

The SLP Entrepreneur

*The Speech-Language Pathologist's
Guide to Private Practice and
Other Business Ventures*



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Introduction



ADRIENNE'S STORY

I started out my entrepreneurship journey by selling chocolate chip cookies when I was 15 years old. My aunt was a baker, and she sold her cakes and pies at the local farmer's market. As a young child, I loved going to my aunt's house to help her bake and learning how to perfect my own recipes. My first business lesson came from her, as she explained to me how to set my prices by calculating the cost of my expenses and multiplying it by three. She explained that by doing that, I would have enough money to cover my overhead costs, pay myself, and still have some profit left over. Over 20 years later, I still remember my aunt's delicious baked goods and her tips as an entrepreneur.

Upon entering college, my original intention was to earn a degree in business, and I actually started by majoring in accounting. However, while the image of dressing in a nice suit, carrying a briefcase, and going to an office in a high-rise building appealed to me at the time, I very quickly realized that my heart was not in it. Therefore, after my first year as an accounting major, I did something that would alter the course of my life. I took an Introduction to Communication Disorders class. Taking this class set me on a path to becoming a speech-language pathologist. After getting my degree in Speech-Language Pathology and working with kids in preschool-12th grade via telepractice for over 10 years, in preparation to climb the corporate ladder, I went *back* to school to earn my Masters of Business Administration. I was already a senior manager of a large department of telepractice SLPs and was no longer providing direct therapy. By the time I was halfway through my MBA program, I had my first child, left my stable full-time job, and started my own business, Online Speech Services. While this was one of the scariest things I had ever done in my professional life, I was more motivated than ever to become my own boss and take control of my future.

About a year after starting my online telepractice business, I saw an online ad for Teachable, which is an online course creation platform. Seeing that ad prompted me to start doing some research to find out, *How do I create my own online courses? Where do I sell them? Will people buy them? And of course, Can I make money from this?* All of these were questions racing through my mind when I ultimately decided, "You know what, I can do it! What's the worst that could happen?" At that time, there was zero financial commitment (with a free starter plan), so I had nothing to lose and everything to gain. After attending several free webinars to learn how to create online courses, I launched my first online mini-course about telepractice

rules and regulations. Then, I continued to launch several more courses for two years before I started partnering with other SLPs to help them launch their own courses too. Over 1,000 course sign-ups later, I surveyed my email list and realized that people were looking for more high-quality telepractice materials. So what did I do? Naturally, I taught myself how to make Boom Card decks and sell them on Teachers Pay Teachers. Soon after that, I started the blog <http://www.TelepracticeTools.com> and opened my own online store to sell telepractice materials. Soon after that, at the end of 2020, I was approached by a colleague to acquire The Interaction Coach, a website for parents and SLPs who work with young children with speech and language delays. That acquisition quickly connected me with three branches of my business: direct client services through Online Speech Services, training and materials for SLPs through Telepractice Tools, and resources for parents and SLPs through The Interaction Coach.

Much of my business growth occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic, while I was also teaching business courses at a University as an adjunct instructor and learning how to homeschool my preschooler. This path has not been easy, and I could not have done any of this without a supportive family. Over time, I've learned how to juggle being a wife, mom, and entrepreneur. So, that means a lot of late nights, a lot of early mornings, and little sleep. I learned the term "sweat equity" very early on in my entrepreneurial journey. As a beginning solo entrepreneur, YOU are it. So that means every sales call, every marketing material, product, and service all start and end with you. I would not trade this path for anything else, and I do not intend to turn back. If you are doing something that you are passionate about, then it doesn't feel like work. While it may be challenging, *you can do anything you set your mind to*. This is something that I teach my business students. You just need to have the drive and decide that you are going to give it your all to make it happen no matter what. I didn't *need* to go back to school to get an MBA ten years after becoming an SLP, nor did I *need* to raise an infant while I was going to school full-time. However, I *decided* that I could not put off my dreams any longer.

