

# A Woman's Perspective

## U.S. Small Business Administration

**August 2005**



**Summertime, and the livin's easy... But you feel stressed out and busier than ever!**

According to an ABC News survey taken this year, 27% of women feel that they are overloaded at work. And no wonder! In addition to comprising almost half of the general workforce in the U.S., women own almost half of all privately-held businesses. Since 1997, the Center for Women's Business Research estimates that women-owned firms have grown at nearly twice the rate of all firms (17% vs. 9%). Women are working harder than ever no matter the season, so this issue is dedicated to balancing work, family, friends, partners and fun while lowering your stress level.

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### ■ Celebrating Women in Business!

Whether you are just starting a business or you already own a small business, motivation to succeed is what gets you out of bed each morning and back to work. Here are a few motivational stories to help you and maybe inspire you to jump out of bed tomorrow without hitting the 'snooze' button one more time. These women entrepreneurs found creative ways to balance their lives, and even helped others do the same!

### **Dixie Allen and her Amazing Space**

▪ Dixie Allen, owner and operator of Amazing Space, a professional organizing service, says, "Getting organized is all about getting control of your life and functioning better and more efficiently." Amazing Space provides a number of customized services, including home and office organizing, estate management and disbursement, moving and packaging services and home resale preparation. Dixie's clients include those who need help increasing efficiency or decreasing clutter including busy professionals, retirees, and even children. "When we accumulate clutter, we delay decision making. I get called when the decisions can no longer be delayed," says Dixie. She ended a successful freelance career as an event planner to start Amazing Space. Despite the economic risk involved in starting a new business, Dixie says she was confident in her abilities to make her business succeed. Dixie has worked hard to initiate and formulate business contacts and sources for information and support. Her networking led her to the National Association of Professional Organizers where she learned from others in the industry. She also obtained help from other business and professional organizations and was mentored by experienced business owners. She did pro bono work, donated her services to charity auctions, and gave speeches to various groups, anything to get the word out about Amazing Space. She also ran ads in local publications and on the Internet. Her hard work paid off three years ago when Dixie was featured in a [Washington Post](#) article about professional organizing. Despite her business' growth, Dixie continues to network to seek clients, advice and information. Her quest for information led her to enroll in a course at the Women's Business Center, Inc. (WBC). The WBC's course, "Managing Your Business with Accountability", enabled Allen to learn new ways to grow and develop Amazing Space. The great thing about the course, according to Dixie, was "sharing with other participants, brainstorming and learning from the speakers." During the course, Dixie participated in roundtable discussions with fellow entrepreneurs on marketing, client development, insurance and other pertinent topics. Dixie says her experience at the Women's Business Center was very affirming. It provided a supportive environment for her to test and exchange ideas and to receive honest and open feedback from entrepreneurs at various levels of experience who "really cared about each other and encouraged each other." WBC is a public-private partnership with the U.S. Small Business Administration's (SBA) Office of Women's Business Ownership (OWBO), part of its women's business center program. WBC is dedicated to offering women business owners high quality, low-cost business training and support. Dixie Allen's example proves that when you are diligent, confident, and committed, you can make your dreams come true. Dixie has been operating Amazing Space for four years now. Future plans for Amazing Space include expanding clientele and hiring employees. Dixie believes that business ownership is rewarding despite the risk involved. She says, "I enjoy every minute of the work. I love helping people, making a difference and obtaining quick results." Because running her own business has been so rewarding, Dixie is eager to mentor other women to encourage them to follow their dreams. "I can easily relate to the early days of starting a career. I'm a former teacher so I'm happy to teach and share what I know."

### **Date With Success**

▪ Claudia Browne and Susan Anderson have a date with success. What started as a simple idea between the friends is now blossoming into a nice little business for both. The two formed a friendship when they were roommates at Douglass College, Rutgers University. Staying in touch over the years, they had careers, they married, started families, and five years ago started Thinkbin, a Bridgewater, NJ-based company that designs and distributes the Thinkbin Family Calendar. Susan's cluttered home calendar with scribbles and arrows pointing to important dates

