit down and just kind of plan it out. It's not like a 50-page thing. It's just answering a series of questions to get you focused on what it is you're doing, whom you're going to serve, and your basic plan for getting there. It is something that you can tweak, especially in the beginning. I mean, you said six months to a year. I think that's brilliant, just so you can realize how you've changed, how your focus has changed because you don't always think about that. Change, I think, is the only constant, and sometimes it's going to take six months to a year before you realize what has changed, how your focus has changed.

I know when I first started Proofread Anywhere – and bloggers are the same. We're business owners. I thought my target market were people that were already proofreading, and I wanted to help them earn more money as proofreaders. And that, in some cases, is still part of my market, but largely my market has become moms, millennials, and retirees who want to supplement their income. So I just didn't start out – maybe I put on my business plan originally who my target market was, but in due time, very soon time, it evolved. So that is really smart, and you can just keep it in a binder. You have your business plan. You put the date on there, and then the next page will be the next time, and you can just have that. It's almost like you're scrapbooking, and it's just a one-page journal every three to six months when you're first starting. It's really cool to look back on how you've changed and what your goals are especially as your mindset shifts as you grow your business and see results.

Emma: Yeah. I think that as business owners, you're constantly learning, and you never feel like you get anywhere until you go back and look and say, "This is where I was. Oh my God, I have come so far." I think it really helps you to keep a positive attitude because it's so easy to get burned out if you feel like you never get anywhere.

Caitlin: Yeah, yeah. We talked about the 50-page long plans. Do you think that at some point those are valuable? And, if so, how do you know when that's necessary?

Emma: I think, most of the time, you don't need to do it unless you are doing something that needs financial backing whether it's a loan to expand your business, or it's getting investors. I think it's important at that point, but I think most small business owners, if you're working from

home, you're probably not going in that direction. You're probably trying to create a business that'll support you, so you're not going to be taking out a loan on it.

Caitlin: Right. Exactly. So, yeah, just kind of rolling with the punches is not feeling like you've got to go big immediately. I know that if I woke up in November of 2014 – and that's when I started Proofread Anywhere – if I had said, "Hey, I'm going to be a media company owner, and I'm going to start Work-At-Home School," I would have just been so overwhelmed and stuff. So that's a big mistake people make is they look at somebody who's three, six, ten years into their business and they're like, "I'm never going to get there," so they never start. And that leads me to – yeah, yeah, so if you've seen that too, what other mistakes have you seen?

Emma: Yeah, especially with moms.

Caitlin: And, yes, especially with moms. So why do you think that is? Why do you think that is that moms have that tendency?

Emma: I mean, I think moms are pulled in so many different directions trying to keep everybody in their family on the same page. I have three kids and it's just never-ending. There's always a million things to do. I think a lot of moms get discouraged thinking that they can't fit it in their lives, thinking that if they're going to start a business, it has to be this big, huge thing. I've done lots of work as a VA, and that's such an easy business to start. I mean, if you have the skills already, it's just marketing yourself to find clients. If you don't have the skills, it's buying a course and then marketing yourself. There's no start-up cost. I think a lot of people think you have to have \$1,000 and all this time, and I tell people all the time – I say, "You don't. You can start this today if you really want to."

Caitlin: Yeah. My advice is always just go on your personal Facebook and get some feelers out there. Be like, "Hey, I'm looking for one new client. I'm starting to offer services helping people answer email," getting specific and just making a small, specific ask. If you get on there and say, "Hey, how can I help you?" – they're not going to know what to even say. You can get specific and ask them what they're struggling with. That's something I recommend, too, is just getting out there and be like, "Hey, what's the biggest annoyance in your life right now?" and just kind of getting some feelers out. You can make it specific to business. You can make it specific to life.

I even recommend for people who – like, "I have no business skills." Well, you can still work locally or work at home by offering personal assistant skills, being somebody that helps people with their laundry. That's not exactly working at home, but you're working in a home. It's very flexible. You can do something that you're doing in everyday life, helping people with their kids. It's also not being picky too, because there are some people who come to me and they're desperate, and they self-describe themselves, like, "I'm desperate for money. I need to make money. How can I make money without getting a real job or a desk job? I just don't have the time to dedicate to that." And I recommend starting out as a personal assistant to somebody,

helping file paperwork and scan paperwork, scan photos, organize photos, do scrapbooking, just things that busy moms just don't have time to do. You don't get to ask for a lot of money because it's not a lot of skills involved, but it's something. So just not being picky with needing the money to start, and then you can use that money to reinvest in a course that you want to take to build your business skills. So let's talk about you and how you got into doing virtual assistant services. How did you find that first client? What services did you offer?