If you have a business idea, all it takes is that first step, the desire to achieve, and the commitment to keep going no matter what. Sure, life may throw a wrench at you—maybe you don't get the sales that you want or the number of followers that someone else has, but you make your business uniquely fit you: your life, your dreams, your goals, and your aspirations.

SONIA'S STORY

Growing up, I always was on the fence about whether I should pursue a career in medicine or in education. I was introduced to the field of medical speech-language pathology during the summer before my senior year in high school when my paternal grandmother, who was visiting us, suffered a stroke, resulting in aphasia.

Although she could understand and speak a limited amount of English prior to her stroke, after her stroke, it was most appropriate for her speech and language deficits to be treated in Hindi and/or Punjabi, her native and more preferred languages. Despite a thorough search across various parts of the United States, there were no board-certified speech-language pathologists who were able to evaluate or treat her in Hindi and/or Punjabi at that time, and as such, my family and I ended up serving as “translators” between the SLP and my grandmother. Without the science and knowledge behind what the SLP was looking for in my grandmother’s responses, and what she was trying to re-train, it was less than ideal, but we made the best out of the situation with the circumstances given to us.

It was at that time that I decided I would pursue a career in speech-language pathology. Having this new introduction into medical speech-language pathology, knowing that there were possibilities of also serving in educational settings, and being a lover of the intricacies of language, communication, and culture, this was a perfect choice for me. With the additional proficiency in Spanish (which I would later minor in during my undergraduate studies while living and studying in Madrid, Spain), Hindi, Punjabi, and Urdu, in addition to English, my goal was to be able to help a wider variety of people with speech-language/cognitive-communicative/feeding-swallowing/voice challenges as I pursued this path. As I worked through the years of graduate school and beyond, I have had the fortunate opportunity to work in a variety of settings ranging from infants in the neonatal ICU, early childhood, and school-age children, all the way through more senior adults in the neuro/medical/surgical ICU, acute rehabilitation, outpatient/day rehab, long-term, and, sometimes, end of life care. I have always been someone that has appreciated variety and balance. Working in Chicago and its surroundings for the entirety of my career thus far, I have been blessed with patients, clients, and colleagues from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, which has allowed me to utilize my multilingual background to serve a wider population, as well as connect with and learn more about various cultures and communities.

When I first left my first job and transitioned into my next role, I recognized the more “business” value that my daily interactions as a clinical SLP might hold. I transitioned from a full-time, salaried position in a hospital to a well-established contract company where I was now being paid hourly and had to account for mileage to travel to various facilities, as well as extra time spent for meetings and trainings. During this time, my eyes were also opened to the vast potential of opportunities for SLPs beyond the traditional clinical employee as part of the hospital/medical facility or educational setting. It was during this phase of my career that I also served as a consultant and creator of therapeutic products for a speech-language pathology publishing company, while also working as adjunct faculty within a local SLP-Assistant program. I also started serving as an independent consultant for school districts to complete bilingual speech-language evaluations, and independently pursued further professional development to start offering services in the area of accent modification. When the opportunity arose to return to where I did my

graduate training as an employee, working in a large academic medical center and serving as a clinical faculty member in the graduate program, I seized that opportunity. The years that I spent there allowed me to serve in the capacity of a clinician for a wide array of culturally and linguistically diverse patients; an educator for graduate SLP clinicians, other medical/health care professional students, resident physicians, other health care colleagues through interprofessional training, and the general public through outreach efforts; a researcher when contributing to departmental or larger hospital-wide initiatives; and a collaborator when working on process improvement and change management strategies for various aspects of the department and organization.

Through these experiences, the variety of manners in which I was using my SLP expertise was exhilarating, inspiring me to expand my thoughts of all of the possibilities that could lie ahead, and helping guide and propel my decision to pursue my entrepreneurial path. As I started down this path, I intentionally transitioned to serving as PRN/Registry for various hospitals/health care facilities that allowed me the time and resources I needed to establish my private practice. I established my business with the clear distinction that I would have two separate divisions of my practice, a clinical division, and a corporate division. This has allowed me to still practice within my clinical scope of expertise while also expanding my corporate practices beyond accent modification and presentation skills training.

