

Choose partners with care

Peggy McHale and Sandi Webster / Consultants 2 Go

By Joel Berg | Peggy McHale had seen family members go it alone in business and she had seen friends form partnerships that splintered on bad terms

Neither scenario was for her. It's no wonder, then, that McHale is happy to have found a dependable business partner in Sandi Webster. The two women, who started a consulting firm in 2002, first met while working for credit card giant American Express in the late 1990s.

"Sandi came in and every "i" was dotted, every "t" was crossed. I knew this person knew her stuff immediately," McHale said about meeting Webster for the first time.

Their careers at AT&T ended after Sept. 11. McHale and Webster took buyout offers in the economic turmoil that followed the terrorist attacks and contemplated their next move.

In 2002, they decided to pursue their shared dream of opening a business. The idea for their firm, Consultants 2 Go, arose during their time at AT&T when they had trouble finding consultants with the right mix of experience and ability to finish the job on time and within budget.

"Good consultants were at a premium and something we had a very hard time getting," Webster said.

Their Newark-based firm finds marketing consultants to work on client projects. The consultants in-

clude many career-oriented women in their 30s. They have young children and want to keep a toe in the business world—but with more-flexible schedules.

Clients, meanwhile, often need help because an internal marketing person is out on maternity leave.

The forces affecting both clients and employees have been an unexpected boost, McHale said. "We didn't set out and say this is what we're going to do, but what we quickly realized is that this is a huge trend in the marketplace."

Although McHale and Webster both hail from a marketing background, they bring unique strengths that allow for a clear division of labor in their firm.

McHale tends to act more as the chief financial officer while Webster functions as the chief operating officer, McHale said.

Both women attribute the success of their partnership to the fact that they were business colleagues before they were friends. They added a third partner in 2004 but the relationship didn't work out, Webster said.

The episode taught her the value of choosing partners with care. Many entrepreneurs prefer to go it alone, Webster said. "We like having a business partner because we bounce ideas off each other. It's not a lonely thing for us."

