

Apprenticeship Series

# Chris the Welder



by Diana White





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# Chris the Welder

by Diana White

Chris always worked hard on his family`s farm, from typical chores growing up to more adult work as he got a little older. Fixing the farm equipment was one of his favourite jobs and he seemed to have a real knack for it. He`d have been happy to fill the day doing welding repairs and nothing else but because it was a farm there were many different jobs to be done and there were some jobs that he could have lived without.



After Chris graduated from high school, in order to learn more about welding and different techniques, he enrolled in a welder-fitter course at Conestoga College. This was very beneficial as it teaches welding basics including power voltages, metals, consumables, and reading and interpreting blueprints and welding symbols. Equally as important, you learn all about safety, personal protective equipment, and safety precautions. He was confident that this course would aid in any future endeavors.



Welding is joining metal pieces or parts together by heating the surfaces to the point of melting using a blowtorch, electric arc, or other means, and uniting them by pressing, hammering, etc... There are several different types of welding techniques but the main three of the most common are Arc, MIG (Metal, Inert Gas) or GMAW (Gas, Metal Arc Welding), and TIG (Tungsten Inert Gas) welding.

After working different jobs within the welding field you learn which type of welding process works best for different jobs.





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With his family having a successful farm the expectation, for both Chris and his family, was that this is where Chris would work. It seemed to make perfect sense for a while. Then after some differences of opinion caused some family friction, Chris began considering leaving the farm and the job that he knew so well. He moved out shortly after that and was no longer working on his family`s farm.



When he was first out on his own Chris kept busy by doing equipment repairs at other farms in the area. Being a tight-knit community others knew of Chris`s abilities and this kept him quite busy every day which provided him with enough income to survive. There was always some broken down farm equipment in need of repair, especially in an area with several farms.



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Quickly realizing that he was more than capable of fending for himself with his skills, Chris began considering starting his own business. He knew that he would have to do a lot of research before making any decisions but felt this was a good time to start so he learned all that he could about starting a business and proceeded with the idea.

It was both exciting and terrifying!

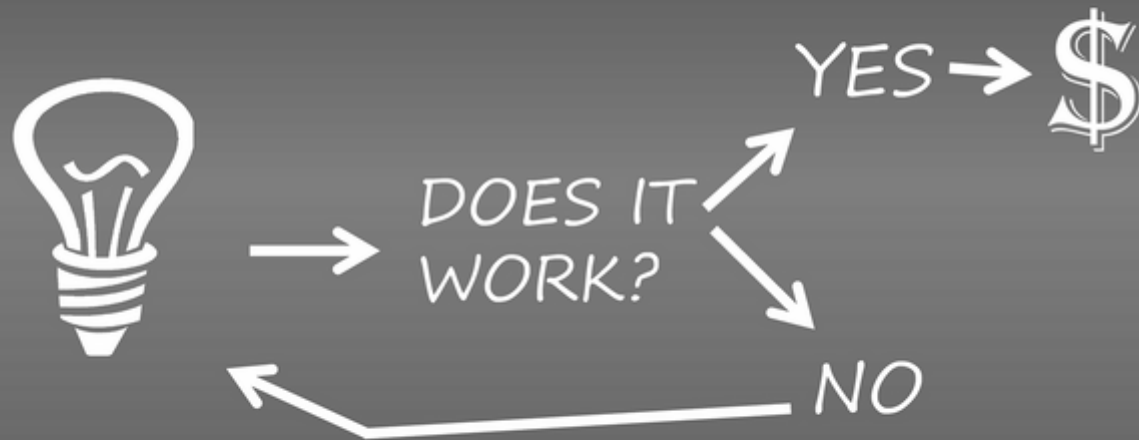


The first thing Chris had to do was create a business plan, which is a written tool that describes your company, the products or services being offered and a projection of the next few years, outlining the path you expect your business to take in order to make money. A business plan is necessary no matter what type of business you are starting.

Most companies need financial help to get up and running so a well thought out business plan is extremely important if you want a bank to consider loaning you money. The bank has to believe that your company will make the money necessary to cover all of your expenses as well as pay them back any money they have loaned you.



# Business Plan



Chris then had to select a name for his new business and check to make sure it wasn't already taken. The next step was to register the business name as well the business itself with the government.

