

THE SUCCESSFUL **INTERIOR DESIGNER'S** **GUIDE**



THE **5 SIMPLE**
WORDS THAT
WILL MAKE YOUR
BUSINESS **BLOSSOM**

marie-gon ●

HI INTERIOR DESIGN PROFESSIONAL!

DOES THE FOLLOWING SOUND LIKE YOU?

You love nothing more than helping people with their homes, and that is your strength. You are creative, have an eye for detail, and are a real people manager. You are sincere and would prefer to help everyone.

But, you also have to be an entrepreneur, and that is sometimes quite tough. Entrepreneurship is just plain hard work. You know that better than anyone. You're not afraid of hard work, and you like to get things done. You often work yourself into a frenzy to get everything just right.

But, sometimes it feels like you're just surviving. You have trouble finding clients, you feel insecure about your prices, and you can't seem to grow your business. That's a real shame because your talent is so valuable.

I help interior professionals build successful businesses, and I show them how it can be done differently.

I believe that successful entrepreneurship starts with a simple, solid basis. Consider this a motivational speech from an expert – from someone who themselves stumbled into all sorts of pitfalls and made mistakes before her interior design business became a success.

ENTREPRENEURSHIP IS JUST PLAIN HARD WORK

The downside of being a self-employed interior designer is that you simultaneously have to be an entrepreneur as well, and everything that comes with it: administration, tax matters, purchasing, updates, and your website. It all has little to do with your profession or your creativity, but sticking your head in the sand won't help.

These are tasks that you might not know how to handle or that you're not good at. Or maybe you just don't feel like doing them. Your website texts actually need to be sharper, your social media posts clearer, and your network more extensive. Having these kinds of things in order makes the difference between profit and loss, success and struggling.

WHAT I WANT TO TELL YOU ACTUALLY FITS ON ONE PAGE

However, I love to make it a little more detailed, so the examples can inspire you. I would love to help you. That's why I'm sharing with you what has worked well for me in the past (more than) 25 years as an entrepreneur in the interior design industry.

I am going to give you five words that will make the difference for you.

Although this manifesto could fit on one page, I want these five words to really resonate with you so that you understand exactly what I mean by them. Take the time to give these words a place in your own business, your own life, and your own mindset.

THESE WORDS HAVE SET ME ON AN AMAZING CAREER PATH

It has been a pretty winding path, and it was not always so smooth. I sometimes took a detour that turned out to be a dead end. I regularly had to go back to the drawing board because the idea I had in my head didn't work. I came up with several ideas that cost me a lot of time, energy, and money but never reached the finish line.

People only see your successes, but entrepreneurship includes the courage to make mistakes. Start there, by allowing yourself to fail. Maybe you feel like you've done nothing but fail in your business so far. It's not too late! Downloading this manifesto is then your first smart move. It means you realize that something needs to happen to truly make your interior design business a great success. From now on you'll be able to find the nicest clients and will also earn a good income.

I hope you get some encouragement from this manifesto. I know you really want to get started to make your interior design business better, more productive, and more efficient. I'd love to give you more insights and ideas – subscribe now to my weekly inspiration emails for that.

Read on if at least one of the following statements applies to you:

- I need to profile myself much stronger and clearer within the interior design world.
- I want to earn a good income so that I will always be financially independent.
- I want to quit my job on the side in the short term so that I can focus better.
- I only want to work with clients who also make me happy.
- I want to be able to work much more efficiently, so that I have more time and money left over.
- I want to make smarter choices to improve my work/life balance.
- I don't want turnover; I want profit.

We could set up a 20 minute session to explore what it is that you need the most at this moment. In the session, we will briefly examine your business and I will see what you need to improve. And if you're interested in being coached to actually achieve that improvement and increase your profits, we can discuss that possibility.

Now, back to the five magic words of your success. Write these words on a post-it note and stick it on your mirror. Or, if such a simple note is beneath you, create a beautiful mood board with these words. I'm curious to know what gets you into action mode. Please let me know!

Lots of love,

Marie-Gon





STEAL

STEALING IS TIMELESS

Even in antiquity there was a lot of enthusiastic stealing. Ideas are not only particularly easy to steal but people have to steal them because with mankind's extensive history it is difficult to be truly original anymore. Everything has been thought of before. And now in this era of AI, you sometimes can't even tell the difference between what is real and what is just imagination. So, there are plenty of beautiful ideas out there to 'steal'!

