



BUILDING OUTSTANDING
KNIVES IS CRUCIAL BUT
THERE IS A LOT MORE TO IT

Keys To Making Knives Full Time

The knifemaker stands alone in his workshop. A knife that was ordered by a client over six months ago is now finished.

There are more orders on the books, sales at shows are pretty good and the hits on the new website seem to be growing daily. It is then the marble starts to roll around in the maker's head. It is the marble that has *full-time knifemaker* written on it.

There are different definitions of a full-time maker. My definition is that of a maker whose sole source of income comes from the making and selling of his/her knives. This is no easy task. In fact, by my estimate, less than 2 percent of the makers worldwide fit into this category. The reason the number is so low is it is very difficult to depend on knifemaking as your sole source of income.

Making knives full time is not an easy undertaking. It not only requires a love for what you do, but you also must have the self-discipline to do what it takes every day to ensure the continued success of your enterprise. Remember, you are now responsible for everything good, bad or indifferent with regard to your business.

I asked five full-timers what it takes to make a living making knives: David Broadwell and ABS master smiths Jerry Fisk, Daniel Winkler, Don Hanson and Shawn McIntyre. What these extraordinary makers have in common other than the fact they make exceptional knives and have won numerous awards for their work is they have all been full time for between 17 to 25 years. All agree there are five keys to becoming a full-time maker.



Daniel Winkler found his competitive advantage when sheathmaker Karen Shook joined the team. Her period sheaths are the perfect complement for Daniel's period knives and tomahawks. On the facing page, Winkler (right) shakes hands with a customer at last year's BLADE Show. (photo of Winkler by Point Seven; photo of knives, hawk and sheaths by SharpByCoop.com)

CHAD NICHOLS DAMASCUS

High carbon, high contrast Damascus
Stainless Damascus
Mosaic Damascus
Mokume

Large quantities and wholesale
pricing available



662.538.5966 662.255.0524 www.chadnicholsdamascus.com

BLADE BUSINESS



You must build time for interaction with your clients into your schedule. A basic rule of thumb: No customers, no business. John White (right), maker of the damascus dog-bone bowie (top), talks knives with a client at last year's BLADE show. (Point Seven photos)

THE 2012 Knife Exposition

American Bladesmith Society

Featuring all-forged blades by ABS Master and Journeyman Smiths

RAFFLE TICKETS ON SALE NOW

J. W. Randall hunting sword forged from 160 layers of 1084 and 15n20 ladder patterned steel. The handle is premium fossilized walrus ivory and the half guard is made from file worked 416 stainless. The sheath is black leather with a basket weave pattern.

Overall length is 27" long.



SAVE THE DATE
JANUARY
27TH—29TH
2012

Sheraton Gunter San Antonio
205 East Houston Street, San Antonio, Texas 78205
888-999-2089 | www.gunterhotel.com

Mention: American Bladesmith Society Room Rate
\$129 Single/Double

(to get this rate, reservations must be made by January 6, 2012)

Exposition Contact:
Harvey Dean 512-446-3111
Steve Dunn 270-563-9830

FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE VISIT
absknifeexpo.com

Key No. 1

"Treat your knifemaking like a business because it surely is." This quote is from Fisk, one of the best businessmen in custom knives. To many, his comment may seem obvious. However, the Small Business Administration reports that 75 percent of all new small businesses fail in their first three-to-five years of operation. The main reason is most new small business owners lack the basic skills required to run a successful enterprise. Fisk's advice is to take college courses on business management, accounting and marketing prior to going full time. McIntyre agrees. He recommends putting as much effort into learning to run a small business as you do into making knives.

If you don't have one, devise a business plan. The plan can be as detailed as

you think it should be. Understand, this is a living document and should be revisited on a semi-annual basis.

A part to give a lot of attention is one of the main elements of your business plan—specifically, the marketing plan. (See Key No. 3.)

Key No. 2

Invest in equipment. The amount of equipment a maker needs will depend primarily on the types of knives he builds, as well as the skill he has in operating the equipment. However, as McIntyre cautions, do not over invest. Depending on the price of the equipment, getting a loan may be prudent. Given the current economic environment and most banks' reluctance to loan money to small businesses, you really need to figure out how much each piece of equipment will add to your bottom line.