For me, my business continues to grant me the ability to pursue my career passions with variety and balance. On the corporate side of my business, I have expanded my service offerings to include training individuals and organizations through leadership communication, executive presence coaching, and cultural and linguistic diversity consultation. On the clinical side, I am still able to serve a wide variety of patients/clients in-person, online, and on-site, and appreciate being able to tailor my service delivery in a manner that is most conducive to my clients. My time with the Corporate Speech Pathology Network (CORSPAN) on the Executive Board, as well as during my presidency, has allowed me the experience of managing a large organization and putting in the time and effort to plan and strategize for all aspects of a larger business. I find great reward in serving as an advisor to various organizations and as a mentor to SLPs and related professionals who are growing their private practices or other related businesses. What I appreciate most is that my business has allowed me to still pursue my creative outlets, my personal passions of helping others, and my distinct connection to people, languages, and cultural diversity, while allowing me the flexibility and balance I need for my family/friends and personal obligations.

I truly feel that the speech-language pathologist of today is well equipped to serve in a variety of roles, not only as a clinician, but also to help our communities and global society in non-traditional ways, and I look forward to continuing to support and promote our unique SLP Entrepreneur community. I have made many mistakes throughout my career, and I have no doubt that I will make more mistakes as I continue to pursue my passions and grow my business. However, I know that

I will continue to grow and sustain that outlook of perseverance and positivity to reach my desired outcomes. When I need that support and a reminder to reframe my thinking, I turn to my community, my network of professional colleagues on the clinical, corporate, and entrepreneurial side, and I turn to my family and friends for respite and reminders of why I am doing what I am doing.

HOW ADRIENNE AND SONIA MET

We met through a professional organization, The Corporate Speech Pathology Network (CORSPAN). Sonia was serving as president of the organization at the time, and Adrienne, although new to the organization, quickly became an active member. Adrienne had agreed to present to the group on telepractice basics and how one might incorporate that into their corporate speech pathology practice for CORSPAN's professional development lecture series. Sonia reached out and set up a call with Adrienne to prepare and coordinate scheduling for this presentation. The meeting started with the intended topic of talking about the telepractice presentation, but then led Adrienne and Sonia down a path that resulted in our collaborative partnership.

From that video conference call, we took our first steps into creating *The Communication Collective*, online classes for children and teens, focusing on public speaking, presentation skills, leadership communication, diversity training, and social-emotional learning. We quickly established our short-term plan, as well as our long-term vision, and welcomed our first cohort of students in a matter of months. As *The Communication Collective* blossomed, so did our business partnership, our familiarity with each other's personality, working style, and independent business pursuits, as well as our friendship, comradery, and support system of our collective business and each other's independent pursuits. As such, it was a natural fit for us to embark on the journey of our next collaborative project—this book, together.

WHY WE WROTE *THE SLP ENTREPRENEUR*

Through our various business endeavors, we have learned that there are so many opportunities for speech-language pathologists to not only build a private practice, but also to become entrepreneurs who are content creators, change-makers, visionaries, and the future of our profession. The skills required to build successful businesses are not currently taught in speech-language pathology graduate programs, yet the trajectory of SLPs wishing to pursue private practice or other related endeavors is continually growing. These vital skills are entrepreneurial elements that we learned through our own education, research, experience, and desire for more.

We wrote this book because we see the trajectory of our field changing, and we are living it as we speak. We cannot ignore the fact that during a worldwide pandemic in 2020, many SLPs realized that their “stable” jobs were not as stable as we all once believed. Yes, the future is still bright, but we have to take more control over it. The only way to do that is to carve out your own path, with multiple streams of income, which is sustainable for the long term. This book will inform you of steps you need to take, inspire you through success stories, and guide your transformation into a confident, skilled, and successful entrepreneur.

