

Kathryn Hunter: Podcasting from Dallas Texas, you're listening to Compass, where we talk with location independent women about finding work and getting paid. I'm your host Kathryn Hunter and you're listening to episode one with Heather Ryan bookkeeper, accountant, and RVer. Today we're talking about getting into bookkeeping and accounting, some things to think about when hiring and accountant, and how baking lead to working with numbers. Heather, welcome to the show.

Heather Ryan: Thanks

Kathryn Hunter: I'd like to start with your early life to see what influences that has later on. What did you want to be when you were around five?

Heather Ryan: Um, I think this is funny question because I honestly have no recollection of what I wanted to be at five. I wanted to be a kid. I guess and play.

Kathryn Hunter: That's fair. So the first time somebody said to you, what do you want to be when you grow up? Do you have any idea how you might have answered?

Heather Ryan: Well, I always loved baking and my grandfather was, they owned a bakery, so he was a baker and I love eating his food and baking with him. So that probably would've been my answer at that time.

Kathryn Hunter: Cool. And when you finished high school, how had that changed?

Heather Ryan: I still loved baking. I started taking some computer science classes when I was in high school and so that's what I ended up pursuing, in my bachelor's degree. So, I don't know if that was just like a natural progression or I saw it as a good career opportunity. I'm not really sure at the time, what went through my head.

Kathryn Hunter: Well, tech is usually a pretty solid choice.

Heather Ryan: Yeah. And here I am not really doing that. So you know, it's okay.

Kathryn Hunter: Do you use it at all?

Heather Ryan: Oh, the problem solving skill for sure. Not really like programming anymore. So, yeah.

Kathryn Hunter: So how did you get into accounting?

Heather Ryan: Gosh, this is kind of a long, drawn out story, but the short version is, I did end up switching careers in my twenties. I went back to school for baking and pastry arts. So that tells you anything you should always start with your heart. Um, and I had my own business. I started obviously having to do bookkeeping and understanding the financials and from there I kind of took some part time jobs to make ends meet and that was always for bookkeeping, for other companies,

for smaller companies that didn't need a full time bookkeeper, but just, you know, 10-20 hours a week. So that's sort of how I started. And then my mother in law was an enrolled agent and she wanted to retire and asked "Do you want to learn my business?" And so that's how I got into taxes.

Kathryn Hunter: Okay. Do you want to take a minute and explain what an enrolled agent is?

Heather Ryan: Sure. An enrolled agent is someone who's licensed by the IRS to practice taxes so they can represent clients before the IRS in any state across the country. And then the difference between that and like a CPA is a CPA is licensed by the state.

Kathryn Hunter: Oh, okay. And how long were you doing bookkeeping before you started to switch to taxes?

Heather Ryan: Probably about five to seven years. I'm trying to think like the years are smushed together, right? Yeah, and the bookkeeping, it's still part of my business. It's not the sole focus, but I do offer the complete package. So as a business owner comes to me and says hey, can you handle all my financials, I'll do the bookkeeping, I'll do the payroll, I'll do the taxes. I can keep on top of all of it. So, it's a good skill to have to add to my business.

Heather Ryan: What kind of training did you have to go through in order to, not really switch over but add taxes to your business?

Heather Ryan: Well, apprenticing under my mother and all was a huge part of it and to be an enrolled agent you have to pass three exam. So I had to study and make sure I understood everything so I could pass the exam. So that's really my training. As part of being an enrolled agent, you need to take continuing education every year. So I need 30 credits every year. I'm constantly learning, constantly taking courses. Obviously tax law changes every year. So it's important to understand that.

Kathryn Hunter: It's really great to hear that that's a part of maintaining your license.

Heather Ryan: I agree. Yes, that is correct. And there's lots of ways to like get an education so you can go and attend like conferences and stuff, which have lectures and classes. You can do online education. There's places, you know, in person that will offer classes. So it's kind of nice to be able to switch it up too.

Kathryn Hunter: Oh cool. How long did your training take?

Heather Ryan: Well, I did two years under my mother in law and before I took over her clients and she's, she's still behind the scenes if I have a question, she hasn't disappeared. And otherwise it took me about a year to pass the three exams.

Kathryn Hunter: Okay, let's change tack a little bit. What was your first foray into being location independent?

