

# CT BUSINESS JOURNAL

May 2004

## Starting Up

### Small Business Entrepreneurs Mark the Milestones of Success One Step at a Time

---

BY NANCY WATERMAN

---

Five years ago, I made a life-changing decision to leave a secure, well-paying job to start my own business. It was a daunting challenge yet, like many entrepreneurs, I knew it was something I had to do. Finding the courage to strike out on my own was the first of many milestones that, for small businesses, are measured one step at a time.

Other steps along the way have included the big events, like winning new clients and hiring my first employee. Also, there were innumerable smaller everyday accomplishments that taken together account for a large measure of my business's success. I took the plunge to start Network-IT in 1999. Riding the burst of the Internet bubble, I now have a full-time staff of three and 33 clients throughout the state.

While my first five years in business have not been without a few headaches, the reward of creating something from nothing has proven to be gratifying. Everyday, we receive new calls from clients who need our help. Checks are coming in and we're busy estimating new projects. There have been ups and downs, but a few strategies have helped me succeed.

For all the would-be entrepreneurs, here are some of my lessons learned:

**Join your local chamber.** As a Middletown business, the Middlesex County Chamber has been a terrific resource. The key is to become as involved as you can. For me, becoming a Board Member has helped greatly in making both my business, and me as an individual, well known in the community.

**Partner with colleagues.** Going on your own doesn't mean going it alone. I have relied heavily on my small business colleagues. In the IT business, there are so many companies that need network and support services that we do not need to be cutthroat about competing with one another. In fact, a colleague helped me to start my business, and I have come to rely on another with specific expertise.

**Get the right people on staff.** It's hard to know when to add staff and how to find the right people, but I know that being well staffed helped me to grow my business. While it meant taking less income for myself at first, it also meant that I was free to work in ways that would mean more money for the company. Although it caused anxiety at times, it definitely paid off.

**Offer employees opportunities to develop their skills.** Once you have a good staff, you must do whatever you can to keep them. They are both a projection and a reflection of your business. I encourage industry certification and provide reimbursement once an employee has successfully passed the exam. This benefits everyone - the company, the employee and our clients.

**Look before you leap.** Being an entrepreneur is about much more than simply bringing a new service or product to market. More than anything, it's about knowing the costs you'll incur and understanding the risks you have to take. Before making the move to start your business, talk with someone who has traveled the road before you.

*Nancy Waterman is owner of Network-IT; a full services network and IT support services firm for small businesses. Network-IT is based in Middletown, Connecticut.*  
[www.network-it.net](http://www.network-it.net)