Once all of that was complete, he had to apply for business permits and licenses needed for his new on-site welding company, Townsline Industries. He chose the name of the company from a nickname he was given as a child by his brothers` friends.



With the legal details behind him, Chris was then able to find the perfect spot to set up his workshop. It was in a central location and was suitable for small to medium size welding jobs. Although most jobs would be done `on-site` (wherever needed) there would be some jobs brought into the shop. His workshop had enough room for two company trucks as well as the perfect spot for a metal cage outside of the garage to secure gas-filled tanks necessary for different welding situations.



The most important equipment of all is the company trucks as they bring the welding equipment wherever it`s needed!

What is included on the truck:

- Welder
- Oxygen-acetylene tanks (torches)
- Grinders and assorted discs for grinder
- Assortment of large hand tools
- Ladders
- Tape measures
- Levels
- Welding helmets
- Hard hats
- High visibly vests/coats
- Gloves
- Harness for heights
- Fire extinguisher
- Welding blankets

These trucks are like welding shops on wheels so it is very important that when you are done using something from the truck it is returned to its place so that everything is available next time the truck goes out!



It is also extremely important to remember to have your certificate documentation available to show to inspectors at job sites when asked. You and your employees must have the proper 'tickets' to work on certain jobs. This ensures that trained, qualified welders are handling the work.

Most companies will only hire a welding company that has been certified by the Canadian Welding Bureau (CWB).

The CWB requires three key things be in place:

1. Welding must be done by competent, qualified individuals
2. Welding operations must be overseen by competent, qualified individuals
3. Welding must follow proven, qualified welding procedures

If any of these three elements are not in place, the risk of welding quality issues - and therefore the risk to public safety - greatly increases.

Companies not certified by the CWB will have far less work opportunities.





As with many new businesses, Townsline Industries was a little slow getting started. Chris still worked doing repairs on farm equipment and due to his solid reputation from that work was hired to fix heavy equipment at a local gravel pit. His customer list was slowly growing as he was building a solid reputation doing quality work at a fair price.

Once Chris could afford to, he had his company trucks detailed with his company information, which included the company name, phone number and some services offered. His hope was that this would be traveling advertising...like a billboard on wheels! He learned soon enough though that there is no better advertising than doing a great job and having others recommend your services. He began receiving more and more calls from different companies that had heard of him through his satisfied customers.



Chris thought success would happen much quicker than it did and there were times that he was very discouraged. There were even times he wondered if he had made the right decision. Many nights he laid awake worrying if there was enough work coming in to cover all of his work expenses – rental space, equipment rentals, vehicle costs, certification requirements, employees, just to name a few. These expenses are considered fixed expenses which are those that cannot be easily changed and are due on a regular basis.

Chris did everything he could to keep his other expenses down. These are considered variable expenses which can be kept lower if everything runs smoothly. His personal expenses became secondary. If he had to survive on boxed macaroni and cheese and/or bologna, then that is what he would do.



After a handful of years things started picking up for Chris's small business. By this time, he had several regular customers as well as a few long-term contracts for regular repair and maintenance of equipment for some local companies. This gave him some steady income that he could count on while leaving plenty of time to pick up other jobs.



Up to this point Chris had hired employees as needed because some jobs required more than one person. When the business started getting busier, some of the jobs for which he was hired were far more complex than most of the work he had been doing. Chris knew it was now time to find some more permanent, quality employees. He hired a younger welder who had recently completed a welding apprenticeship and an older, experienced welder who had worked in the field for several years. It was a great fit for the three of them. They worked well together and were able to learn from each other. They were a real team.





Chris still owns Townslin Industries and has had an exciting couple of years. Chris and his crew have been hired to do all kinds of different welding jobs at several different locations, including some sites over an hour away. His phone is always ringing with new opportunities for him and his crew. They all claim it is a great place to work as a welder because there is so much variety. Many welding jobs are in a large shop where you are contained to a certain area and area specific tasks.



When asked what the worst part of this experience has been Chris shared it was the sleepless nights and the uncertainty. When asked what the best part of this experience has been Chris said it was definitely finding great employees, who he now considers friends, to share in his success.



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