Emma: Yeah. I mean, very similar to what you just said. I found my first client from my personal Facebook page. I threw up a little website on Weebly, and I posted the link and said, "I'm starting to offer services." I think I said, "I can do websites and social media and newsletters," and my husband's uncle was like, "Oh, I need some help with my website." And there you go. That was my first client.

Caitlin: Yeah. See how simple it is, you guys?

Emma: Yeah, it is. It really is. It's not this huge, scary thing. It's totally doable and, I mean, anybody can do it. So, yeah, that's how I got started. I still offer some services between my own blogging stuff. People I've had for a while and people I've known. I don't usually go out and look for clients hardcore anymore. It's smaller.

Caitlin: Yeah. At some point, you don't have to because you make a name for yourself and people just kind of find you, or you can get your blog going and it's kind of generating revenue. So let's talk about that a little bit. What's your main income stream right now?

Emma: The blogging probably just passed the VA stuff now, but they both are my main sources at this point.

Caitlin: Cool, cool. And which do you like better? Do you like blogging or providing the services or do you like doing both?

Emma: I like blogging. I like doing my own thing. I like not having a boss.

Caitlin: Yeah. Yeah, for sure. For sure. So what does your business plan look like, then?

Emma: That's a really good question. I probably need to revisit it again, things constantly change. I've made some courses to go along with my blog, but they haven't done what I was expecting, so I'm sort of in a little bit of a lull right now. I'm taking a little break over Christmas because my kids are going to be home, and it's going to be crazy anyway. I think January 1st, I'll probably pull out my business plan and take a look and make some decisions about what next year should bring.

Caitlin: Yeah. I think it's a good time of year, and for those of you tuning in, we're recording this in early December, so we're talking about taking a break. And it's a really good time to take a break. I'm really busy in the first half of December, but then I'm planning in some rest and relaxation time because things are going to get crazy in the new year because that's when we're opening Work-At-Home School. That's when the Work-At-Home Summit is happening. So it's a perfect time to invest in yourself in terms of taking a break during December as the year kind of comes to a close, and then you amp things up again when you have all this energy and resolve to make 2018 or your new year a success.

So, Emma, can you tell me what – we talked a little bit about mistakes people make with their business plans, but can you think of any other specific mistakes that you see new mompreneurs or other entrepreneurs, new business owners, new VAs making when they first start with their business besides maybe not having a business plan?

Emma: Yeah. I can think of two major ones that I seem to see over and over again, one of which is not having your perfect customer defined. Whether you want to call it your avatar or your customer or your client, I think people either stay too general, or they're kind of thinking the wrong way about it. I'll see people with products. They market a product that's for children, and that's who they put as their customer, but that's not who's buying your product. The mom or the grandmother is buying the product, so you have to think about appealing to the person who's going to use the item as well as the person who's going to buy the item. Then I'd say the other big thing that I see most often is people thinking more about what they want out of the business rather than what they can give people out of the business.

Caitlin: Mmm, you are preaching to the choir, sister. Man. I call that flipping the switch, right? We think when we go into business that our number one goal is to make money and to solve our own problems, but the reality is when we focus on other people and solving their problems, our problems just go away naturally. And by problems, I mean financial problems. So if we want to make money, we can help other people make more money by helping alleviate problems in their business. You solve actual problems for other people, then you make money. You provide value. You make money. That's all there is to it, and it's a relationship thing. People forget that all the time. It's transactional.

You can't just show up and be like, "Hey, how can I help you?" – and expect them to do the work of telling you what they need and holding your hand and stuff. You've got to be confident, and in order to be confident, you've got to have skills. In order to have skills, you've got to sit down and learn skills and be willing to invest in yourself. I think that's a big mistake people make too, that they're like, "Oh, well, I'm stuck with what I've got." There's this fixed mentality versus the growth mentality. Thinking, "Oh, you know, I went to school in 1990, and I have a computer science degree that is completely obsolete. I guess I'm screwed." No, you're not. And part of it is just this – in our day and age, there's so much that exists online, and Work-At-Home School is attempting to change that, showing people that, hey, there's a whole world that exists out

there that you can get for a fraction of the cost of going back to school for a new degree in computer science. You can learn coding online, and we've got coding included in Work-At-Home School. I mean, it's just crazy. There's a whole new world that we just – so many of us don't know that it exists, so we get ourselves into debt going back to school thinking that we have no other options, and we just do. So that's a really big mistake.

Emma, can you tell me, if somebody is sitting at home shaking in their boots and they're listening to you and you're talking about how simple it is – you have a one-page business plan – how simple it is to get that first client by just offering services, but they're still scared to get started, what would you tell those people?