Stealing starts with being alert, looking around you, listening, and using all your senses. Even smelling something can inspire you and give you an idea. Inspiration is in the air, all around you: find it!

IMPORTANT NOTE:

Stealing is not the same as copying. Copying is making a duplicate of an original. We are not going to do that as that is beneath our dignity. Don't literally re-use texts from other websites. Don't make the same Instagram posts as another designer. You should only steal the 'feel' of the idea and work it out in your own way. **Be an original.**

Of course, you would never stoop to imitating a colleague. But you can be inspired by the websites of fellow designers. Scroll through their social media posts and follow the people you admire. What do they do and how would you do that? What elements appeal to you? Put your creative brain to work and make something that suits you and your interior business.

WHAT CAN I STEAL THEN?

I always like to look at what's happening in other industries. An advertisement from a restaurant, a good idea from a beauty salon, or a local promotion at the grocery store.

What is successful? What is likeable?

What do they use to attract people like a magnet?

Why is there always such a demand for designer brands like Gucci, Louis Vuitton or Prada?

What makes your favorite brands popular?

Why do people line up at one place for donuts or ice cream and not at the other? Why do you have to book a month in advance at one restaurant but can you just walk in at the other?

Make new combinations of ideas or give a promotional idea your own twist. If supermarkets or shoe stores can successfully attract people by offering '2 for 1', how could you translate that to your own business?

"If you let me design your interior, I'll do a free quick scan for your friend." I'm making this example up right now, this temporary promotion, but I would steal this idea if I were you. ;-)
I'll come up with another one: "If I get to design your living room, I'll also create a design for your bedroom." Of course, this is also a temporary promotion. Or it could be only valid for the first five registrations.

BRILLIANT IDEAS CONCEIVED BY OTHERS

You may sometimes think, "Ooh, what a good idea. I wish I had thought of that." You certainly shouldn't just copy blindly, but you can always use one good idea to get to another (perhaps even better) idea. How? For example, by creating a word web. Put a theme word in the middle of a piece of paper and write all the words you immediately think of around it. What subsequent words can you think of for each word? This is how you engage your creative brain and constantly discover a new angle. Inspiration has many disguises.

Look for successful marketing campaigns and gimmicks in your everyday life. 'Collect all 6' or 'Comes with a free gift' are classic examples. In my word web for these kinds of promotions, words like free, loyalty, collecting, and wanting more come up.

Can you think of something with these words that you can incorporate into what you offer? How can you attract potential clients and ensure that they want more? What can your client collect from you? Can you provide free tips in your inspiration emails? And if you turn it around - what can they provide in exchange? What do you think of a loyalty card? With every WhatsApp message or email with a question, you put a virtual 'stamp' on it. See? If you really start brainstorming, surprising ideas will emerge.

STOLEN, NOT COPIED

Offering a booklet with interior design tips that visitors to your website can download for free is nothing new. But am I copying someone by using that? No. Because the content is mine, the graphics were created by my [designer](#), and here and there my sentences have been polished by the [word artist](#) I enjoy working with. Together we make something original

You can steal this idea again, too. Be my guest! Create a mini-booklet about your expertise. For example, make one about how to turn a windowsill into the coolest display on the street. Or how to furnish your house in such a way that you save on your energy bill. Or provide tips on how you can help companies get their employees back to the office. If people can download this booklet for free or for a small fee from your website, a fan club is created – your fan club.

Steal away, but stay true to yourself. Consider what your ideal clients need and respond to that. This is how you attract the nicest clients and forge a bond with them. Success guaranteed.

ASK

PEOPLE LOVE NOTHING MORE THAN **HELPING OTHER PEOPLE**

Really. Because that gives them an extremely good feeling. Helping others is good for your ego. So, feel free to ask for help. You'll be doing someone a favor by giving them the chance to help you. Pride will only slow the growth of your business. You have to trust yourself, but also others.

ASK FOR HELP WITH...

