

# INTRODUCTION

## BROADCASTER TO BUSINESS OWNER: HOW I STARTED THINKING BIG

This book is based upon my experience as the owner of a small business that has attracted some large customers. It's an award-winning media production and communication company. But my experience in business began long before I started the company; it began in the backroom of a dry cleaning establishment. It was a family-owned business operated by three brothers, the descendants of Greek immigrants. The brothers also owned a small burger joint right next door where the specialty was—what else?—Greek chili dogs.

I can remember working at the cleaners from the time I was old enough to follow directions. My dad was the middle brother and the only one of the three with a college education.

Every Saturday he would take my sister, younger brother, and me to the store. While he did paperwork, or caught up on loads of clothing in need of attention, we would check in the dirty clothes, put paper inserts on hangers, and clean the store. That was my first foray into business and, believe me, there was no better feeling than having the run of the store. As I got older, I worked my way up to being a counter girl, my first sales experience. Then I was able to open and close the place, my first management experience.

My parents were definitely ahead of their time. In an era when most Greek parents wanted their daughters to “get married and have babies” (yes, that famous line from *My Big Fat Greek Wedding* is very accurate), my parents wanted us to go to school, get educated, and have careers. But, to be clear, my dad did not want us to go into the family business; he wanted us to achieve more. So we did.

My sister, Vicki, went into retailing and today, along with her husband Charles, owns a boutique rental company in Raleigh, North Carolina. They are small, but they do big business. You’ll hear more about them throughout this book. My brother, Steve, is a successful litigation and entertainment lawyer, and his wife Bess is a dentist. As for me, I went to Michigan State University, became a broadcaster, and then got my Master’s Degree. No over-achievers in this family.

For more than 10 years, I had a successful, award-winning career in broadcast journalism. I did it all; from anchoring, producing, directing, and hosting specialty programming to investigative reporting, documentaries, and features. In the process, I was honored with more than 30

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awards from United Press International, the Associated Press, and numerous regional and local broadcast awards. Pardon the bragging, but you'll see why it is necessary when you read Chapter 14. I got tired of working for a TV station where the owners changed every year or so—and so did the priorities! Every new owner seemed more focused on cost cutting, and less concerned about the quality of the product and the needs of the local community. By the way, I got fired, but that is a topic for a whole other book.

It was time to make a change. I had chances to move to stations in larger markets. But every opportunity I explored seemed like I would be doing the same job, just in a different city. Where was the challenge in that? Like countless others, I dreamed about having more control over my life and career. I wanted to own my own business, run it, and grow it. That's why I founded Cynthia Kay and Company, and in 25 years the business has thrived.

While the company originally served businesses in Michigan, I knew that to survive the economic roller coaster, I needed to attract big businesses throughout the country. I set about working to do just that. Today, CK & Co. serves corporations from the Global Fortune 100, as well as small businesses and non-profit organizations. Our clients are pretty impressive, including Herman Miller, Inc., Siemens Industry, Inc., Dematic, Wiley Publishing, Nestle, affiliates of Susan G. Komen for the Cure, and countless others.

The strategies I am about to share are a major reason for our success. It's a simple but often misunderstood fact. A small business is not just a scaled down version of a big

business. Some of the strategies which work well for larger companies may actually be counterproductive for smaller firms.

*Small Business for Big Thinkers* provides proven strategies to run a better small business that are unconventional, yet logical, clear, understandable, and easy to act upon. The early chapters help lay the foundation for what it takes to build and grow a small business that is healthy, efficient, and a great place to work. If you don't get this right, you simply won't be prepared to work with sophisticated, large customers. Strategies like "Be Ahead of the Pack, But Not Too Far Ahead" (Chapter 9), or "Know When It's Time for Employees to Go" (Chapter 10), help position your business so that you can go after big business. In the later chapters, the book provides a roadmap for small companies looking to expand their businesses by *doing* business with *big* business. Trust me; it isn't as easy as it sounds. "The Big Business Buyer's Perspective" (Chapter 12), "How to Get Face-time and When to Show Up" (Chapter 15), along with "Give Something Away, Get more Business" (Chapter 16), show you how to connect and deepen the relationship with large customers. Each chapter ends with Tips to Get You Thinking Big.

By sharing my own experiences, from growing up in a family business to running my own media production company, along with the experiences of others, I aim to provide the kind of information and inspiration that will help small business owners become big thinkers. A fellow business owner told me that her favorite saying is, "Small businesses are not small because we are too stupid to be big." I agree,

and would add that you don't need to have lots of employees and mega-facilities to have a big impact. Read on, and start thinking *big*.