

# The Learning Curve of Starting a New Business

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**Patricia Wynn of Patricia Services, LLC | Credit: Patricia Wynn**

*Editor's note: In this series, Next Avenue will follow Patricia Wynn as she embarks on becoming an entrepreneur with her North Carolina lifestyle assistant business. Future installments will note her progress, with advice for her and for other midlife entrepreneurs. This article is part of [America's Entrepreneurs](https://www.nextavenue.org/americas-entrepreneurs/) (<https://www.nextavenue.org/americas-entrepreneurs/>), a Next Avenue initiative made possible by the [Richard M. Schulze Family Foundation](https://www.schulzefamilyfoundation.org/) (<https://www.schulzefamilyfoundation.org/>) and [EIX](https://eiexchange.com/) (<https://eiexchange.com/>), Entrepreneur & Innovation Exchange.*

Entrepreneurs with a new startup are balancing so many things: developing and managing a new business, meeting the needs of customers and marketing to attract new ones, keeping the books straight and building their brand. Tying all these things together? A need to identify inexpensive or free ways for entrepreneurs to educate themselves in techniques necessary to advance their business.

With an eye on her bottom line and keeping expenses down, Patricia Wynn has taken advantage of online courses with a nominal certification fee to further educate herself as she runs her Hillsborough, N.C.-based lifestyle assistant business, Patricia Services, LLC.

Noted Wynn, "Even though I'm not a certified nursing assistant, I was able to go on the [myCNAjobs.com](https://www.mycnajobs.com/) (<https://www.mycnajobs.com/>) website and click on the training section to find online classes. So far, I've taken a caregiver class, one on CPR, another on COVID, one

with tips on meal prep for seniors, and a class on the dos and don'ts of dealing with people who are suffering from dementia. Often there is no cost for a course, but [there is] an eight dollar fee if there is a certificate when you complete it."

Wynn, 53, also plans to take advantage of some of the [SCORE small business seminars](https://www.nextavenue.org/become-score-small-business-mentor/) (<https://www.nextavenue.org/become-score-small-business-mentor/>) that she sees listed in her email inbox. SCORE is the national organization of business executives that is affiliated with the U.S. Small Business Administration. Wynn has had a good experience with her SCORE mentor, Maxine Stern, and many of the seminars offer helpful business tips for free or a nominal cost.

"I'm thinking about attending some of these seminars in person, or I might even be able to listen to an online version while I'm cleaning for one of my clients," said Wynn.

## Finding Ways to Network

She also recently learned that her Hillsborough, N.C. Chamber of Commerce has annual memberships which start at the entrepreneur level of \$300 and include being invited to business events, getting listed as a new company, obtaining referrals, benefiting from advocacy, and networking. Wynn is reviewing information on her local chamber of commerce organization before committing to join.

Kimberly A. Eddleston, Schulze Distinguished Professor of Entrepreneurship, D'Amore-McKim School of Business, Northeastern University, Boston, said entrepreneurs should, "Search for your local, town or state chamber of commerce on [uschamber.com](http://www.uschamber.com/) (<http://www.uschamber.com/>). They offer workshops on all kinds of marketing, ideas on branding, and understanding financial statements. Some are very



focused on how to start a business. They could also do community outreach events that might put you in touch with potential customers or other entrepreneurs in your area."

Eddleston, a senior editor of the (EIX) Entrepreneur and Innovation Exchange, which is a funder of Next Avenue, also recommended that new entrepreneurs look for online or in-person workshops sponsored by SCORE or the Small Business Administration (SBA) and websites like

[frugalentrepreneur.com](https://frugalentrepreneur.com),

(<https://frugalentrepreneur.com/>) which has a listing of courses, tips and tools for small business owners.

She added, "Many universities and community colleges also offer free or inexpensive workshops. If you don't have a business background, you need to understand accounting. [You need to know what's costing you money and what's making you money,](https://www.nextavenue.org/secret-success-small-business-owners/)" (<https://www.nextavenue.org/secret-success-small-business-owners/>) with your new business.

## Opportunities for Education

Eddleston mentioned that even YouTube has some accounting and bookkeeping informational videos. "You should pick accounting programs that will not overwhelm you — a platform that will offer you basic information so that you can move up and grow" your company, she explained.

In Wynn's case, Eddleston said, "The idea is that she wants to grow, but if someone grows too fast, there can be problems. There are scams out there, and you have to be really careful. Look for reviews when you are looking at online workshops — you want to be aware of whether they are trying to sell you something."

Another source that owners of startups can trust would be the Small Business Development Centers and continuing education courses often associated with colleges and universities or nonprofits, noted Eddleston.

"EIX offers free online surveys to assess your (business) strengths and weaknesses and articles written by leading professors," she said.

Eddleston also suggested new entrepreneurs join trade

associations. "Their whole purpose is doing research on what are best practices in your industry," she said. "You can see what the trends are, start networking and find out how you might pivot, if necessary."

As COVID-19 restrictions begin to lessen, Wynn said she might consider attending some in-person small business workshops as well as the online options.

"I received an email that had information on SBA programs with no out-of-pocket cost at North Carolina Central University, a historically Black college in Durham, and at North Carolina State University in Raleigh," Wynn said. "I just have to see when they are offered and how I could fit attending a program into my schedule."

## Keeping a Steady Flow of Work

Wynn, who continues to maintain her Care.com profile to attract business for her lifestyle assistant company, juggles her weekly and as-needed customers, ranging from two to eight-hour assignments, to keep a steady flow of work.

"Rather than charge a flat fee to clean a house, for example, I prefer to charge by the hour, ranging from twenty-five to thirty dollars. If one customer needs less done, I can try to pick up additional hours from another customer. I love what I'm doing with the cleaning and the cooking — that's why I'm taking my time building the business."

Through research, Wynn learned that a local cleaning company charged \$240 for two hours of work with a staff of 4 people. If she works eight hours at \$30 per hour, she's also making \$240.

The key, commented Wynn, is to "always make sure that you are professional and show up on time. I want to show my work ethic. If I tell someone I will be there, they can be sure that I will show up. Networking is free because clients recommend you to their friends who become new clients."

Ironically, Wynn is making a business out of work similar to what her mother did as a health care private duty employee and domestic when she was growing up in the Hillsborough and Chapel Hill region.

"Back then, my mother said, 'this is not the land of opportunity for us' — meaning for Black people. While there are still some confederate flags flying at certain homes, and home prices have skyrocketed, pushing many Blacks and others that can't afford the real estate out, it's something for me to come back (from Atlanta) twenty-six years later and make a business of being a lifestyle assistant," said Wynn.