



The Path to STABILITY



Navigating Contemporary Financial Challenges

I have a master's degree in special education, and I taught full-time for 12 years in a school for learning-disabled boys. At some point, I started feeling burned out, and decided to begin working as a salesman for an insurance company. It quickly became obvious that I was not cut out to be a salesman; I sold very little and I did not enjoy the work.

I would like to get back into special education, but I'm reluctant to return to teaching in a school. In the past, I tutored learning disabled kids privately, and it gave me tremendous fulfillment. Now I would like to become a full-time private tutor for boys with learning difficulties. Do you think this is something I could earn a living from?

It is definitely possible to earn a living from private tutoring, especially for someone with your credentials. But that can only happen once you have firmly established your reputation and have built up a full roster of clients.

At this point, you cannot afford to sit around and wait for clients to come to you. To ensure that you have enough money to live on now, we recommend that you look for at least a part-time position working in either a mainstream or a special-ed school. This does not have to be in a classroom setting; it could be in a resource room, with small groups of students or individual students.

Although working in a school might not pay as well per hour as private tutoring, it does guarantee you a steady income. Moreover, it will enhance your image and your marketability. It will be easier for you to attract private students if you are a full-fledged teacher than if you are merely a freelance tutor.

Being employed by a school gives you credibility as a professional. It could also potentially be a springboard for establishing yourself as a private tutor, if you can convince the school's principal, teachers or resource room staff to refer students in need of tutoring to you.

Once you have landed a steady job, you are in a good position to begin marketing yourself as a private special ed teacher. (Use of language is significant here; if you feel that the word "tutor" carries a less professional connotation than "private teacher," do not use it to describe yourself.)

Know Your Market

The first step in marketing yourself is defining who your potential clients are. When defining your target market, you should differentiate between users of your services (children) and the people who recommend you (teachers, principals, parents of former students, etc.). Your marketing efforts should focus on the people who are in a position to recommend you to the parents of the children you wish to work with.

Make a list of all the people who could potentially refer clients to you, then contact them directly and ask that they recommend you as a qualified tutor to parents of boys who require extra help. It might be a good idea to mention that you would be willing to work with students at school, in their homes, or in yours.

When contacting the people on your list, focus first on those who are located near you. If necessary, you can call people outside your area later on.

We suggest that you schedule face-to-face meetings with the school principals and resource room supervisors on your list. Once they have met with you, they will feel more

comfortable recommending you.

During these meetings, you can present your credentials, highlight your areas of specialization and explain what type of students you are qualified to work with. You should put together a professional portfolio to bring to these meetings, which should include your resume, thank you letters from former students or their parents, letters of recommendation and samples of educational materials you have created or worked on. At the end of the meeting, leave some business cards.

After initiating contact with school principals and supervisors, follow up periodically with a visit or telephone call. This will ensure that you remain fresh in their minds.

Positioning

Market positioning is the second step of your marketing efforts. It involves branding yourself and ensuring that your name becomes synonymous with professionalism and success.

Public relations, or PR, is a crucial element of positioning. To generate PR, you can prepare an article, or a series of articles, on special education and submit the articles to local publications at no charge. At the end of the articles, be sure to include your telephone number and invite people to contact you. Having an article published under your name boosts your professional image, enhances your portfolio, and advertises your services.

You might want to do some low-cost advertising, such as placing small ads in community circulars. These ads should highlight your professional experience, areas of expertise and past successes.

Another way to position yourself is by writing a book, workbook or teacher's manual on a subject related to your field. This book could generate both PR and income for you.

Making Your Product the Best

More important, be your own advocate. Put together a mental list of reasons why you think people should hire you to teach their children, and be prepared to share these reasons with anyone you meet. You can also ask friends, relatives, neighbors and parents of former students to pass on your name to anyone whose son might need private tutoring. Networking and word-of-mouth are the least expensive forms of advertising, but often the most effective.

Remember, however, that the secret to successful marketing is having a good product to sell. Your professional expertise as a special-ed teacher is your product — so make sure it is the very best possible product.

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Mesila is a nonprofit organization dedicated to helping families and businesses in Israel achieve financial stability and independence. With over 25 chapters across Israel, Mesila's three-pronged approach of education, counseling and financial assistance is rescuing hundreds of families and businesses from the cycle of poverty and debt. Readers are invited to submit questions and feedback to hamodia@mesila.org, or by fax to (02) 500-0478.

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*Special does not apply to Cottages.