We decided to write this book as a guide for anything that you want to do, realizing that you are not limited. There is no “SLP box” that you have to fit into, and there is no ceiling to how high you can go! We know many SLPs who desire to get out of the daily grind of working for someone else. You’ve spent all of this money to go to school, get a degree, and work until retirement while pouring into other people’s lives. Most SLPs do not go to school to get a degree in business, so even if we want to start our own practice or another type of business, we usually don’t know where to begin. That’s how the SLP Entrepreneur was born. If you dream it, you can achieve it! This book will show you how to do just that.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

This book is not your traditional how-to manual. While we will include the steps for starting a traditional private practice, these same principles can be applied to other types of related business ventures. We will guide you through developing a business plan, which includes elements such as writing your mission and vision, identifying your target market, and making financial projections. To help you plan and transform your ideas and ambitions into reality, we have included tangible, functional resources and exercises that will enable you to work through creating the path that you would like your business to take, and see your vision come to life. Each chapter begins with an overview of what to expect in that chapter. Templates and worksheets are embedded throughout the chapters for you to write in as you read along. At the end of each chapter, there is a checklist of action items that you can complete related to the chapter. Finally, at the end of the book, we include a comprehensive list of resources that are relevant to the topics discussed throughout the book, as well as a glossary of key terms for you to refer back to for easy reference. Here is a Master Checklist that you can print or copy and complete as you read this book. This is a composed list of the end-of-chapter checklists in one easy reference. Let the journey begin!

MASTER CHECKLIST

- Create an Aspirational Canvas (Figure 1–1)
- Write SMART(ER) goals for your business
- Schedule an email to your future self
- Decide when, how, and what to start
- Write your mission, vision, and value proposition (Figure 2–2)
- Identify your primary and secondary target audiences (Figure 2–3)
- Determine your products and services
- Decide how you will deliver your products and services to your target audience
- Brainstorm some marketing strategies for your business
- Determine the costs of your business
- Identify your potential revenue sources
- Complete your Business Expenses Worksheet (Table 2–2)
- Complete your Revenue Goal Worksheet (Table 2–5)
- Identify potential referral sources in your network
- Complete your Regulatory-Administrative Considerations Checklist (Figure 2–5)
- Create your SLP Entrepreneur Business Model (Figure 2–7)
- Complete Speaking to Your Specific Audience Worksheet (Figure 3–1)
- Set self-care goals (Figure 3–7)
- Complete the Gratitude Challenge (Figure 3–8)
- Set priorities for your business this week (Figure 3–4)
- Determine what customers you will serve (Figure 4–2)
- Decide on your service delivery options
- Determine which payment sources you will accept
- Set your rates
- Write a letter to potential referral sources (e.g., physicians, schools)
- Determine your expenses
- Create your practice forms

- Complete your business model (Figure 4–11)
- Decide on revenue sources for your business
- Select a platform to sell your products or services
- Set SMARTER goals for your business
- Create your content
- Choose your business name
- Define your brand elements
- Complete the SWOT Analysis Template (Figure 6–2B)
- Determine your marketing expenses (Table 6–2)
- Create a marketing action plan
- Set your marketing objectives
- Choose your marketing channels
- Create your website (Figure 6–5)
- Create your social media profiles
- Select your email program
- Sign up to attend networking events (in person or online)
- Create your elevator pitch (may need different ones for different contexts/ events) (Figure 6–9)
- Complete your Profit and Loss Statement (Figure 7–1)
- Identify ways to establish systems in your business
- Determine what can be automated
- Decide whether you need to hire employees/contractors or outsource tasks
- Identify your leadership style (Figure 7–7)
- Update policies and contracts
- Contact us to share your success story

CHAPTER 1



Embarking on the Journey of Entrepreneurship *Getting Ready to Take the First Step*

In This Chapter

This chapter will help you make the decision about starting your own business. It will include the importance of having core foundational elements prior to embarking on this journey, such as strong clinical expertise and experience being a part of an organization.