Emma: Don't be afraid of failure. I mean, I've failed plenty of times, and I think it's probably one of the best learning experiences. I tried to start an online store at one point, and then you get into it and you're like, "I can't compete with Amazon because they offer free shipping on everything, and I can't do that and make money." So it was a great learning experience, and that was the way I learned WordPress. And if I didn't learn WordPress then, I would never have started a blog a couple of years later. So, I think, don't be afraid of failure because you're going to fail at some point as long as you're trying, and that's the most important thing is to get out there and try. You might not figure it out perfectly the first time, but you can just try again.

Caitlin: Yeah. And what you just said, looking at failure as a learning experience, and then let's relook at the definition of failure. Is failure a real thing if you've gained something out of it? I tend to look at failure as stepping stones. I actually started an online store, too, a few years back. A lot of people were like, "I want Proofread Anywhere t-shirts. I want this." And we worked on designs together and stuff, and I ended up selling like three t-shirts, and I had the store open for probably six or seven months before I finally closed it. I lost money on the project, lost a lot of time on the project, but it just ended up being something I didn't want to do. But I learned how to use Shopify. I learned how to set up an entire online store. I know how it all works now, and I don't look at that as a failure. I look at that as a learning experience. I sometimes just say, "There's no such thing as failure. There's only learning."

So it's all that mindset thing again of if the reason that you're not starting is failure, and you haven't failed yet, and you can only fail if you give up. I think that's really the only way to fail is if you give up. You pivot, right? So you do something, not the right fit. Maybe it didn't work out, or it wasn't something that you really enjoyed. I've spent \$7,000 – that's no secret – \$7,000 on personal training school. I did it for three years, and then I'm like, "Eh, don't like this." I knew that I didn't like it a lot sooner than three years in, but I was doing it just because I could. I didn't hate it, but it was not something that I was put on earth to do. I'll put it that way. But I don't look at that as a failure at all because it got me to where I am now.

And I think that a big mistake I see people make is they wait until they figure out what they're passionate about before they get started. So they're waiting and waiting and waiting for this

passion bus to come along, and they're sitting at the bus stop, and they just see things come and go. People moving, they're on buses, and they might not be on the right bus, but they're going somewhere whereas we're just sitting here waiting for this bus that may or may not come, and we're going nowhere. Where we could just get on the next bus and go. See where it takes us, and we're going somewhere. And they're waiting for this passion, and they're waiting for this momentum –

Emma: And you're learning along the way.

Caitlin: Yeah. They're learning. And they can just get off at the next stop, wait for the next bus, and they're going someplace. We expect to have momentum. We expect to have traction. We expect to have motivation, all this stuff, before we start moving. But by definition, to have motivation, traction, momentum, you have to actually go somewhere. So if you're sitting at a bus stop waiting for that bus to come, you're not going to go anywhere. You've got to be willing to take what you might perceive as a risk. You have to be willing to risk failure. But sometimes thinking about like, "Okay, what's the worst that could happen is I learned something," and that's not that bad, right? So if you think about it in that way, it becomes a lot less scary to start your business.

Well, I want to say thank you so much, Emma, for just being here today and breaking down the simplicity of what business is. I think that's really valuable. And we're listening to this early on in the Summit, and I think that just changing perspective of thinking about – just thinking about what business is, it's not starting this – you need multiple investors. You have to have this 50-page business plan. You just don't need that, and you've made it not sound intimidating at all, and I'm hoping that it has motivated people at home watching this. It's just so important to get started on the outlook, to have goals, and that's exactly what a business plan will help you to do is to keep you on track and headed in the right direction.

So for those of you watching from home right now, listening to this conversation, Emma is offering that business template we talked about, that seven questions that will help you write your first business plan. She has a one-page template you can print out. And that's the thing that you're going to want to save to your computer and as you start your business, whether it's through Work-At-Home School or not, you're going to have that one-page, seven-question business template. You can print out multiple copies, put it in your calendar, get out your phone, put it in three months from today that you're going to print out another one and go through it again, three, six months, a year.

And if you love that freebie, you'll be excited to learn that Emma is also an instructor here with us at Work-At-Home School. As an instructor, she's offering not just the free template that we just talked about, she's also got the *Small Business Quick Start Workbook*, and that's inside the Curious-level Curriculum Package. That workbook will walk you through all the steps needed to start a business including a handy checklist and information on how to complete each step.

Users of the workbook will learn how to legally set up their business, create a brand, and more details on how to write the one-page business plan. You'll get Emma's workbook and other essential resources to start living your dream today. Again, that's in the Curious-level Curriculum Package. It's the lowest level available in Work-At-Home School. It's totally a no-brainer, folks. The links are below this video. We hope to see you inside. Thanks again for being here today, Emma.

Emma: Thank you.