



CLARITY

What Business
Are You In?

Sharon A. Gill

What Business Are You In?

Introduction

I know this may sound weird, but I was born to coach. From the time I was a child, people naturally sought advice from me—or maybe I was only too willing to give it! Either way, I got into the coaching business long before it was fashionable.

Whether it was a girlfriend who had boy issues, or my dad, who got me into the real estate rental business at a young age (I mean like 12 years old—seriously), I’ve been in the problem-solving business for a long time.

This intensified as I grew up, got married, had children, got my education, and started multiple businesses. In my life, I’ve owned or co-founded an import-export company, a beauty business (yes, I am a “Beauty-School Dropout”), an international magazine, a commercial law firm, a nonprofit agency, a real estate investment company, a church and several iterations of my online businesses.

I’ve been busy!

But in all seriousness, this richness of experience has allowed me to meet, mentor, coach, and grow with some of the most incredible women on the planet. The only thing that surpasses my love for my family and my God are the wonderful women I’m so honored to call my clients and friends.

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I beam with pride every time I see one of you stepping up, facing your fears, getting the clarity you need, and taking flight! In that moment, I know that's why God placed me here on Earth.

At the same time, I've also seen so many of you who feel stuck! You've got a dream business in mind, or maybe you've even started, but things have come to a halt because you're unclear about your vision, your mission, your purpose or how to pull it off. You feel confused and overwhelmed by the sheer number of choices that need to be made about your messaging, your marketing, your branding, and your strategy. Not to mention the all-important: What should I tweet about today?

I feel your pain!

It's difficult to navigate the thousands of questions that need to be answered in the process of launching or growing your prosperous business. It can be overwhelming. That is why I created this guide. I've found that in order to solve any problem, you must tackle it in small chunks.

If you contemplate all the questions at once, it just leads to confusion and frustration—then they invite over their first cousins: fear, doubt, and anxiety. So, this guide is designed to help you break down the confusion and achieve a powerful, crystal-clear vision of your dream business and how to make it happen!

I promise that if you follow the steps that I outline in this publication, you will face a breakthrough in clarity that you've never experienced. That clarity will lead to confidence and your confidence will carry you to places you've never imagined!

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So, are you with me?

Let's begin!

Your coach,

Sharon

Chapter One

What Business Are You In? *“Begin at the beginning ...” Lewis Carroll*

My client sat across from me, radiating with excitement. She had made the big decision to hire me as her coach— investing in herself and her business for the first time. Our first coaching session was here, and it was now time to lay our cards on the table.

I said, “Tell me about your business.” She smiled nervously, thought for a second and then asked, “Which one?”

I said, “Pick one!” She then began to tell me about her service business that she was struggling to get off the ground. One of her biggest problems was that it was conflicting with the nonprofit agency she had on the side, while still holding down a full-time job!

As we got into our discussion, there was a great deal of confusion about the business, its brand, its messaging, its strategy and even its future—considering her competing interests. We had to slow down and begin at the beginning. The first question we had to answer (and it will be yours as well): ***What business are you in?***

It seems like a basic question, but it’s foundational. If you don’t get that question right, then any organization built upon that foundation will be easily toppled.

Many of you are failing to get the kind of traction that you’d like because you’re not clear about what business you’re in. I’d like you to stop right now and contemplate that question. Ask yourself: ***What business am I in?***

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Really think about it. Take out a journal and make some notes. Give this question deep thought because your success depends on it. Here are some of the fundamental issues that flow from understanding what business you're in:

- Your marketing (including messaging, branding—such as color schemes, logos, online presence—target audience, customer acquisition process, community involvement, public relations, etc.)
- Your budgeting (where and how will you spend your dollars)
- Your manpower (where and how will you spend your time and the time of others) and
- Your form of business (are you a partnership, sole-proprietorship, limited liability company, for-profit corporation or a nonprofit?) What is the nature of your offline and online presence?

In my experience, a lack of clarity about the core business results in mixed messaging in any number of these areas and mixed results for the business owner. Getting back to my client, she had one core business idea, but also a nonprofit idea that would involve its own business plan, marketing strategy, Board of Directors, funding, etc. As her coach, I made her stop and think which one of those businesses she would focus upon first. Once that business was stable, there would be plenty of time to expand the vision.