Topics include:

- Setting Life Goals and Creating an Aspirational Canvas
- Setting Professional/Business Goals and Maintaining Measurable Expectations
- Factors to Consider When Embarking on the Journey of Entrepreneurship

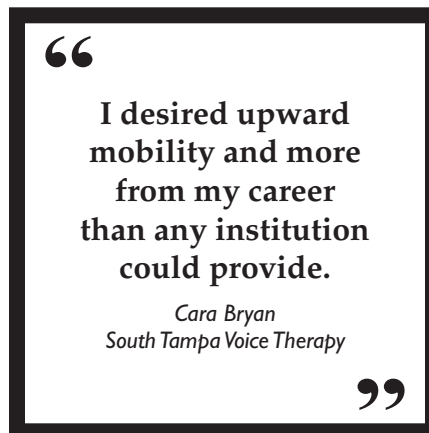
Congratulations on taking the first step toward transforming into an entrepreneur! You are not an ordinary entrepreneur; instead, you are embarking on your journey as a specially trained, skilled *SLP Entrepreneur*. We have put this resource guide together for you based on our own personal and professional experiences, as well as expert insight and perspectives from not only fellow SLP Entrepreneurs but also other related industry professionals. We hope that while you read and work through this resource, you will gain the basic foundational tools to establish and grow a business, whether that is a more conventional private practice, or another related business endeavor utilizing your SLP expertise. If you are already an established SLP Entrepreneur and you are reading this book, we hope that you find benefit in gaining resources and tools to revisit some of these foundational pieces of your already established business and find ways to help strengthen, expand, or enhance your current business processes and outcomes.

We thoughtfully labeled these chapters because we know that this chosen path of entrepreneurship is a continuous and very interconnected journey. Within this journey, you will find yourself: embarking on new perspectives, thoughts, and ideas; establishing new systems utilizing a foundational framework; and thinking as not just an SLP, but rather an SLP Entrepreneur. From that embarking, establishing, and thinking, with continued planning and strategizing, you will be building and venturing into new avenues of your professional skillset and expertise. With your new skillset and expertise, including marketing, networking, and branding, you will be transforming into an established and experienced entrepreneur, continuously looking and learning from others in your own network, as well as from a broader, less familiar community. As you look ahead at your future as an SLP Entrepreneur, you will soon recognize that this cycle is continuous and always interconnected. Embracing each facet of this journey with positivity, mindfulness, drive, tenacity, and balance will allow you continued growth and success in your personal and professional pursuits.

SETTING LIFE GOALS AND ASPIRATIONS

Many life coaches, psychotherapists, and spiritual leaders guide individuals to engage in visualization practice via the creation of a Vision Board, or as we like to refer to it, an “Aspirational Canvas.” Taking some time to reflect, review, and then revise your visions, goals, and desires for your life as a whole will help to keep you focused on the mission and vision of your business. Your Aspirational Canvas should be used as a reminder of what you are working toward, especially in moments when you are feeling overwhelmed. However, it should not only be a visual and tangible reminder of your ultimate goals but also a guide to executing some action steps to attain those goals. It can be reviewed and updated as time goes on. It can be made out of photos, quotes, or crafting materials, written as a journal, or written down on a board to visually represent your goals.

Initial evidence indicates that the components of the process of making a vision board/aspirational canvas can result in individuals more easily obtaining their success and goals, as it is a mechanism that allows an individual to self-reflect and become more aware of what they want and how they plan to go about getting it (Davis, 2021). Studies indicate that those who engage in some form of visualization of goals are more confident that they will attain those goals; however, there is a caveat. If you utilize a Vision Board or Aspirational Canvas and simply put images, quotes, and ideas of what you want without visual representations of certain tangible, productive steps to get those things, your board could potentially do more harm than good. It is essential that you not only put visual representations of your long-term goals and aspirations, but also be diligent about visually representing relevant activities that will help you eventually reach that aspirational level (Morin, 2021). Keep in mind that while creating an Aspirational Canvas can aid in overall well-being and success, it also needs to be realistic. It is vital to include tangible activities that you need to engage in to reach your goals. For example, if you simply put visual representations of luxurious travel destinations that you would like to visit, you also need to put a visual representation of the career path you will engage in to financially support those aspirational travel journeys. You may even extend to putting visualizations of you registering your business or acing that interview that will guide you closer to that career path and the subsequent financial gain, which finally gets you closer to your desired travel destinations. Your Aspirational Canvas should be seen as a tool to simply help you picture what you would like to manifest and how you envision *you making* that happen.