...creating or improving your website. Maybe there's someone in your network who is very handy with this, so you don't have to spend evenings fiddling with a mediocre website. Or do you know someone who is great with words who can elevate your website texts so that your ideal clients respond to you much faster.

...making connections. You've probably heard that you can reach anyone in the world with six handshakes. Even Brad Pitt, Barack Obama, or Madonna. Amazing, right? Just imagine, with one or two handshakes you're probably already reaching the right person. Get introduced and see what happens.

...your administration, your content creation, your branding. Are you not good at it or not handy with it? Think about who can help you with that. And look beyond your immediate circle. Mention it to the hairdresser, tell people about it at a party, at the gym, and ask around at your kid's school. Here too, you'll reach the right person in just a few handshakes.

Ask and you will be pleasantly surprised by the helpfulness of people and by the time, energy, and even money they want to invest in you. People will help you because they believe in you. They believe in your idea and they know you can make it happen.

AND WHAT CAN YOU DO FOR THEM IN RETURN?

Let's turn it around for a moment. Who can you offer your help to? Who do you see struggling with a problem you know the solution to? Who can use your ideas, time, or energy? That's where opportunities lie too.

Offer to help someone in the industry, especially if you have the time for it. It's very valuable for the other person and you will almost certainly come into contact with new people. These are valuable contacts that you would never gain simply by scrolling through social media for hours.

A supplier once asked me to brainstorm with one of his clients. I jumped in the car and drove there. That client is now also my client, and one of my favorites. Every year in January, I go to Florida with him to visit a trade show that specializes in tropical plants. Not only is it amazing to meet his clients in the US, it's also nice to catch some sun rays in the winter.

SEIZE

I'LL DARE TO SAY IT: **EVERYONE GETS OPPORTUNITIES**

I also dare to say that many interior designers are too quick to adopt a “yes, but...” attitude. I really hear it too much around me.

Yes, but... in my area there are no clients.

Yes, but... my clients don't want that.

Yes, but... my clients don't pay for my advice.

Yes, but... who even reads my blog?

Yes, but... it's easy for you because you are already successful.

The reason something doesn't get off the ground properly usually isn't due to the circumstances. It's not about where you live, it's not about your client, and it's usually not even about your client's budget. It's about you.

LOOKING FOR YOUR 'BLISS POINT'

Let me state this with slightly more nuance: you simply haven't yet found the unique, successful combination of the specific services you are offering and the clients who need them. It's a matter of the right lid for the right pot. It pays to ponder this question. Make time for a deep dive, brainstorm with others, or deliberately isolate yourself to clear your thoughts.

Maybe you are attracting clients who need what you are offering, but they are not the clients you enjoy working with. Don't rush things. You may have to adjust what you are offering and how so that other people come your way.

If you can clearly describe what you can help people with in a persuasive way, you have taken a huge step. Then it suddenly becomes crystal clear how you can reach your ideal client.

SEIZE THE OPPORTUNITIES

So, why is "seize" the magic word in all of this? Because your success, your opportunities, are probably already right under your nose. You don't see them because you're not looking. I always say: everyone encounters opportunities, but you have to recognize them as such. Sometimes they are disguised as something scary and you find it too terrifying to try.

I went to the Chamber of Commerce on January 1, 2000, to register myself as an Interior Stylist. I still think it's a magical date. I didn't have any clients yet, no network, and hardly any experience; I was also paying my mortgage on my own – not really a good basis for leaving paid employment. The only thing I knew was that it would be incredibly cool to be able to call myself an independent interior stylist.

In the photo studio of my very first photo styling shoot, I picked up all the Polaroids - it was in the analog photography era - that the photographer dropped on the floor, even the failed ones. Since I didn't have a portfolio yet, I literally scraped those together. I stuck them on large, thick sheets of cardboard so that at least the size of my portfolio would make an impression. Sometimes you have to make things literally bigger.

SUCCESS DOESN'T COME TO ANYONE BY ITSELF.

With my handiwork, I went 'door to door'. If anyone tells me that everything just fell into my lap, I immediately get defensive. Yes, it was a different time with different kinds of opportunities, but it certainly wasn't easy. What I have always done and still do is look for opportunities and seize them.

When I had just started, I received a phone call from an old friend. She worked on the editorial staff of a very popular magazine about home design. They were looking for a new columnist; was that perhaps something for me?