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This misunderstanding is not limited to small business owners. At the beginning of the online video revolution, one of the early pioneers of video gaming approached several toy manufacturers to fund their business. The toy companies roundly rejected the online gaming company because they stated that they were in the “toy” business, not the “online gaming” business. “Come back when you have a toy,” they said.

Well everyone knows how that turned out. Many of the toy manufacturers went out of business and online gaming is, by itself, a multi-billion-dollar industry. The toy companies misunderstood that they weren't just in the toy business, they were in the “play” business—they needed to be open to what children of their generation wanted to play with. Being unclear about their true business cost those companies billions. Compare that to the gaming companies. They captured the hearts of their target market for generations.

So, how do you win the battle for clarity?

Here are my top three strategies for gaining clarity about your business:

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1. **Focus on one business at a time.** Running one business is difficult enough. Statistically, only a small percentage of small businesses succeed beyond the first year. Trying to launch more than one business or leading with mixed messaging about your business is one path to failure.
2. **Get a coach.** This sounds like self-promotion and I hesitate to place it here, but the job of a coach is to tell you the truth, with patience and empathy. So, here's my truth. The availability of a coach to challenge your assumptions, keep you focused, and hold your feet to the fire is priceless. People who invest in coaching experience quantum leaps in performance. Just remember that not all coaches are created equal!
3. **Study your market well.** We will cover this to some degree in the next chapter, but I must state it here. I've seen so many smart women jump into a market because it was their passion, or they like the industry or they see someone else making money in that area. There's nothing wrong with having a passion for your business. It's difficult to run a business without passion! However, beyond passion or what you see others doing, it must be a viable market for your services. Do your homework. Don't "assume" a viable market where one doesn't exist.

Chapter Two

Who Is Your Ideal Customer?

Here's a pattern I've seen repeated during my coaching sessions with entrepreneurs over the years. The entrepreneur has a passion, a product, and even some ongoing promotions. They're working hard, but still struggling to make steady sales. *"You've got to know your customers better than they know themselves."* Stephen Little

When I ask them to describe their ideal customer I usually get one of three reactions: A blank stare, a long pause or something like, "My ideal customer would be interested in the kind of products (or services) I sell."

Therein lays the problem, and fortunately, the solution! The problem is that many entrepreneurs place the cart before the horse. They create a business and then they go looking for customers.

In truth, this process should be reversed. Before the first dollar is spent, the first web page designed, or the first business card printed, every entrepreneur should have a crystal-clear idea of the ideal customer for their product or service. This is a visual representation of the ideal person who will spend real dollars with you.

This person or potential customer is often called your "Ideal Customer Avatar" or "ICA." Once you decide who that person is, all your marketing efforts will be directed at your ICA with laser-beam focus.

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To create an ICA for your product, think in terms of one person (very specific) and less in terms of a market (very general). Some marketers have gone as far as to choose a name for their ICA, an image that represents the ICA, and even virtual jobs or families for her.

This takes your ICA from being a “concept” like a market, and into a real person who you can relate to and get to know. You need to develop an in-depth understanding of the person most likely to buy your product.

In creating your ICA, here are some questions you should answer about her:

1. What is the biggest problem that you solve for her?
2. What are her dreams, hopes, and aspirations?
3. How do you specifically facilitate those?
4. What are her doubts and fears; what keeps her up at night?
5. How do you specifically alleviate those?
6. What's her socio-economic position?
7. What makes her feel good about buying?
8. Where does she hang out, both offline and online?

9. Does she have a family? How many kids?

Great marketing and sales are never about “transactions.” Meaning, it’s not about the one sale that you transact. Great marketing is a long-term proposition. It’s about building a relationship of mutual respect and trust with your potential client. That takes time, thought and a deep understanding of your ICA.

Former Apple CEO, Steve Jobs, is an awesome study of this. He had a rabid dedication to his customers and their user experience. He knew his customers to a tee. He figured out their hopes, dreams, and aspirations. Then he made products designed to exceed those hopes.

That is your job as the CEO of your company. Break open your journal again or open a fresh document on your computer. Begin to answer the questions above in detail. If you can’t answer them, it shows you don’t know enough about your potential customers and you need to go back to the drawing board. It also demonstrates why you’re struggling to make sales.

When you make the ICA connection, your products will almost sell themselves. This is because you will be speaking to a specific woman (or customer) about a specific need. No more generalizing!