As Winkler noted, he and his partner, Karen Shook, "invest money in new equipment that will make our work bet-



Investing in knifemaking equipment is a key, though, as Shawn McIntyre noted, don't over invest. You really need to figure out how much each piece of equipment will add to your bottom line. Todd Begg works with the CNC machinery in his shop. (Begg photo)

ter and more efficient."

Key No. 3

Find your niche market. Some makers who contemplate going full time are already established in a particular market. Others are looking at either entering a specific market sector or improving their position in a particular market.

PARANG MACHETE
From the jungles of Malaysia comes a timeless design well suited to hard and soft vegetation, the classic Parang has finally arrived.

CONDOR
Tool & Knife

Blade Show 2011 Booth #122

- 1/4", 1075 High Carbon Steel
- Distal taper along spine to 1/8" for Balance
- Epoxy Black Powder Coating
- Walnut Handle
- Limited Lifetime Warranty
- Satisfaction Guaranteed
- Hand Crafted in El Salvador

757 West Sand Lake Rd # 106 Orlando, FL 32819
407-876-0886 www.condorknife.com
Request Free Catalog: rti@embarqmail.com

EXCEPTIONAL QUALITY. INCREDIBLE VALUE. OLD WORLD HAND CRAFTSMANSHIP

Cliff Parker

Handmade Knives & Damascus Steel



CP

6350 Tulip Drive
Zephyrhills, FL 33544
(813) 973-1682
www.cliffparkerknives.com



Sunfish Forge



Don Hanson III
P.O. Box 13, Success, MO 65570
573-674-3045

Check Web Site For Available Knives
www.sunfishforge.com

Come See Us Both at **BLADE Show**
Don at Table 13-O & Cliff at Table 13-N

FREE KNIFE CATALOG

A complete catalog of knives, including Damascus knives, collectors knives, tactical and work knives, and much more.



To request a free catalog of knives, either call (toll free) 1-800-835-6433 ext. 18, write to Boker USA, Inc., 1550 Balsam Street, Lakewood, CO 80214-5917, or visit our website at www.bokerusa.com.



BLADE BUSINESS

This is where your marketing plan comes into play. As with the business plan, it can be as simple or as sophisticated as necessary for your business. The objective is to optimize how you introduce your knives to potential buyers. At a minimum, your plan should address how you will make the most of attending knife shows, advertising in print and on the Internet (usually a website), and the potential of working with a dealer and/or purveyor.

You also must address what may be the most difficult part of a successful knife-making business: pricing your knives. You will have to figure out how much to charge for them so you can make enough profit to pay all your expenses.

Many makers adopt the easiest technique—ask another maker. Remember, as a full-time maker, your friends are now your competitors. When was the last time Coke, on the eve of introducing a new drink, asked Pepsi for advice on how much to charge for it? As Winkler noted, “Pricing by what someone else does or what



PRO+TECH
Proudly Made in the USA

The Original EMERSON CQC7 Chisel Tanto in a Pro-Tech AUTOMATIC KNIFE produced to exact Emerson specs!



E7T03 Solid Black Handle Black Blade Plain Edge. \$240



E7T01 Solid Black handle, Blasted Blade, Plain Edge. \$220



E7T04 Solid Black handle, Black Blade, Part Serrated. \$240

Pro-Tech Knives, LLC Santa Fe Springs, California (562) 903 - 0678

www.protechknives.com



More times than not your competitive advantage will come from being the first to adopt a new steel, handle material, design element, etc. You should incorporate such use of new materials or techniques into your business plan. Antonio Fogarizzu makes notable use of sculpted mosaic damascus for the center handle inlay in his folding dagger. (SharpByCoop.com photo)

you think the market will bear is short-sighted, and will likely cause problems in the future.”

Key No. 4

Communication. The biggest complaint I hear and read about is a maker’s lack of communication with clients. For Hanson, it is one of the most important aspects of being a full-time maker.

“I answer phone calls and e-mails very quickly, and deliver on time or contact clients and let them know why there is a delay,” he stressed. “I listen to my clients.”

