

THE AMERICAN DREAM PROJECT

The Operator's Handbook

Running your business, step by step

Money & Bookkeeping

Know where every dollar goes — simply.

Cash is not profit

Profit is what's left after costs; cash is what's actually in your account today. You can be profitable on paper and still run dry if customers pay late. Watch both, and never spend money you haven't truly collected.

A system you'll actually use

Separate business money from personal — even a second free checking account helps. Keep every receipt. Once a week, write down money in and money out. A plain notebook or spreadsheet you keep beats a fancy app you abandon.

Bookkeeping: Recording money in and money out.

Profit: Revenue minus all your costs.

YOUR NOTES & NEXT STEP

Taxes, Plainly

What a tiny business owes — and how not to be surprised.

Set aside as you earn

When money comes in, move a portion aside for taxes before you spend the rest. Many small owners park roughly a quarter to a third of profit. Rules vary by state and situation — this isn't tax advice, so check official sources.

Quarterly, not just April

Very small businesses often pay estimated taxes four times a year. Keep clean records of income and expenses — legitimate business costs are deductible and lower what you owe. For anything complex, a tax pro usually pays for themselves.

Estimated taxes: Tax paid in installments through the year.

Deduction: A real business cost that lowers taxable income.

YOUR NOTES & NEXT STEP

Pricing for Profit

Charge what your work is truly worth.

Cost, time, then value

A price must cover your costs, pay for your time, and leave a margin — then settle near what the result is worth to the customer. Underpricing isn't generosity; it starves the very business that serves them.

Raise it without fear

Most beginners price too low. Test a higher number with new customers and frame it by the outcome you deliver, not the hours you spend. Quiet confidence in your price signals confidence in your work.

Margin: What's left after covering your costs.

Value-based pricing: Pricing on the result, not only the hours.

YOUR NOTES & NEXT STEP

Sales & Asking for the Yes

Helping someone decide to say yes.

Selling is serving

Selling isn't pushing — it's helping someone solve a problem they already have. Listen first, understand the real need, then show plainly how you meet it. People buy from those who clearly understand them.

Ask clearly, welcome 'no'

Once you've shown the value, ask for the sale in plain words — then be quiet and let them answer. A 'no' is often 'not yet' or an unanswered question. Ask what's holding them back, answer it, and follow up kindly.

Close: Clearly asking for the decision.

Objection: A concern to understand, not to fight.

YOUR NOTES & NEXT STEP

Service & Repeat Business

The cheapest growth is a customer who returns.

Keeping beats finding

Winning a new customer costs far more than keeping a happy one. Do excellent work, communicate clearly, and answer fast. A satisfied customer buys again and brings their friends — that's growth you don't pay for.

Turn problems into loyalty

Mistakes happen; your response decides everything. Own it quickly, make it right, and customers often trust you more than before. When they're glad, that's the moment to ask for a review or a referral.

Retention: Keeping customers over time.

Referral: A happy customer who sends you another.

YOUR NOTES & NEXT STEP

Legal Basics for Builders

The few things to get right early. (Not legal advice.)

Structure & licenses

Many begin as a sole proprietor; an LLC can add protection as you grow. Check your state and city for the licenses or permits your specific work needs. A simple, lawful setup you actually complete beats a fancy one you skip.

Put it in writing

Clear written agreements prevent most disputes — what you'll do, by when, for how much. Keep records. For anything serious, a licensed attorney's quick review is cheap insurance. Rules vary by state, so verify locally.

Sole proprietor: The simplest one-person business.

LLC: A structure that can separate personal and business liability.

YOUR NOTES & NEXT STEP

Personal Finance for Builders

A strong owner stands on stable ground.

Keep some of what you make

The first rule of every fortune is to spend less than you earn and save the difference. Build a small emergency fund so one slow month doesn't sink you. Keep the household's money separate from the business's.

Credit & debt, used wisely

Credit is a tool, not free money. Pay on time, keep balances low, and borrow only for things that earn more than they cost. Good credit quietly lowers the price of everything you finance.

Emergency fund: Savings set aside for the unexpected.

Credit: Borrowed money repaid with discipline.

YOUR NOTES & NEXT STEP