Chapter Three

What Is Your Brand? *“Your brand is what other people say about you when you’re not in the room”* Jeff Bezos, Amazon CEO

Let’s talk about how to create a rock-solid personal brand. You may ask yourself, what is a brand and why is that important to me? In its sheer essence, your brand is your identity. It represents all that you stand for and reflects how the world sees you. A large part of developing self-confidence is becoming comfortable in your skin. It’s about embracing your uniqueness and living it out.

Whether you intended it or not, the world has already decided on your brand. Your friends, family, and colleagues already have an idea of what you’re all about. Some of this is based on their own biases, but most of it is based on the image or persona that you consistently project.

Stop and ask yourself for a moment: what is my brand? How does the world see me? You may want to jot down some adjectives or phrases in your journal to flesh this out. For example, I was fortunate some years ago to be featured in a magazine as one of the 21 most influential women in my county.

The editors of the magazine placed each woman selected in a category based on that woman’s personal brand: what she was most identified with and known for in the community. One woman who was a Public Relations Strategist and blogger was named “The Communicator.”

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Another woman who made it a life-long crusade to rescue people who suffered from substance abuse was named “The Crusader.” Others were named “The Humanitarian,” “The Pioneer,” and other traits relative to their public persona.

Based on my work at the Oasis Compassion Agency (a nonprofit empowerment organization I ran for many years), I was given the title “The Altruist,” a name that was totally in keeping with my core values (who I am) and my public image (the way the world sees me).

Notice that I was not named “The Communicator,” although I believe that I have great communication skills. You’re reading this book right now because I was able to successfully communicate to you the value of gaining clarity about your life and business. But that is not my personal brand; the thing I’m most known for. In my case, altruism, helping disempowered and disadvantaged women, was more closely aligned with my mission.

I hope you’re beginning to understand what I mean about developing a personal brand. The key question is: What will YOU be primarily known for? Take some time and give some deep thought to this. Write down anything that comes to mind in your journal or computer.

What’s in a Brand?

Now that I’ve given you some examples of personal branding, let’s discuss the five pillars you will need to establish your brand.

PILLAR #1

The first pillar of establishing your brand is **Identity**. Identity answers the question: Who are you? What can the world expect from you? At heart, are you a communicator? Are you a humanitarian? A crusader? Or something entirely different?

The key question is: What is unique about you? What sets you apart from everyone else? Take some time to think this out and continue to record your thoughts. As you jot down your thoughts about your identity, keep these tips in mind:

(1) Be authentic. Your brand identity should be about the true you. Many have tried to project a fake persona, but it always backfires. The world just seems to know how to spot a fake.

(2) Be credible. This means that you need to conduct yourself with integrity and character. That is also a part of your brand. Have you ever met someone with a big **But?** I say that for little humor, but I think you know what I mean. This is a person with a big B-U-T attached to their brand. “You can use Carol’s services, but ...” “We would love to have Brenda join our Board, but ...” “Jan is a great marketer, but ...”

You can fill in the blank. The gist is that you must maintain a standard of integrity and character in all that you do, or you will be branded negatively.

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(3) Be consistent. Whatever you decide to brand as your public persona, stick with it. The easiest way to water down your brand is to be all over the place. There's nothing wrong with trying several things, but the most powerful brands are known for one thing primarily. Think about your favorite brands. Whether its companies or individuals, being branded means being known for one thing. I don't want to buy my hotdogs at Starbucks.

PILLAR #2

The second pillar of establishing your brand involves knowing your **Values**. The issue of values answers the question: What do you stand for? What do you hold sacred at your core? You must define these values upfront. They are personal to you.

For example, entrepreneur Steve Jobs said that he was here to “put a dent in the universe.” Therefore, his life was based on innovating through technology to change the world. Bright Horizons Family Solutions expresses its values in the acronym, HEART: Honesty, Excellence, Accountability, Respect, and Teamwork. The shoe company Zappos embraces creating “fun and a little weirdness,” as well as the simple statement: “Be humble.”

Whatever you may define as your core values, I encourage you to include the aspiration to live for a higher purpose than yourself. One of my core values is to “have a positive and spiritual impact on everyone in my sphere of influence.” I've lived by those words and it's defined my personal brand over time.

PILLAR #3

The third pillar of establishing your brand involves your **Visual Presentation**. This encompasses your style, including your dress, logo (if you're in business), online presence, and every aspect of how you are visually presented in the world.

In this day of social media, you must give your visual presentation a lot of thought. Every post, blog comment, or picture you upload or allow someone else to upload is essentially in your digital footprint forever. So, you must be strategic and careful about the kind of presentation you give or receive online.