for her children's activities was the inspiration for their product. Typical office style calendars didn't offer the space or layout needed to keep track of the activities of a busy family. "When I saw Susan's calendar I actually gave her some credit for having a color-coded system," laughs Claudia. "But Susan told me she just grabbed any pen she could find." That very calendar page, now hanging in a frame on the wall in their office, was the driving force behind the design of the Thinkbin Calendar. "We're both moms with three school-aged children, so we know how hard it is to stay on top of things," said Anderson. "Our calendar is a 17 month calendar that helps families get organized for an entire school year." Large daily blocks are divided into morning, afternoon and evening sections to encourage neatness and avoid scheduling conflicts. The "Reminders" and "To Do List" sections offer lots of room to record extra information. While both Claudia and Susan had the desire to start Thinkbin, they needed just a little guidance to move the business along. Claudia learned about the services of the Small Business Development Center at Raritan Valley Community College, a program that is supported by the U.S. Small Business Administration. Most recently, both women completed a New Jersey Economic Development Authority-sponsored eight-week Entrepreneurial Training Institute program held at Raritan Valley Community College. There the partners refined their business plan and were successful in securing the financing they needed to expand their business. Today, Thinkbin Calendars are gaining popularity as school fundraiser products. Thinkbin's fund raising program provides a no risk way for schools and other non-profits to offer a product that families need, while raising extra money for their organizations. Currently, the majority of Thinkbin's sales are in New Jersey, but Claudia and Susan are working to change that by exhibiting at PTA/PTO conventions around the country and advertising nationwide in *PTO Today* magazine. "The response to our calendar has been great so far," said Anderson. "Last year we sold 2,000 calendars and this year we expect to triple that total." Claudia and Susan have also developed a Web site for Thinkbin where customers can order the calendar online or request information on their fund raising program. During the past two years, the company has donated a portion of its direct sales to charitable organizations such as the Valerie Fund and The Wellness Community of Central New Jersey. A portion of their sales from the 2004/2005 calendar went to the Platelet Disorder Support Association. "We started small intentionally in order to balance our family responsibilities with those of a start-up business. It also allowed us time to test our product and different ways to market it," said Claudia. "We're at a point now in our family lives where we can put more time into the business."

### **Seven Sisters**

- Like many big business adventures, Seven Sisters Steakhouse & Lounge in Hot Springs, South Dakota, started out as a small idea. In fact, it started out to be a small ice-cream stand. But sometimes, small ideas grow into larger ones when things fall into place. Charlene Maxwell and her daughter, Pam Brekke, bought a piece of land near Mammoth Site on the U.S. Highway 18 truck bypass in Hot Springs. "We thought of a small ice cream stand with other concessions . . . then a liquor license became available . . . and things just took off from there," Maxwell said. So with counseling from the West River Business Service Center in Rapid City, a 504 loan from the U.S. Small Business Administration and Northern Hills Community Development, Inc. and financing from the Community First State Bank in Hot Springs, the small concession stand became a restaurant. The restaurant has seating for 150, a lounge, and an out-door dining area that seats 50. There is an out-door food stand where people can order burgers and yes, ice-cream cones. Maxwell believes the restaurant is located in a good location. First, it is located in the Black Hills of South Dakota - the state's largest tourist attraction and home of Mt. Rushmore. Second, it is located close to Wind Cave National Park and Custer State Park, and

finally it is close to Mammoth Site and Evens Plunge located in Hot Springs. Maxwell is the key management person having 13 years of experience as a State of South Dakota employee in Kitchen Management involving food preparation, equipment purchases, inventory control as well as personnel issues. Her daughter, Pam, handles the accounting needs. Additionally, 15 employees make sure the restaurant is clean, stocked and ready to go. How did the restaurant get its name? Seven Sisters Steakhouse & Lounge draws its name from the mountain range just to the east of the restaurant. The restaurant's expansive windows offer panoramic views of all seven siblings.

## ■ Stress Solutions

As a busy woman striving to achieve success maintaining relationships and family ties, are constantly being pulled in different playing catch-up and never getting any time study by the National Institute for and Health found that “Gender-specific such as sex discrimination and balancing demands, may have an effect on women beyond the impact of general job stressors such as job overload.” Not only does stress lower the morale and decrease the ability to concentrate while you are at work, it also has serious health consequences including hypertension, high blood pressure, mood swings and greater susceptibility to other illnesses. Here are some tips to keep stress low while maintaining a balance in your life-



in your business while you may feel that you directions, always for yourself. In fact, a Occupational Safety work stress factors, work and family workers above and

- **Do less.** This is the simplest stress-buster there is, and possibly the most difficult to achieve. Try to treat every day separately, creating goals for that one day. Be realistic about how much you can get done in a day. By creating small daily goals that can be met during your day, you will find that your stress level lowers because you have accomplished your goals instead of obsessing over what you could not do in a day.