Heather Ryan: I mean, my husband and I just decided that you want this lifestyle. We wanted like we wanted to travel more, you wanted to see places. I lost a parent at a young age and he lost an aunt at a young age when we were probably just a year or so before we hit the road. And it was just kind of, we wanted to live our life and so we decided to make that our life choice. And I made sure I changed the business, I guess to fit that lifestyle. I used to have an office that people could come into and see me. And I decided that would just go away. And I did lose clients because of that. And I said that was okay because I'm switching my business, I'm switching my focus and it's opened up some opportunities and new clients.

Kathryn Hunter: How long have you been on the road then?

Heather Ryan: We're in our third year.

Kathryn Hunter: What have you had to do with your business in order to make it more mobile?

Heather Ryan: I had this set up, like I have secure file storage so I can share files with my clients and I'm just making sure all my offices are up. And I mean I think it's honestly easier to take an accounting or tax firm on the road and being remote because even people in a stationary city can be kind of remote. That's my biggest thing is not having clients like face to face. And there are people that still want that and that's okay, but I'm not the right fit for them. So I guess that's my biggest thing.

Kathryn Hunter: You said, secure file storage. So I'm guessing that some things similar to Dropbox but not exactly the same.

Heather Ryan: Similar. It's more like, so a client will have a login and I and they are the only ones that can see that data. There's all kinds of software options out there for that. And they're specifically targeted towards, you know, accounting towards lawyers, towards people that are constantly sharing documents. Um, I can name a few if you're interested.

Kathryn Hunter: That would be great.

Heather Ryan: So I use ShareFile. There's also SecureFilePro, that I know of. You know, dropbox is a good option. I just, I don't know if I would totally trust the security behind it.

Kathryn Hunter: They've... well I say this, I believe they had a breach a few years ago and so I use it for all kinds of backup stuff, but I don't know that I would use it for anything that I considered confidential.

Heather Ryan: Right. So that's really the other big thing is the confidentiality. And there's all kinds of like the ShareFile and the SecureFilePro. They integrate directly with tax software. So that's why, depending on the tax stuff you use, many people choose the share filing that goes with it. Um, cause it'll integrate directly. So, I

feel like I should know other names, but off the top of my head, I can't think of one other than those two.

Kathryn Hunter: It's definitely a good start if people are looking. So you said you've been doing this for two years, I'm guessing you've had at least some struggle, something to overcome?

Heather Ryan: As far as my businesses is concerned? Well my biggest struggle was losing clients. I probably lost a third of my clients when I took to the road. And at first it was like a blow because you think, oh, what am I doing wrong? And then I had to step back and say, no. Like if this is the natural progression of business and I just need to start marketing to get my, my niche clients, the ones that I want. And that's kind of how it turned it around. Okay.

Kathryn Hunter: So how did, how did you focus your marketing?

Heather Ryan: Well being on podcasts is a, it's a great way to market and get people, you know, bigger audience reach. I've also done, my blog has been up for about two years and it's really helped me just to make a name for myself. I do all kinds of tax articles on there, free advice... or free inflammation I should say, maybe not advice, which has really helped I'm involved in facebook groups online. And just client referrals once you start getting some of your, you know, your niche kinds, the ones that you want and you treat them well and they like you, they're going to start referring their friends or their coworkers or fellow colleagues.

Kathryn Hunter: It starts to snowball, which I'm sure...

Heather Ryan: Exactly. It's a slow start and I say that's okay. Just keep doing it and keep plugging along. And I think eventually if you're targeting the right audience, it will happen.

Kathryn Hunter: Do you more or less keep a full roster now? Or do you kind of keep things open? Especially with your travels...

Heather Ryan: I'm still growing and still taking on clients. So I do as like a balanced... obviously my busy season is, you know, February, March, April. But there are things that go on throughout the year. I do have some bookkeeping clients which keeps me busy. It's nice to have, kind of for me, like a lump, in a few months and I'm earning a majority of my income and the rest of the year I can be kind of relaxed and enjoy myself maybe a little more.

Kathryn Hunter: Yeah. So if anybody is looking for an accountant who specializes in people who are location independent, they can reach out to you.

Heather Ryan: Sure. Yeah, and I have a contact form on my site, I have like a, book a time to talk to me directly. So yeah.