My advice is to take charge of your visual image. Decide on your style, colors, online image, and every aspect of how you present yourself. If you are lacking in inspiration, you can emulate others. Sites such as Pinterest and numerous online magazines offer lots of advice about how to put an image together. The key is to remain true to yourself. Borrow some ideas and inspiration, but never copy anyone wholesale.

PILLAR #4

The fourth pillar of personal branding is **Authority**. Authority speaks to the question: What qualifies you? What is your area of expertise? What skills do you bring to the table? How do you add value to others? Think about the reasons why people call you up. What are you known for?

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Some great authority brands are Suze Orman: Personal finances. Jillian Michaels: Health and fitness. Martha Stewart: Home and living. There are many ways to establish authority. You may do so through higher education or learning. You may also gain authority through work experience or community service.

Another method of establishing authority is through media coverage or publishing on your topic of interest. This could be in the form of a blog, a newsletter that you write, or even a book. The Big Idea is that a part of your brand should encompass an element of authority: the expertise or skill that you bring to the table.

PILLAR #5

The fifth pillar of personal branding is **Visibility**. Visibility answers the question: Where are you? You don't have a brand if you can't be found. To be properly branded, you must be seen. You must be a part of the conversation. As previously shared, in our modern world of social media, you are part of your conversation whether you like it or not. It's your responsibility to take control of how and where you show up. Here are some ideas on how you can show up more effectively:

- Consider writing a blog about your topic or areas of interest.
- Take control of your public image by learning how to use social media.
- Get online and demonstrate a positive image.
- Get involved in your community by giving back, through service.

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When these five elements are put together: **Identity, Values, Visual Presentation, Authority,** and **Visibility,** you will create a powerful personal brand. Your positive personal brand will propel you ahead of your competitors in your career or business. It will open doors for you, and most importantly, it will help you construct a business that's built to last!

Chapter Four

What is Your Sales Strategy? *"A vision without a strategy remains an illusion." Lee Bolman*

Have you ever had one of those conversations where you ask a straightforward question, and you receive sheer silence in return? If you listen carefully, you can hear crickets chirping in the background. Or, there's a long, awkward pause followed by lots of humming and hawing.

This happens to me more times than I can mention when the issue of business strategy surfaces with my prospective clients. Here's what I mean. You may crystalize what business you're in, define your ideal client with specificity, and sharpen your brand to a point. But if you do not have a clear strategy to reach your ideal customer, then your efforts will be in vain. At the end of the day, you must have some sales!

If you do not have sales or a systematic method of bringing in sales, you do not have a business.

According to Investopedia:

"The term business ... refers to the organized efforts and activities of individuals to produce and sell goods and services for profit."

No profits equal no business.

I had to learn this the hard way. Several years ago, I launched an international magazine (I told you I've been busy). We nailed the first three categories mentioned in this book: We knew what business we were in (publishing). We knew our ideal customers (advertisers seeking to reach a Caribbean market). We also had our branding down pat (a high-end, glossy publication called "Prestige Caribbean Magazine").

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We spent countless hours designing the magazine, writing and curating content, writers, contributors, and endorsements. We set up distribution routes and personnel in several states and three foreign countries. We obtained press coverage, television appearances, and invitations to prestigious events.

All of this was exciting! It certainly felt like we were running a successful business. The problem was, we hadn't made any sales! All these activities were funded out of our own pockets or on small investments that we raised. We were so busy creating and promoting a beautiful product that we neglected to sell it!

By the time we awoke to our folly, it was too late. We closed a few sales in the waning months of the publication, but it was too late to save the enterprise. Thus, I'm telling you from experience that the time to develop a sales strategy is *before* you launch the product. Or, if you've already launched, but you're not steadily growing your sales, then it's time for an inventory of your sales process.

Fix this issue before you do anything else.

A lack of sales means something is broken. There's a weak link in the chain that connects you to your customer. It could be as obvious as the mistake I made—being so obsessed with the product that my team neglected to simply ask for a sale. It could be that you haven't thought carefully about your customer's fears, pains, and desires that you can fulfill. Or, it could be process-driven – you lack a clear system to identify a lead; turn that lead into a prospect, and then turn that prospect into a sale.

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This will not happen by accident. It will not happen because you have a great product or a great team. Your business will only begin to turn a profit when you have a clearly-defined sales strategy, that isn't just written down somewhere or in your head—it is acted upon!