Look at the Aspirational Canvas template that we have provided for you in Figure 1–1. Take a bit of time, in an environment free from distractions, to self-reflect on what motivates you, what your values are, and what priorities you have in order to put visual representations in each category. Revisit this Aspirational Canvas from time to time and make note of priorities and goals that have been achieved and those that may have changed. Allow yourself to reflect and gain some self-awareness and

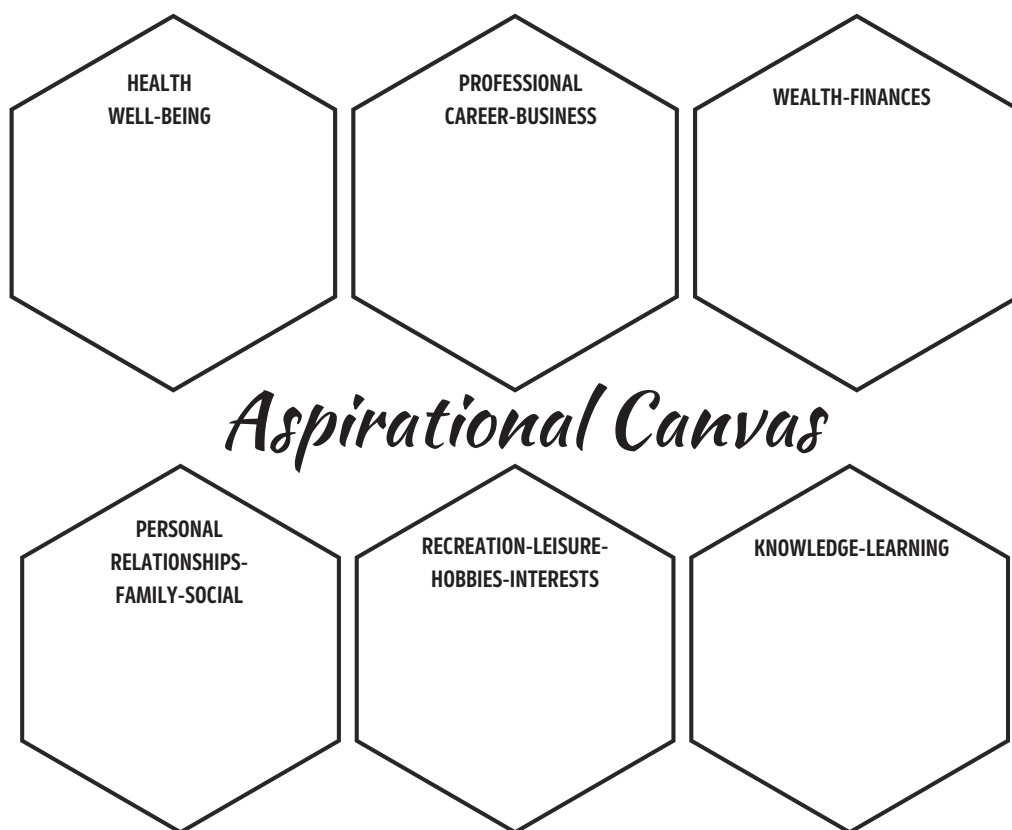


Figure 1–1. *Aspirational Canvas Template.*

ideas for revision as you revisit your board. Are your aspirations the same as they were when you first created your board? Did the steps you engaged in to reach your goals work, or did you navigate a different path to reach your ultimate goal? Remember to continue to revisit, reflect, and revise your board on a regular basis.