WHAT HAPPENS IF I SAY 'YES'?

I wasn't a columnist and I hadn't done much writing except for essays in school. Did I see myself as a serious contributor to this beautiful magazine? My heart started beating faster; it was scary. Did I say yes? Of course! Because it was an opportunity.

I wrote about twenty columns for this magazine. A few years later, I worked at that editorial office again to replace someone on maternity leave. It was a dream job. Following that, I created productions for a DIY magazine. Later, I worked as a stylist for a number of TV programs and for over ten years I was the art director of the biggest interior design show in Amsterdam. All of this can be traced back to that one 'yes', a long time ago. Even though I found it scary, I did it anyway, which connects nicely to my next chapter.

COURAGE

ENTREPRENEURSHIP IS TERRIBLY SCARY AT TIMES

I'm happy to reveal to you that this is still regularly the case for me too. That really doesn't go away over time. Investing in something, approaching someone you look up to, changing course and saying goodbye to existing clients – these are all decisions that you as an entrepreneur have to make now and then to help your business move forward. It's necessary in order to be more successful and to increase your income.

There are no courses that make you suddenly courageous. You can train yourself to be more courageous though, simply by starting with small challenges.

The chance is small that your interior design project will immediately grace the cover of Elle Decor. However, writing a monthly blog for an online magazine or a regional newspaper might be possible.

KEEP STRETCHING YOURSELF

Keep stretching yourself; it makes you more flexible. You'll grow as a person and as an entrepreneur, so your rates will grow with you. When you are first starting out as a designer, your rates are still modest. (If not, then you can skip this chapter with peace of mind.) There comes a moment when you think: "Hmmm. I've gained experience, my skills have improved considerably, and my clients are happy. I'm ready for the next level." The next level also includes higher rates. That's only normal, and yet it can still be daunting.

I recognize this reluctance. Stretching is scary but it takes you further. And every time the stretch is over, you can stretch again.

YOU WILL ALWAYS NEED COURAGE.

Maybe you want to change course and have to say goodbye to your existing lovely clients. That also takes courage because you could choose to leave everything as it is. Perhaps you know that you will really progress by working with a good coach. Then you need the courage to invest in yourself. Maybe you even need to borrow money from someone to make this investment. You have to dare to do that too. But as an entrepreneur you know one thing for sure: investments often pay you back. Double, triple, and most of the time more.

Most of the decisions we routinely make on a daily basis are not particularly scary. It only becomes stressful when a choice will fundamentally change something. You know it could turn out well, but who can guarantee that your investment of time, energy, or money will achieve your dream goal?

No one.

I have been at such a point several times. And one thing I do know: if I hadn't jumped, I wouldn't be where I am now.

Waiting until you dare to make a choice is pointless. That moment will not come. Never. The “**yes, but**” and “**what if**” voices keep racing through your head. Deal with it – you can perfectly trust your intuition. Just think about it: when have you ever made such a terrible choice that it ruined your life?

Well then.



DO

AS FAR AS I'M CONCERNED, **THIS IS**
THE **MOST IMPORTANT** ONE

Just DO it. Hmmm, reminds me of a very famous brand.... Easier said than done?
By staying on your couch, the assignments won't come to you. Success doesn't just happen to you.

“But I already work so hard.”

That could be absolutely true. I believe you. But are you doing the right things? Designing your flyer or business card on Canva can be quite hard work, but that doesn't immediately put a client in front of you.

Scrolling through your timeline to see how successful other interior designers are also yields very little. It might even reduce your courage because they do seem to be very busy and have the coolest projects.

Spending hours tweaking your website to try out all the fonts, colors, and font sizes is also a way to fill your hours. This is time that you could use much more efficiently with actions that do yield results.

TAKE A CRITICAL LOOK AT HOW YOU SPEND YOUR TIME.

Understand me correctly: these are things that also need to happen, but you need a different kind of action to become more successful. Make a list of actions you can take to change something, to get new clients, and to connect with the right people. Such a list will quickly be longer than you expect.

Get creative! You are already very creative in your profession, so you naturally have that talent. Use it optimally, extend that creativity to your entire business, and don't just use it in your projects.

BUT HOW THEN?

