

SMALL BUSINESS START-UP

KEY TO STARTING YOUR OWN BUSINESS IS NOT JUST WHAT YOU KNOW, BUT WHO

By Andrew Kulp
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When Lori Donofrio-Galley decided to launch her Wyoming-based public relations firm, The Right Angle Strategic Storytelling LLC, in April, she was prepared.

She identified an opportunity in the recent rise in demand for PR services. She had the experience assisting in marketing solutions for small-to-midsize businesses and nonprofits. She had the desire and passion to go to work every day in a communications field.

Donofrio-Galley dutifully went through the business startup checklist, too, an exercise that is still paying dividends three months after getting The Right Angle off the ground, she says.

Yet, early in the conversation about why after 38 years Donofrio-Galley decided to go to work for herself in the first place, a pivotal reason why she believed in her success emerged.

"My network is my most valuable asset, and I knew that going in," Donofrio-Galley said adamantly during a phone interview. "I would say it is critically important that people (entrepreneurs) actively build and engage in a network."

Having worked in the nonprofit sector for more than 20 years and served as executive director of the Northeast Berks Chamber of Commerce for the last six, Donofrio-Galley has shaken countless hands and established numerous connections.

It wasn't simply part of the job, though. Networking is a skill Donofrio-Galley actively honed, understanding that the relationships formed with peers can result in productive partnerships even decades later.

"The massive outpouring of support I received when I made this transition has been amazing," Donofrio-Galley said. "I got ideas. I got referrals. I've been invited to do some speaking engagements."

"Three connections from my past — one I haven't seen for decades, another for 17, 18 years — these people have reached out to me. One hired me, one is considering hiring me. It (networking) is really important for your personal reputation and your business presence."

Running down the checklist

Donofrio-Galley acknowledges she benefited in part from her position at the chamber



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Before she launched her new business, The Right Angle Strategic Storytelling LLC, in April, Lori Donofrio-Galley made sure she was prepared to make the move.

where she was able to see firsthand what businesses needed and challenges entrepreneurs were facing, especially in the midst of a pandemic.

Still, when she began developing a business plan during her time off on weekends and evenings, she took a by-the-book approach.

"I mapped out my business over a period of five or more months," Donofrio-Galley said. "I did the research and created an outline. What kind of services would I offer? How would I do this work? How did I want a typical day to be? I created a mission statement early on."

"And some of these writings would be evolving over the months, and that's great because you have to start with something."

With a fully fleshed-out background in place, Donofrio-Galley was ready to take concrete steps toward opening.

"I filed for the LLC," she said, "I made sure I'm covered for insurance I need. I opened a business bank account. I had an attorney draft professional services agreement for me. I researched pricing. Even at the beginning of 2021, I was working through all of that."

While Donofrio-Galley was technically going through a type of business startup checklist, which is common, that process continues to come into play on a daily basis three months after launch.

"I'm so happy I did all that work and now have a book of information that I do use and reference," she said.

Networking remains a critical part of the equation in Donofrio-Galley's eyes, whether for meeting clients, building partnerships, generating referrals or

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learning from peers in your own industry or other professions.

It's something entrepreneurs should be carving out time to do, if not every day, at least once a week.

"Meeting people, talking to them over coffee at networking events, it's a significant way to get the word out," Donofrio-Galley said. "But also to really listen to what other people are doing."

Getting The Right Angle

Listening and researching are two of Donofrio-Galley's skills that carry over into her marketing firm, The Right Angle Strategic Storytelling, which she describes as "investigative journalism meets creative PR strategy."

Being at the chamber, she recognized that so many business owners are seeking ways to bolster their public presence ever since COVID-19 shook up everyday life.

"Talking to prospective members, they were thinking about joining the chamber because, 'I need to become visible again,'" Donofrio-Galley said. "It's almost having that intel on the street."

That's an area Donofrio-Galley had always helped others, so turning it into a business wasn't a stretch. Even going back to her time at Wyoming High School and Elizabethtown College, communications and in particular journalism were always areas of interest.

The Right Angle offers prospective clients a free 30-minute consult, during which she

lands on four key questions the business owner is looking to answer. Should they choose to go forward, Donofrio-Galley produces a customized public relations strategy researching the best way to disseminate the company's message.

"Investigation defines the plan," she said. "Find out how to make people aware of their services and storytelling — who they are, so customers understand their back story — and all the platforms that will define the client's direction."

"People get busy, then they're 15 years into a business and they don't have a PR or marketing plan, so it makes sense to delegate that to someone who has the contacts."

Already, The Right Angle has booked five clients, and, already, the business has adapted to new requests or challenges that inevitably occur with any startup.

"Working with those early clients is the best way to work out those logistics," Donofrio-Galley said. "As much as I knew coming in, there were still opportunities to change and shift."

"Every day is a learning experience."

Ultimately, if anybody who possesses the methodology and the drive, and is able to prepare and network accordingly, can start their own business if they want, Donofrio-Galley believes.

"Once you get to the point where you know I've essentially done this work within other organizations, having that knowledge and experience is enough," she said. "Whatever your skills, your expertise, trust that you can do it."

"You've already done it, so why not go out and do it on your own if you're willing to put in the work."

OPINION

Starting a small business? SCORE can help



Willie Kanaley
 Ash SCORE

SCORE, "Counselors to America's Small Business" is a part of the United States Small Business Administration with 10,000 volunteers in 300 chapters national that provide confidential, unlimited, free business counseling and mentoring services to entrepreneurs starting or growing a small business. The Berks Schuylkill Chapter in Reading was started in 1965 and has 35

business owners and executives dedicated to helping small business get started and grow. Last year they provided over 400 individual mentoring sessions.

Small business is risky. The SBA's records show 20% fail in their first year, 30% fail in two years and 50% fail within five years. SCORE can help you manage this risk.

SCORE mentors understand the needs and challenges of managing a business because they have done it themselves. By sharing their "been there, done that" know-how they can help you achieve your goals. There is an old saying "If you don't know where you are going, any road will get you there." I am convinced a written business plan is an essential for improved business success. SBA records show that businesses with a written plan grow 30% faster than those that do not have a plan. The following steps will greatly improve your odds for success:

- Determine your target market and audience and investigate your competition. Your business will not interest everyone. Think through which groups will benefit most from your proposed product and services. A data base like A to Z Databases (<https://www.atozdatabases.com/search>) has a huge amount of information that can be searched in great detail. All you need is a library card from a library in Berks County (<http://readingpubliclibrary.org/>) to gain access. Contact the Reference Department at the main library (610-655-6350) in Reading for additional information and assistance.

- Develop a network of contacts that with people that might help you in your business. The Greater Reading Chamber Alliance can be a big help. (<https://greaterreading.org/>) Another local organization that can also help is the Small Business Resource Association. (<https://www.sbrassociation.com/>)

- Make sure you have the appropriate professional advice. Use the check list BLAIME to make sure you have not overlooked a