

Financial Success! The OffAssist Interview

Good Monday morning ladies & gents! Today is Monday, April 17, and it marks the first week of a seven week interview feature here at Freelance Wurk. First up, we have Candy Beauchamp and her *very successful* business, [OffAssist](#).

“If you truly want to be a financial success in this world, you have to go out and do it yourself.”
– Candy Beauchamp



Once just a vision in 1999, OffAssist opened its doors in 2002 and has since become a successful virtual assistance firm specializing in bookkeeping for small- and medium-sized businesses that is steadily approaching its fifth year. With a staff of five experienced professionals, OffAssist allows clients to focus on their businesses without the stress of numbers. The mastermind behind the firm, owner Candy Beauchamp, has agreed to talk with Freelance Wurk about the struggles and successes of branching out from the “traditional” job market and starting your own business.

FW: Thanks for being with us today, Candy! I’ve given our readers a brief description of OffAssist. In your own words, describe your business. Why, and how, does it help people? What do you think some of its best features are?

CB: OffAssist frees up business owners from the overhead of their businesses to do the work that they want to do, which is to run their businesses! We are able to offer business owners a turn-key solution to their biggest administrative headaches by handling things such as bookkeeping, marketing support, mail outs, scheduling, etc. Since we are experts in our fields working as independent contractors, clients don’t have to worry about the training and payroll taxes that go along with hiring new employees, and because we work from our own offices, there’s no need to provide a computer or office space for us.

FW: Sounds as if OffAssist is quite self-sufficient. Rhonda Abrams, a journalist for USA Today, is quoted as saying, “To greatly increase your chance of success, find out as much as you can BEFORE you open your doors” in her article “[Focus On Success, Not Failure.](#)” Tell us what kind of planning you did during the incubation period of OffAssist. What kind of changes, if any, did you make after its birth?

CB: I wish I could say that I had all my planning in place. I did do a bit of research but, in retrospect, I realize there were many things I should have looked into more. I had a rough business plan and quickly found I had to fully round it out to make OffAssist a success. I think a good business plan is the key to running a successful company; it doesn't have to be a traditional 20 page plan, either. Our business plan is a simple: Excel worksheet with notes all over it! I think in numbers, so that works well for me. Another VA I know thinks in pictures so hers has a lot of graphs.

FW: USA Today reported that the odds of survival for a new business increase dramatically after the business has hit the five year mark. OffAssist, in its fourth year, is closing in on that significant anniversary. How does it feel to have survived those crucial first years? Was there ever a time when you had your doubts about the future of OffAssist?

CB: Of course, it feels great to be coming up on that anniversary! I don't really think I've ever had any doubts. When I started OffAssist, I was pretty driven to make it work and it has. The biggest struggle for me was public speaking and getting up the nerve to just randomly walk up to someone and hand them a business card. I had to really make myself get out there and do it. Now, it's almost second nature—everyone I speak to knows what I do by the time we are done with a conversation and it all comes natural to me. I have had several people say, "Wow, you just gave me your business card, told me what you do and I still don't feel like you are trying to sell me anything." *laugh* I'm still working on the public speaking aspect, but again, it all comes with practice. The easiest for me was finding clients. I worked from my inner circle of people, again telling everyone what I did and asking for referrals of clients that came my way. I also made contacts with others in related industries, such as CPAs whom I could both refer to and get referrals from.

FW: Ah yes, public speaking tends to make many of us nervous. When you freelance or own your own business, it's basically up to you to advertise yourself, isn't it?

CB: Absolutely! I think that's probably the biggest mistake I see other freelance business owners make – they think if they build a website, the clients will come. You have to get out there, either in person or virtually and make a name for yourself.

FW: Very good point. Chris King, the mind behind CreativeKeys.net, wrote an article called "[How to Craft an Effective Elevator Speech](#)." In a nutshell, it explains how to answer the question, "What do you do?" – a question that so many freelancers and business owners are faced with. It's easier to explain that you ring up groceries at the local Piggly Wiggly than it is to explain that you started your own business as a numbers genius for other companies. Four years and going strong, I assume you have your own "elevator speech" for OffAssist.

CB: Yes, of course. I think it's something that you have to develop over time. Say it out loud to yourself, and say it often to as many people as you can. Our current "elevator speech" is what I said to you in answer to your first question. Of course, it changes based on who's asking the question and what information we need to convey to them, but that's the core of it.

FW: I think it's wonderful that your husband has been working with you and OffAssist since last year—around the same time USA Today also reported that 85% of new businesses fail in the first year. It's fair to say that some significant others—especially those that share bills!—are a bit skeptical when the other decides to start a business, given those statistics. Would you say your husband was somewhat skeptical in the beginning?

CB: Actually, no. Tom has always been supportive of OffAssist. I won't say that when I told him I wanted to quit my job and open a business with only one little client that he didn't look at me like I was crazy, but after the initial shock of it, we sat down and figured out if we could make it work. The answer was no, but we did it anyway! We don't recommend this way of thinking, though. We always felt that between luck and hard work – very hard work – OffAssist would become a successful business, and it has!

FW: Indeed it has! But office hours, shmoffice hours. Have you guys ever been tempted to clear the table after dinner and head straight back to your computers?

CB: This actually does happen. While we do try to set specific business hours, we also like to leave the door open. One of the reasons I wanted to start my own business was so I could be there for the kids more. If we aren't under any heavy deadlines and decide we want to have a picnic, we send the phones to voice mail and go do it. Flexibility has become very important to us as we have gotten busier. We have a part-time assistant who comes in and that has really taken the burden off of both of us during the day.