“What actions can I put on my list?” I hear you thinking.

An action is primarily taking an initiative. For example, initiate a collaboration with a company or a person who will give you the right exposure. Do you need to take action because you don't have enough clients? Then think about where work might lie for you. Where does your ideal client go?

- Does your ideal client go to a beautiful home decor store? Can you think of something that would make the owner of that store very happy? Could you initiate an activity that attracts people to their store? Could you give a lecture on how to make an interior more personal? Could you lead an interactive workshop where you let the client create a mood board with the store's samples? Store owner happy, client happy, and all contacts made.
- Does your ideal client read certain magazines? Watch TV shows about restyling homes? How do you get into them? Start with the colophon, so you know who to approach at the editorial office. Do you have something interesting to report, have you done something special, or are you going to do something innovative? Editorial teams love everything that is spontaneously submitted to them. It's a big job every month to fill all the pages. Of course, they don't just publish everything blindly, but if your contribution fits the format of their magazine, the time of year, and the reader, you have a good chance of getting into the magazine.
- Does your ideal client visit specific trade shows? Can you somehow help the trade fair organization or the exhibitors before or during the fair? Can you provide visitors with advice about their interiors? Don't get me wrong: working for nothing is different from investing time and energy somewhere. I am against free and non-committal work and I even wrote an [interesting blog](#) about it. But I know plenty of interior design colleagues who landed the most beautiful projects because they dared to invest their time somewhere.

→ Expand your network by making it a daily routine to invite 10 people to follow you on LinkedIn, Instagram, or wherever you prefer to be active. Introduce yourself personally and get in touch with people you might be able to collaborate with later.

DO AND PERSEVERE

These examples will surely inspire you to come up with your own actions. And doing also includes persevering because it really isn't always an immediate resounding success.

With everything you've read so far, are you thinking: "That's just not for me"? Then seriously ask yourself if entrepreneurship is really for you. Maybe you would secretly prefer to just design. It's nice not to have to deal with peripheral matters and perhaps not even with the clients. Then you are the designer many agencies are looking for. At an agency you have little stress, a fixed income, and you can do what you are good at all day long.

But didn't you become an entrepreneur precisely because you wanted freedom? Because you want to be in the driver's seat yourself and be flexible with your hours?

THEN DON'T GIVE UP!

Never give up. Start living according to the 5 words I have given you in this manifesto. They may seem like just words, but in fact, they form the mindset of a successful entrepreneur.

"I DON'T BELIEVE IN COINCIDENCE AND DUMB LUCK. I BELIEVE IN MAKING THE MOST OUT OF EVERY OPPORTUNITY!"

Marie-Gon



Elsbeth Geldhof

MARIE-GON TAUGHT ME TO THINK LIKE AN ENTREPRENEUR

As a conservator of historic interiors, I have been working at the intersection of architecture and interior design for 20 years. I specialize primarily in paint and decorative finishes in interiors, mostly in listed buildings and protected interiors.

My American husband and I lived in Europe for many years, but four years ago we moved to the United States. This seemed like a good time for me to get the idea of my library off the ground. I joined Marie-Gon's platform Inside to learn more about how designers think and work. I am not a designer. I also don't work for private clients very often. Yet, I chose Marie-Gon. It quickly became clear to me that she was the right coach for me. Her level of thinking is so fast, it's rare

When I told her about the idea for the historical materials library, she immediately knew what I was talking about and where I wanted to go. She had all sorts of ideas about what I could do. "If you want to, of course," she added. She thinks so quickly, is so experienced and well-rounded. That's rare. I knew immediately that she could help me establish this institution properly. And that is proving to be the case, because we are now almost at the end of the coaching program and I am at a completely different level with my idea. Her coaching has accelerated and deepened the process, and I am much more confident about it.

This historical materials library is not a product that I am going to sell; it belongs to all of us. But how do you make something like that financially viable? I am a conservator, I come from the non-profit world, I work for the public interest. Learning to think like an entrepreneur is also something Marie-Gon has helped me with enormously.