You must schedule time for interaction with your clients. A basic rule of thumb: No customers, no business.

Key No. 5

Create a competitive advantage. According to Broadwell, a maker needs to develop his or her own style. He makes an excellent point. What separates you from your competitors? Winkler said adding Shook and her period style of sheathmaking to his operation gave him a competitive advantage. “She brought a lot of business skills and makes sheaths that really put our work in a whole new league,” he observed.

More times than not your competitive advantage will come from being the first to adopt a new steel, handle material, design element, etc. You should incorporate such use of new materials or techniques into your business plan. Understanding that the custom knife market moves in cycles—and planning for the next cycle before you are actually in it—is one of the keys to obtaining and maintaining a competitive advantage.

Delegate, Delegate, Delegate!

No matter what their level of expertise, most makers realize they cannot do it

DAMASTEEL USA

www.ssdamascus.com

Infinity

Knife by:
Jerry McClure

Giraffebone Knife Supply
1-888-804-0683 • www.giraffebone.com



WINKLER
HAND FORGED

The Tradition of the Past—
Inspired by an era when the tools a person carried meant sustenance and survival

WINKLER KNIVES II

Born of Warrior's Experience—
High performance working knives and field proven tactical tools

Blade Show Table 6-P

DANIEL WINKLER
MASTER BLADESMITH
PO Box 2166 · Blowing Rock, NC 28605
(828) 295-9156 · danielwinkler@bellsouth.net
www.winklerknives.com

In the tradition of our other "Dog Paw Knives" these are the two newest editions! USA made with genuine stag handles! These two knives feature a dog paw logo shield in addition to the dog paw prints on the blades! Each knife comes with a special tube packaging which has the dog paw story and logo on the packaging!



2 Bladed Trapper, stag handle,
10950 High Carbon Steel
Blade, USA made!
Item number 081-0010
\$149.95

1 Blade Lock Back, stag
handle, 1095 High Carbon
Steel blade, USA made! Item
number 081-0011
\$174.95

Plaza Cutlery

www.plazacutlery.com • E-mail: dan@plazacutlery.com

South Coast Plaza 3333 S. Bristol St., Suite 2060, Costa Mesa, CA 92626

714-549-3932 • Ordering Toll Free 866-827-5292

Phone orders welcome and we accept all major credit cards!

BLADE BUSINESS



Communication includes making your customers feel special, and few understand the concept better than Jerry Fisk. After each of his knives was drawn for and bought at his 2009 Micro Show, Fisk (left) posed with each buyer—Brent Haltom in this instance—and the knife. (Chuck Ward photo)

all by themselves, though some try. Successful businessmen understand that utilizing the expertise of others frees them up to do the things they do best.

One thing the makers interviewed all agreed on was employing a professional to photograph their knives. I recommend adding a certified public accountant (CPA) to your knifemaking team. In addition to handling your books, a CPA can recommend which type of business entity you should form. Perhaps the CPA's best skill: tax planning.

Enthusiasm and loving what you do are important factors in becoming a successful full-time knifemaker. However, understanding and implementing basic business concepts are equally important to building and maintaining a long-term, successful enterprise.

Winkler may have summed it up best.

"I suspect very few makers are at [the full-time] level, as it's the most difficult to survive in. It does not make your work more sought after. It does not put you in any kind of 'exclusive club.' But," he observed, "if a maker can handle the pressure, it can be very rewarding mentally and somewhat rewarding financially."

For the contact information of the pictured knives, see "Where To Get 'Em" on page 111.

To read similar stories and all the latest knife news, forums, blogs and much more, see <http://knifeshowcase.blademag.com>.

BLADE

BLACKSMITHS DEPOT



Exclusive Dealer
Iron Kiss Hammers
Sizes 50 to 150 lbs

Anvils

Hammers

Tongs

Gas Forges

Professional Quality Tools for the Knifemaker,
Blacksmith and Metalworker

See our work at www.customforgedhardware.com

www.Blacksmithdepot.com

Kayne and Son

100 Daniel Ridge Road Candler, NC 28715 USA

Phone: 828 667-8868 Fax: 828 665-8303

International Shipping available • Inquiries welcome