- **Live a healthier lifestyle.** This means getting enough sleep and exercise. Being sleep-depleted is shown to make people less able to deal with stress and less able to perform during the day. You may think that you are helping yourself to meet your goals by burning the midnight oil, but you will find that with more sleep you can perform better during the day, leaving you with less work at night and less stress. Exercise helps to release tension and produces feel-good chemicals like endorphins. Exercise can also be a social activity if you wish: go hiking or running with a friend, join a gym, or go biking with your kids!

- **Schedule time away from work as you would schedule a work appointment.** Make time every week to spend quality time with family, friends and loved ones. Engage in a fun activity with your family or try to create a standing dinner date with a friend every week. (Research shows that more than half of us would rather spend time with a friend when stressed!) Write it down in your planner or PDA and don't miss it! Taking time off is essential to your piece of mind and will help you work better when you are at work.

- **Take time for yourself.** Do something daily that makes you relaxed and happy, like listen to music, take a hot bath or just sit quietly for a few minutes. Dedicate time to an old hobby or start a new one. Choose a time to leave work and stick to it. Having free time to do things you want to do will give you motivation and clear your head.

- **Avoid perfectionism.** Having unrealistic expectations of yourself and others puts pressure on you and sets you up for failure and feelings of guilt for not meeting goals. You have the right to determine your own standards. Prioritize what you think is important.

- **Ask for help!** You cannot do it all - have friends, relatives, caregivers, partners and children help you with small tasks to make your load a lot lighter.

YOU CAN be a businesswoman or entrepreneur and have balance in your life. This balance is the key to stress management.

## ■ News From the SBA

### Minority and Women Business Ownership Increasing Faster Than National Average

#### U.S. Census and SBA Loan Programs Reflect Exponential Growth in Entrepreneurship

**WASHINGTON** – The U.S. Census Bureau yesterday released preliminary estimates from its 2002 Survey of Business Owners, indicating that minority groups and women are increasing business ownership at a much faster rate than the national average. Overwhelming increases in minority business ownership parallel the demand for SBA loan products in these communities.

The SBA's flagship 7(a) loan program has registered sharp increases in loans to women and minority-owned businesses during the first three quarters of FY 2005. Loans to minorities have increased by 27 percent, compared to the same period in FY 2004, and loans to women have shown an increase of almost 50 percent, followed closely by loans to African-American business owners, which are up 46 percent. SBA loans to start-up companies have increased by 76 percent over last year.

"These newly released census estimates and our own loan figures validate what I see in the communities I've visited all across the country," said SBA Administrator Hector V. Barreto. "Minority and women entrepreneurs are leading the way in business growth and are making important contributions to our nation's economic strength. This impressive growth in business ownership, and the clear-cut benefits that result from it, is what President Bush refers to when he talks about the ownership society."

The U.S. Census Bureau's press release is located at [http://www.census.gov/Press-Release/www/releases/archives/business\\_ownership/005477.html](http://www.census.gov/Press-Release/www/releases/archives/business_ownership/005477.html).

For more information on SBA loan programs visit <http://www.sba.gov/financing/index.html>.

## ■ Save the Date

- **August 23, 2005 3:00 PM (EDT)**
  - Women's Business Connection Free Conference Call Hosted by the National Women's Business Council
    - Topic: "Exporting for Women Business Owners: Access to Technical and Financial Support Programs"
    - Guest Speakers from the Department of Commerce, Small Business Administration and the Export-Import Bank of the United States
    - [www.nwbc.gov](http://www.nwbc.gov)
- **August 25, 2005 1:00 PM (EDT)**
  - SBA's Online Chat
    - Topic: "Healthcare and Your Small Business"
    - Hosts: Karen Karrigan and J.P. Wieske
    - [www.sba.gov](http://www.sba.gov)

- **September 14, 2005**
  - SBA and HP's Business Matchmaking
    - Location: Milwaukee, Wisconsin at the Hyatt Regency
    - [www.businessmatchmaking.com](http://www.businessmatchmaking.com)

## ■ **Connections & Directions**

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To share your questions, ideas, success stories or tips, please contact Kathryn Ballenger at:  
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