

INTRODUCTION

BROADCASTER TO BUSINESS OWNER

This book is based upon my experience as the owner of a small business that has attracted some well-known and respected 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. Every Saturday, Dad 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, along with her husband, Charles, owned a boutique rental company in Raleigh, North Carolina. You'll hear more about them in this book. My brother, Steve, is a successful lawyer. As for me, I went to Michigan State University, became a broadcaster, and then got my master's degree. No overachievers in this family.

For more than ten 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 thirty awards from United Press International and the Associated Press, plus numerous regional and local broadcast awards. Pardon the bragging, but you'll see how working in broadcasting helped me when you read chapter 9. 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. 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 for over thirty-five years the business has thrived.

Today, CK and CO serves corporations from the Global Fortune 100, as well as small businesses and nonprofit organizations. Our clients are pretty impressive, including Siemens Industry, Dematic, Wiley Publishing, Nestle, Cisco Technologies, Bradford White, the International Society of Primerus Law Firms, 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 that work well for larger companies may actually be counterproductive for smaller firms.

Small Business, Big Success provides proven strategies to achieve success from starting up to stepping out. They are 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 will become a statistic—one of the many businesses that does not make it past the five-year mark.

Strategies like “Get Smart about Partnering” (chapter 4), or “You Are the Boss. Now What?” (chapter 7), get you off to a great start. 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 14), “Find Your Brand Fanatics and Nurture Them” (chapter 16), along with “Give Something Away, Get More Business” (chapter 19), show you how to connect and deepen the relationship with customers and also give back to the community. Because I believe in seeing the whole picture, there are chapters to help you begin to think about “success at stepping out.” Each chapter ends with Tips to Succeed.

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. 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.