If you want to achieve something, to establish something, even if you don't yet know exactly what, then Marie-Gon is the right person to help you discover what that is and how to realize it. It was an investment, but honestly, I had forgotten about that after two minutes. My idea quickly became such a clear plan that it was worth every penny.

elsbethgeldhof.com

**Yvette Steward****MARIE-GON IS MY SAFE BASE.**

I owe her a lot. She gives me the confidence that I can do it. Occasionally, I still book a sparring session with her because I like to hear her perspective on things from time to time. She is bold and has a great understanding of color and layout.

Considerable drive It might be a somewhat unusual choice to work with a coach right from the start of your business, but it has worked out excellently for me. Actually, everyone should do it that way! You do need to have a considerable drive, because it's demanding. I also found it nerve-wracking to make such an investment when I had no income yet. I was doing everything at once: working, taking a course, and being coached. But I haven't regretted it for a second. Because much of what I learned from Marie-Gon, especially about entrepreneurship, I would have had to figure out all by myself without her. You don't get that in the training.

Flying start

Marie-Gon is always there for you and has a great network. She is a connector. If you really want to go for it, then I recommend starting your business directly with her by your side. She gave me a clear roadmap and is always willing to brainstorm. That does wonders for my self-confidence.

I believe in visualizing, in dreaming big, and then working incredibly hard for it. Because it is hard work, you know, I have very little free time. Nothing comes easy in this profession, not even when you start working with Marie-Gon. Her warmth, her sincerity: it's very nice to have someone like that to lean on. I wish everyone had a Marie-Gon. yvettesteward.nl



Katrien Goossens

TO WORK WITH MARIE-GON AS MY COACH IS A WONDERFUL GIFT

I originally come from a small Flemish village. Via Ireland, I ended up in London, where for the past 20 years I've been managing communications for government construction projects. In that job, I gained a lot of practical knowledge about steering projects 'on time' and 'on budget'. I had been playing with the idea for a while of combining this knowledge with my interior design studies to start my own business. To create more freedom around where and when I work. But yes, who do I know in London, and how good am I?

I was a bit insecure and was looking for a European mentor to expand my knowledge. I found Marie-Gon via Instagram. After 23 years as an expat in English-speaking countries, I find it a wonderful gift to have Marie-Gon as my coach. Moreover, Marie-Gon is a top professional in the industry.

She is a mentor in the true sense of the word: generous with her advice, patient, wise, and very easy to talk to. Experts are sometimes afraid to share knowledge for fear that students will overshadow them. Not Marie-Gon. She genuinely enjoys the forward leaps her 'mentees' make. She has made me realize that I really can do this.

Out of the corporate treadmill I have always had an affinity for interiors, culture, and art. I have also renovated my own properties. That inspired others to ask me for help – an Irish friend building a house on the coast. That's when I started to realize: this is how I can get out of the corporate treadmill.

Although I initially found it a scary idea to present myself as an interior designer in London, I have now started my company, Atelier KTJ, thanks to Marie-Gon's 'vote of confidence'.

I knew immediately that I wanted to work with Marie-Gon, even though I had to take on extra work to pay for it. She sees my strengths and patiently guides me in a direction I didn't see myself. I can ask her for advice on anything. Prices, products, layout of my website: everything. If something is going poorly, she intuitively picks up on it and I receive an email to encourage me.

I now have beautiful projects in my portfolio, with excellent testimonials. I consistently receive assignments through word-of-mouth, and I just recently completed one for an art gallery in the heart of London. I'm happy! [Atelierktj.com](https://www.atelierktj.com)

I AM SO HAPPY THAT YOU HAVE **READ** **THIS WHOLE GUIDE**

Now is the time to get to work because just reading and then getting caught up in the daily grind again won't bring about any change for you. What will you tackle first? **Stealing**? Looking around you to see what others are successful with and figuring out how you can put your own spin on it?

Or will you **ask** for help? Maybe first you will ask people you feel safe with and then perhaps strangers? I am sure it will surprise you! What will you **pick up**? What treasure is lying at your feet waiting for you to bend down and find it?

Will you push the limits of your **courage**? Will you stretch yourself and dare to do something you haven't done before? Or will you immediately go into action mode? Yes! I'm on the sidelines cheering you on. **Doing** is the most powerful verb there is.

Go for it!



Let me inspire you more, with my weekly inspiration letter full of fresh insight, and helpful tips. Just click [here](#).

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