

MAKE YOUR FORTUNE

How to get rich in America

A dozen entrepreneurs, a dozen success stories: proof that you don't need a lot of money to make a go of it, but you do have to be smart about how you invest your energy.

By Josh Hyatt, Money Magazine

Money

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Sandi Webster, 45 Newark

Lesson: It's not who you know - it's how well you keep in touch with them

Sandi Webster spent 15 years collecting the raw material she'd need to start a business. She just didn't know it at the time. As director of marketing at American Express, Webster, along with colleague Peggy McHale, helped launch automatic bill payment in the late 1990s, a project that hooked them up with many of AmEx's 128 business partners. "We had our tentacles in different companies," Webster says. "And those people knew the quality of our work."

That came in handy in December 2001 when both of them were laid off. Deciding that "we didn't want to be employees anymore," they cofounded Consultants 2 Go, providing marketing help to big and medium-size companies. After coughing up \$1,000 apiece to upgrade their computers and buy quality printers, they got on their phones - not landlines, because of the expense. An attorney they knew let them sublet an office, accepting payment in the form of marketing wisdom. Webster pitched their services to the companies they had met through AmEx, tailoring her words to their needs. If she knew they focused on database marketing, she'd highlight her experience there. Need a brochure? She'd offer to send a sample of one she'd made. "It was an advantage that I knew what they did," she says, "and even better if I knew what they needed."

To find consultants to work for them, the pair called folks they knew through AmEx. Even now the majority of the company's 40 consultants are former colleagues. "A lot of our friends were on the mommy track or had elderly parents to care for," says Webster. "They wanted the flexibility." There are still more she'd like to bring on. Webster stays in touch with them, finding a reason to call every couple of months. If an e-mail bounces back or the phone number doesn't work, she tracks them down through mutual friends. "My contacts don't grow old," she says, "and I make sure they never die."

Even though the company reached \$1 million in sales last year, the founders have yet to make a full-time hire. Webster thinks the time to bring in an employee may come soon. When that day does arrive, she says, "I probably know somebody."



PHOTO: JONATHAN SPRAGUE

Sandi Webster used her experience and contacts at American Express to launch her own marketing firm.

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