FW: On that note, quality family time can either be helped or hurt when a parent (or both!) starts his or her own business and works from home. Obviously you and your husband have a strong working relationship. Has your personal relationship been affected in any way? What about quality family time with the kids?

CB: We work just as hard in our personal life as in our business life to make sure that the business only enhances our family. We have a housekeeper that comes in once a week so we don't have to worry about cleaning. We use that time instead to do something fun with the kids – each and every week. They look forward to that time; we get a clean house and actually save a bit of time in the process.

Our business is about outsourcing and our clients outsource to us to save themselves time, money and headaches. We do the same in a lot of different ways; the housekeeper is just one example. We do try to say “no business talk” after a certain point in the day. This doesn't always work out – because we have busier times of the year (tax time) than others – but we try to be flexible. If we are disagreeing about something in business, we try to leave that in the office, and vice versa.

FW: So, there are times when you and Tom don't agree on everything related to OffAssist?

CB: For the most part, we don't have very many disagreements about business. Early on, we set out roles and responsibilities, just like any other business partnership, but we try to make large decisions together. I am very lucky that I get to do what I love doing with my best friend in the entire world.

FW: Candy, you told me that it had been a dream of yours to start your own business ever since you could remember. What do you think sparked that interest in you? Did you have any business-related role models?

CB: I'm really not sure, to be honest. I grew up in a very small town in South Carolina and saw so many people struggle to make ends meet and work long and heinous hours for such little compensation. I've always had a penchant for numbers and I guess it didn't take me long to realize that if you truly want to be a financial success in this world, you have to go out and do it yourself. Perhaps this had something to do with it?

FW: I'm sure it did. Many people leave the more "traditional" job market in order to be better compensated for what they're worth. Describe your experiences in the traditional job market. Is there anything you miss about it? Is there anything you're glad you don't have to deal with anymore?

CB: There's so much I don't miss about the corporate world. The bureaucracy, obviously, but I don't miss being chained to a cubicle or office all day, or the office politics/gossip. I like that we only have to answer to ourselves. Now that OffAssist is starting to "grow up" we like that we can be a little choosier with our clientele and make sure we are the perfect fit for them and their needs. We like that we hold our own fate in our hands. We make the rules. We celebrate our victories and learn from our own mistakes.

FW: You're getting a new office—congratulations! How will it differ from the first office OffAssist knew?

CB: Thank you! We move into the new home/offices in a few short days! The first office I had was in a corner nook of the formal dining room. My office has finally started to overtake the space with filing cabinets and equipment, extra computers – there's no actual dining room furniture in here now! It's organized, but it's everywhere. Our new space will have two separate offices. My office will actually be a large room connected to the kitchen that looks over the backyard – I work well when I don't feel "cubed in," so I'm excited! The area is large enough that I will be getting a new desk and it should be able to accommodate all of the work-in-progress filing cabinets. Tom's office is actually one of the extra bedrooms. It has enough space for his desk and our assistant's desk.

FW: Do you think you'll enjoy having home offices, rather than just one home office?

CB: We've always shared a workspace, so we are going to see how this works before making a final decision if we should keep separate working spaces or if we work better in the same office, we can always rearrange as my space is quite large and could easily fit us both with room to spare.

FW: What is the most important thing you've learned about starting a business and what advice would you offer those who are considering, or have already started, venturing into the world of self-employment?

CB: Get a good, solid business plan in place before doing anything, spend a lot of time on research and put that into the plan. Get support from your spouse and other loved ones, it is so important to be on the same page, whether they work with you or not. Realize that you are not perfect and you are going to hit stumbling blocks along the way. The best test of your character is how you react to those as a business owner.

As for personal advice, back to that business plan... take yourself out for a quiet dinner – by yourself – once a year. Take your business plan with LOTS of white space in it and make notes about what you have accomplished that year, what you didn't, what you see in the future. Rework that business plan. A business plan, in my opinion, should be a living thing. This is probably the best 2-3 hours I spend each year on my business. It allows you to get centered and remember why you are doing what you are doing, what's working and what you may need to change.



Make sure you have a good recognizable logo and branding. I even have a blouse that I purchased simply because it's "OffAssist Blue" – we advertise everywhere we can – even on our car!

Talk to everyone you know and start from your inner circle of people – friends and family. Have GOOD business cards made, don't skimp on that! Your business card is a lasting impression of who you are. Be liberal with business cards and have some stashed within easy reach of everywhere you go.

FW: Great advice, Candy. Thank you so much for your time and all of us at Wurk.net wish you and OffAssist the best of luck in the next five years!

CB: Thank you, Alicia... good luck to you guys as well!

Candy Beauchamp is active in the Virtual Assistant (VA) industry. She currently sits as President-Elect on the Board of Directors for the [International Virtual Assistants Association](#), mentors aspiring VAs and co-chairs the member benefits department of the IVAA. She holds three certifications/designations - Certified Virtual Assistant (CVA), Certified Real Estate Support Specialist (CRESS), and EthicsCheck, and is also a member in good standing of the American Institute of Professional Bookkeepers (AIPB).

Contact Candy at candy@offassist.com, and don't forget to check out OffAssist's [blog](#) and [newsletter](#), as well as the rest of the [OffAssist team](#)!