



## Sue Olson, KidzArt

### **Why did you become a business owner and what significant factors led you?**

For many years I dreamed of owning my own company. I did not know why or what kind of company, but in the dream I was doing something to make a difference and I was my own boss. When my first child was about eight months old a friend told me about a business opening down state called Dream Dinners. I was up all night thinking about the possibilities and how I could bring that to Traverse City. The next day I went to some trusted friends who at one point had been personal coaches and they informed me that there were already TWO of those types of businesses slated to open in our area. I was dumbfounded. My hopes were dashed and I felt a bit foolish. But it helped me recognize that desire and it was the first time in a very long time I had allowed myself to feel that crazy excitement of "Oh my gosh can I do this?" I felt uncharacteristically out of control, but in a good way.

The next time that feeling came along I had just been laid off from my twelve year career as a landscape architect & planner. I felt a certain amount of panic. But even more powerful was this feeling of excitement mixed with the faith that all would be well and I was finally going to find something fulfilling to do for a living. I felt open to possibilities. I did not know *HOW* I would find something – I just knew it would happen. I found KidzArt while doing a Google search for a present for my niece. The more I learned about it the more I felt a certainty come over me that this was meant for me. It really pushed me out of my comfort zone and the fear of failure was so powerful it almost made me squash the feelings and the dreams. In the end I knew I would be disappointed in myself when I saw someone else do it and more than that I would not know what to tell my kids when they asked if they should take risks in life.

### **What prepared you (or didn't!) for business ownership?**

Hindsight is 20-20. Now I know why my first job out of college had nothing to do with my major. It was in accounting. That job led me to another accounting job in a local engineering firm. There I learned more of the "back-of-the-house" business operations. When I got hired as a landscape architect it was for a very small firm and I was able to put a lot of my accounting experience to good use. In that small firm we all worked together on every aspect of the business including marketing and proposal writing. I even got to train and manage people. I also got to watch my boss closely as he struggled at times with accounts receivable and taking loans to pay his employees. Even being that close still does not totally prepare you for things when all of it is your own.

### **What or who inspired you?**

Megan Raphael is a person in my life who offers a steady undercurrent of support. Our paths seem to cross at the most necessary moments. Juliette Schultz is another who for a time surfaced at critical times. She would listen to me cook up dreams and ideas. She always took me seriously. There was another woman who took me seriously when I got the courage to say out loud that I wanted to start my own business. It surprised me when people did not laugh in my face and I am not sure why expected this but I did. So this other person was Mary Rogers. I showed up at my first Marigold luncheon when I was on maternity leave for my first baby. Since I was off work I felt able to „fess“ up for the first time that I really wanted to start my own professional organizing business. Mary acted as if that was a totally normal thing for me to be saying. You just never know what your reaction or opinion can mean to someone – it is powerful.

### **What do you enjoy most about business ownership?**

I love getting out there and talking to people about my business. I am passionate about this program and about telling everyone what KidzArt has to offer. I love being able to make decisions about how to give back to the community. The fulfillment of being able to bring art and make promises and stand behind them is strangely calming and very empowering. I am filled with the possibilities and they are endless. That is so enjoyable – I am having a blast! The wonderful connections you make when you put yourself out there authentically fills me up with gratitude.

### **What surprised you most?**

Having to revise my business plan and open up the studio space was quite a surprise and challenge. At a time when things were just about to gel for me I had to adjust my sails and go in an entirely different direction. That took a lot of energy and more pure faith to go into uncharted territory.

How I truly do not miss what I was doing. I have not had a twinge of regret.

The economic climate has been a bit of surprise. Things were not super great when I made the decision to start this business, but they have gotten worse instead of better. Now there is only one way to go and I figure starting in this climate will only have made my foothold stronger by the time the tides turn.

### **Who or what keeps you motivated?**

*“My son is having a blast. I always knew he was a good artist and he is extremely proud of the art work he is doing. He's been through one full session (5 weeks) and is starting another one. It has done a lot for his self esteem and self reliance. Signing him up for Kidzart is probably the best thing I have done for him. What a great program!” -Mary (A KidzArt Mom)*

Receiving feedback like this really gives me chills. When I decided to buy a KidzArt franchise I thought it was a good fit for me and something that I would like doing. I had no idea that it was my passion finding me. I had no idea the fulfillment I would get and that all those years sitting behind a desk would be rewarded with this kind of goose-bump producing knowledge that I am exactly where I need to be. This is what keeps me going even though I am not yet making a living from this business. Every cell in my body knows that I will at some point and in the meanwhile I know this program is making a difference. The opportunity to be involved with these kids is an amazing and humbling experience. Growth is painful – getting comfortable with pushing the comfort zone takes practice and now I can impart this on a daily basis to the kids in our classes.

The exhilaration of making my own choices and choosing to give back is addictive.

**What advice do you have for women considering or in the beginning stages of ownership?**

- If you have already started your business be prepared to boldly try everything to get and keep it going.
- Brainstorm any and all ideas you have to grow your business then look over that list and divide it into “immediate”, “short-term”, and “it’s on the radar” so you can start implementing your ideas in a way that does not overwhelm you.
- Keep going with a laser focus on where you want to be in the end and then be prepared to take any roads that lead there even if they are not the direct route you anticipated in the beginning. Have faith in yourself, your decisions, and people.
- Trust your instincts.
- If you are doing this totally on your own find a person (or people) to use as a sounding board for those times when you feel like you are making decisions in a vacuum.
- Find those people who will take you and your dreams seriously and believe them. It can be anyone and may not even be those closest to you.