Conclusion

“Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter ... ”

King Solomon

Running a business is one of the most difficult *and* rewarding things you will ever do! If it were easy, more people would own one and far fewer businesses would fold up after a short period of time.

But in my opinion, after starting multiple ventures and coaching multiple business owners, the number one reason businesses fail is a lack of clarity around one or more of the four questions posed in the book:

- What business are you in?
- Who is your ideal customer?
- What is your brand?
- What is your sales strategy?

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If you are experiencing ambiguity or outright confusion around any of these areas, please, do yourself a favor and stop now! Stop producing, blogging, posting, photographing, website enhancing, influencer peddling, reading, bright-shiny-object chasing, seminar or masterclass attending, competition copying, and worst of all-curling into the letter “S” on your bed out of depression.

You can have your dream of a thriving business.

You can have the freedom that comes with that.

You can have that without sacrificing your health or values.

The thing you need the most is not money, resources, connections or other externals. Your greatest need is **CLARITY**. Go back to that journal that I’ve been encouraging you to start and drill down in each of the four areas mentioned. Ask yourself if you’re fully satisfied with your answers to the four questions posed.

If not, then you may be lacking in what is needed the most! But it doesn’t have to remain that way. I am offering all readers of this book a complimentary 30-minute coaching session to help you obtain the clarity you need about your business, and to help you finally achieve that big dream of your heart. Here is my calendar link below.

<https://calendly.com/faithbasedcoach/discoverysession>

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sharon Gill is an American success story. Sharon came to the United States in 1986 with the equivalent of fifty-six American dollars and a dream. Her odyssey began in New York City where she worked as a nanny before striking out to test herself in the business world. It wasn't long before she obtained employment with American Express and became a multiple *Pace Setter*, an award given only to the top 5% of all employees, by area of responsibility, worldwide.



Sharon later left American Express to join her husband, Wayne in his startup law-firm. Together they grew the law firm from one employee in 1997 into a merger that resulted in the firm becoming a part of an eighty-million-dollar legal conglomerate.

Sharon retired from the law business at that time and formed the Oasis Compassion Agency, a nonprofit corporation that helps to restore dignity and hope to the least fortunate in society. The Oasis provided food, clothing, counseling and economic

empowerment to all its constituents, which hail from all walks of life. From its inception, Oasis assisted more than ten thousand individuals.

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In 2010, Sharon took one of the biggest steps in her life: She went back to school to finish her college degree, which she had postponed while having children and tending to her family. In true Sharon style, she graduated *Summa Cum Laude*, at the top of her class, and was awarded the Outstanding Graduate Award from the MacArthur School of Leadership at Palm Beach Atlantic University.

Along the way, Sharon has won too many awards to list. She has been awarded the Martin Luther King Leadership Award; The Local Heroes Award by the American Red Cross; The Giraffe Award by the Women's Chamber of Commerce.

She's spoken to business groups such as The Rotary Club, 100 Black Women of Broward County, Florida Atlantic University's Student Leadership Program, and was honored to give the Outstanding Graduate Address at the Palm Beach Atlantic University's MacArthur School of Leadership.

You may view many of Sharon's videos and content on multiple social media platforms where she receives thousands of views every week.

Below is a sampling of what her audiences have to say about her message and her brand.

"Sharon has the ability to see the best in people, more than they can often see in themselves."

Brigitte Sylvestre/Co-Host, Moody Radio South Florida

"Working with Sharon proved to be one of the most rewarding experiences. As a result, the non-profit increased the number of students serviced, experience the most active and enthusiastic year as board members, and most of all we connected individuals to a worthwhile mission."

Marva Wilks/Founder-Education Gateway

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"In all the years I have known Sharon I found her to be exceptionally professional in all that she does. She is an excellent communicator and is known for being someone who can be counted on to get to the root of issues, offering up real solutions. Sharon brings with her a reputation for possessing good business savvy, strong leadership and people development skills."

Aimee Nelson/Founder-YouMom

"Sharon Gill was asked to provide a lens into her own leadership journey that would encourage and motivate a group of adults as they embarked upon the next chapter in their own leadership journey. During her beautiful narrative of God's imprint upon her life, her leadership experiences, and storytelling skillfulness she encouraged and clearly spoke into the lives of the participants."

Audy Johnson/Professor of Management-Palm Beach Atlantic University

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