Kathryn Hunter: And we will put all of that in the show notes, so that it's super easy to get in touch with you. So, in your business, is it easy to say, well this was, this was a big success for me? Or is it more a series of smaller accomplishments?

Heather Ryan: I would say smaller accomplishments and I think all the smaller things have kind of added up to the success of it. And I think it's still growing. So I think there's still room to be successful later.

Kathryn Hunter: As everything keeps changing because it certainly seems like it's changing quickly. I think there's a lot more opportunities that pop up that we didn't even recognize would be available.

Heather Ryan: Yeah, it's true. And the more I'm out there and I'm with other digital nomads or location independent folks that have been with it, I just learn and take maybe different ideas from different people and I can send it off to my own business. It's just been a really good way to be successful.

Kathryn Hunter: So I'm guessing there's no such thing as an actual typical day for you?

Heather Ryan: No... Yeah. Um, does any digital nomad have a typical day?

Kathryn Hunter: I wouldn't think so, but I'm not gonna make any promises. Yeah. Do you want to give us kind of just a random day what it would look like for you?

Heather Ryan: Well, I have two dogs, so my day always starts with a dog walk. Raining or sunshiny. And yeah, I mean like during tax season it's obviously just jumping right into work. If I'm not in tax season, it could be, you know, spending the morning going exploring where we happen to be. Visiting the museum or a national park or something. And I usually try to do the afternoon where I'm more working. Maybe if I don't have necessarily client work I'm writing a blog post or scheduling social media out, maybe on client calls and you have a general idea.

Kathryn Hunter: Do you guys stick to the US or do also go into Canada and Mexico?

Heather Ryan: We have done Canada so far; we have not done Mexico.

Kathryn Hunter: Okay. So now we're going to get into some numbers. What would you say your salary range is for being an accountant?

Heather Ryan: I honestly don't even know. I never like really looked at the numbers, I think it'd probably be as low as, you know, \$40,000 or \$50,000 once you're entry level and it can pop out well over \$100,000 as you start to get to that more managerial position. I know other accountants and they're making you know, \$1 million on their business. It depends on how much you want to grow.

Kathryn Hunter: Okay. Does being on the road limit that at all? Does it actually expand it?

Heather Ryan: I don't see being limited because I can reach clients across the US. But I don't see it being limiting at all. Yeah. I mean I think it's beneficial. I actually understand the life. I'm paying taxes in different states. I understand that you have a really bad day and maybe we were supposed to have a call, but something happens and comes up. I totally understand that and relate to it. So yes.

Kathryn Hunter: So I'm from Texas, which is a no income tax state. How do you decide where to register your business and where you're going to pay taxes?

Heather Ryan: Typically I say register your business in your home state and whether... gosh, it's hard to say you know, where you're going to owe taxes to because it depends on the business. I know people who physically go into states and are attending like, let's say you do art festival or some other kind of show where you're physically selling a product in that state you may owe to that state. It really depends on each state. Some states like say California, it's probably the worst. The minute you set foot there until you pull out of that state, you owe income tax to that state, but other states are a little more lenient.

Heather Ryan: I typically say, you know, all of your income should go to your home state and where you're at, wherever your business is established. And I mean even the business established... picking your domicile or your home state is my number one advice. But obviously there can be variations on it, depends on what business.

Kathryn Hunter: So if, if you have a couple of choices, definitely reach out to somebody who knows what those states require.

Heather Ryan: And the other thing I know I stressed a lot of my clients is keeping a travel log. So you know exactly the reasons why you went to a certain place. Maybe you are meeting with clients, you know, across the country. And there's also differences of being a full time. I'm thinking of being an RVer, because that's like, to me the easiest way to travel around the country, but there are other ways you can be, you know, a housesitter that's sending three or four months somewhere and then moving somewhere else. So there's different ways to do it.

Heather Ryan: So just keeping that travel along and why you went to certain places. I do have a few clients and they maintain a sticks and bricks home and they use their rv to go and visit their clients. So that's a very different travel. Them not having a home base, but they're still, they're still digital nomads. They're still traveling for their business and sometimes they're on the road, you know, 10 months out of the year. Right. like, there's a whole spectrum of what it means to be location independent.