SETTING PROFESSIONAL BUSINESS GOALS AND MAINTAINING MEASURABLE EXPECTATIONS

Now that you have had time to reflect on some of your overarching life goals and aspirations, let's talk a bit about creating some shorter-term goals or aspirations in the same way that we do as clinicians creating a plan for the individuals we serve. You are a pro at establishing goals and knowing how to measure and modify goals with your clients every day in your clinical practice. We know that when establishing goals, we want to target a specific objective, in a specific context, with a specific amount of scaffolding or support if needed, and we want to make it measurable,

either by time or by percentage achieved. In the same way that we create *SMART* [Specific Measurable Attainable Relevant Timely] goals or *SMART(ER)* [Evaluated and Revised] goals for our clients, we want you to set some goals for yourself and your business endeavors. Whether these are short-term goals specific to one area of your business framework, which is discussed in Chapter 2, or more specifically related to private practice in Chapter 4, these can be benchmarks for any length of time and for any area of your business/professional development that you determine. You can choose any number of skills, tasks, or performance goals that will make you a better entrepreneur, a better clinician, a better advocate, a better keynote speaker, a better content creator, a better marketer, a better networker, a better work-life balanced small business owner . . . you get the idea.

“

**Set goals, strategies, and
know your capabilities.
Keep asking the tough
questions about where you
want to go and whether the
path that you are following
will take you there.**

*Allison Geller
Connected Speech Pathology*”

Create your goals so they are specific, measurable, attainable or actionable, relevant to whatever it is you are trying to achieve, and timely. Then you want to make sure that you're not just creating *SMART* goals, but you're creating *SMARTER* goals indicating you're going back and evaluating your goals and then based on that evaluation, you are revisiting and revising those goals (Harris, n.d.). Take a look at the following sample *SMART(ER)* goals that we have highlighted for some of the various areas related to SLP Entrepreneurship.

We will talk a little bit more about your growth mindset in Chapter 3, but as you go through this journey of entrepreneurship, you should recognize that there will definitely be a learning curve. The large majority of us did not go to school for this area of business expertise, and even people that may have complementary degrees in business, in addition to their speech-language pathology expertise, still learn something new about the ever-changing landscape of engaging in business pursuits every day. You will grow as an individual, you will grow as a professional, and yes, you will grow as an entrepreneur. With the right framework, planning, intention, skill-building, confidence, executive presence, and execution, you will succeed, although you are also guaranteed to have moments of “failure.” It is important to know that you will experience “failures” or “setbacks” at some, often many, points along your journey. Knowing that beforehand is essential to maintaining

Sample SMART(ER) Goals

Specific Measurable Attainable Relevant Timely (Evaluated and Revised)

- **Marketing**—By (specific date/month) I will host a 1-hour complimentary virtual webinar for parents on bilingual Spanish–English speech and language development to increase my exposure for my target market in my local community, including a feedback form and special offer for my language enrichment summer camp.
- **Social Media**—On the first Saturday of every month, I will curate or create social media posts for a month's worth of weekly posts and schedule when to post to my Facebook and Instagram pages.
- **Network**—I will attend a virtual monthly local Women's Networking group sponsored by my local SCORE and connect with at least one new contact outside of the networking session each month.
- **Client Volume/Service**—We will add a 6-session/ 50-minute weekly summer reading enrichment group to our regular schedule that will offer 2 scheduling options for enrollment of 16 to 20 students (8 to 10 each session) with at least \$2,500 in revenue after subtracting all costs.
- **Skill Development**—Within one calendar year after connecting with other SLP colleagues working as corporate SLPs, and completing continuing education related to accent modification and presentation skills training, I will add at least two corporate speech pathology clients each quarter.

appropriate expectations. Knowing that, yes, “failures” are inevitable, however, each “failure” is truly not a failure in itself, as it can be used as a tool and an impetus to reimagine, renovate, or repurpose your vision, strategy, or execution. Know that this will not be a smooth ride all the way through and that you will hit bumps, face obstacles, miss hurdles, and be challenged. However, you will learn from all of these experiences and get back up if you fall, reach eventual success, and persevere through this journey. Setting some goals not only will help to keep you on track, but will also help determine what your priorities are in terms of your business plan