Kathryn Hunter: Oh yeah, definitely. I'm currently in the US, but until about three weeks ago, I had been doing three month stints in various countries in Europe. And it requires a lot more documentation.

Heather Ryan: I can imagine it.

Kathryn Hunter: But again, being from Texas, it's a lot easier than when I was living in New York City.

Heather Ryan: Yes. New York City has a lots of taxes.

Kathryn Hunter: Yes. City taxes, state taxes. So it was all brand new to me. When you're doing your pricing, how do you decide what to charge? What goes into that for you?

Heather Ryan: I do really flat fee pricing, so I don't base it on a form. I don't base it you know, on how many hours it's going to take me or anything. I just have a flat fee depending on what is on your return, is going to kind of dictate the cost. And that's just how complicated it's going to be. I'm really getting into like value based pricing, so that's why my bookkeeping services and everything, like monthly services are all value based. So you know, for the value I'm providing you, the tax savings from the offering you, whenever the pain points are that I'm taking away.

Kathryn Hunter: So what are your next steps as an RVer?

Heather Ryan: I mean I think we're, as we kind of get into our third year here, we're looking to slow down a little bit and take more like a month or even longer at some places, to really explore and get to know an area. That's, that's kind of typical a lot of people. You kind of traveled fast the first year and then we kind of get a little burnout. It's nice to spend a little longer and places. And just looking up to more convergences then or like rallies and meeting up with our friends that we've met on the road. And I know the traveling life can be lonely at times. So nice to meet up with fellow nomads.

Kathryn Hunter: So do you incorporate traveling to conferences in your travel planning? Does it kind of, is it a longterm planning or do they just kind of pop up?

Heather Ryan: I find that I have to, because otherwise I'm not going to be in the location where they are. So we attended our first convergence. We did an esc,apers convergence this past December, well this December, just a few weeks ago. And I planned that back in May when they first kind of started announcing it and it sold out. So I was happy that I planned back in May, it pushed our travel plans to come back through that city and be there for that.

Kathryn Hunter: Do you have any advice for our listeners as far as, obviously something very general since you have no idea what they're doing?

Heather Ryan: I mean, my best advice is if you're confused or unsure of anything tax related or even, you know, bookkeeping and financial related, get in touch with a professional. Even if it's just to help you get things established and get the right patterns and understanding, like the, the basics down for the business. You don't necessarily need to maintain a long term relationship, but just to make sure everything's in order. And that, that's probably my biggest advice. And then as a small business owner, understanding what your tax obligations are. Cause I do get people coming to me and say, I didn't even know I had to pay quarterly estimates on labor, isn't this income? That way you're not surprised come tax time.

Kathryn Hunter: Yeah. Cause there's these extra fees and fines when you don't do that. We won't talk about how I know that...

Heather Ryan: My biggest advice is find someone that you can trust and ask questions to. And like I said, even if it's not necessarily a long term relationship, it's just setting those foundations and learning a basic understanding of how things work. What it means to have a business. What are your obligations?

Kathryn Hunter: How much money should they expect to set aside for those first conversations?

Heather Ryan: I mean I do initial like my initial 15-20 minute talk is free and I do offer some basic advice. And like I said, even my website has some basic advice that's all free. So when you come to me and I'm going to do some basic tax planning with you and I'll charge between \$200 to \$500 depending on what I'm looking at and how complex. If there's multiple businesses or income streams... I think that's probably a fair assessment.

Kathryn Hunter: Where can listeners find you?

Heather Ryan: I have a website it's tax-queen.com and I am also on facebook and I believe, though I don't use it very often, but the handle is facebook.com/Ryantaxqueen. I'm on Pinterest as well, pinterest.com/rvtaxqueen/

Kathryn Hunter: Okay. And we'll get all of that in the show notes so it's properly linked up.

Heather Ryan: Sure.

Kathryn Hunter: Well, thank you so much for joining us. This has been great.

Heather Ryan: Yeah, thanks for having me.

Kathryn Hunter: Thank you for listening to Compass. You'll find today's show notes at [compasspod.com/episode001](http://compasspod.com/episode001). If you enjoyed this show, please share it with a friend, by visiting [compasspod.com/episode001](http://compasspod.com/episode001) and clicking the share button at the top of the page. Next week we'll be talking to Alyssa Cairns, a home design and decor consultant who works entirely online.

