

KATHY DAVIS

KATHY DAVIS STUDIOS

Having launched her business from the corner of her bedroom some 20 years ago, Kathy Davis is today a successful entrepreneur who inspires and directs her talented design studio and an adjoining retail gallery and center for the arts. Her personal vision and company mission are one and the same: to scatter joy through art, living, and giving. It's a vision that has helped guide the impact of her work in the marketplace, with retail sales of greeting cards and licensed products exceeding \$80 million a year. More than 400 million Kathy Davis items have sold to date, scattering joy the world over.

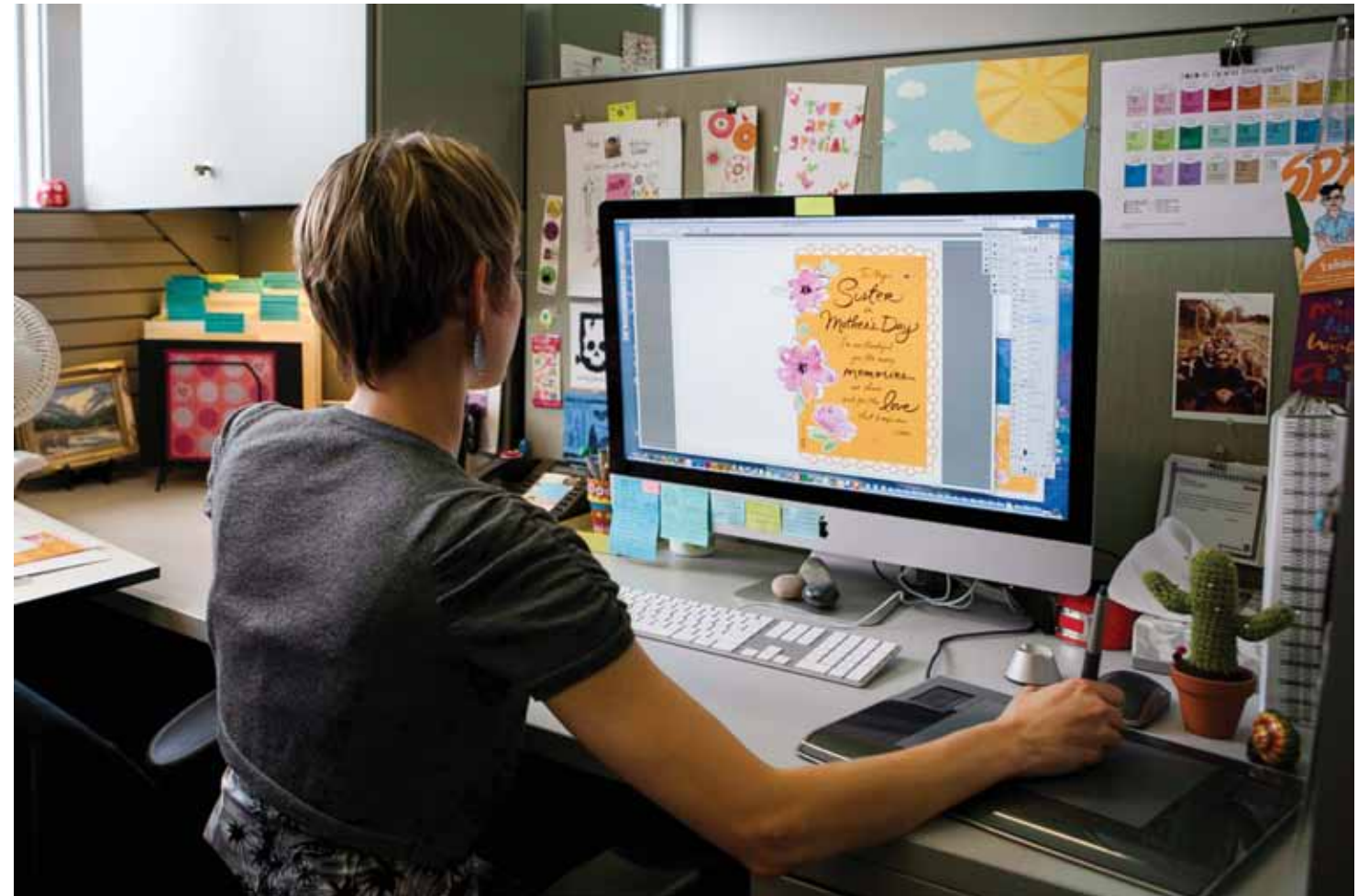
As entrepreneurs, we often struggle with finding the right direction to grow our business. But the truth is that we each have to carve a path that fits our own particular place in life, our strengths, and our dreams. I was once asked in an interview for my secret to success in such a competitive field; I arrived at the notion that, for me, success was all about seven basic ideas. As I look back over the past 20 plus years of my journey, these seven principles emerge as key ones for me.

1. Believe in Yourself

Since childhood, I always felt that creativity was in my future, but I lacked the confidence and clarity to pursue it as a career. After 10 fulfilling years as a teacher, I decided it was time to try and work for myself in a creative field. A divorce and the prospect of raising my kids as a single parent provided the momentum needed to address this calling in a serious, purposed way. The book "What Color is Your Parachute" (Ten Speed Press, 1972) helped me focus my strengths in such a way that I could see a potential career taking shape, but giving myself permission to put myself out there was a very important step for me.

I discovered that coming up with new ideas and working them to completion was a strength of mine. Creating is something that gives me a sense of pride. While I enjoy working solo, I also realized that working with other people and helping to teach and inspire them was equally important to me. Once I recognized my strengths and identified my purpose, I then had to find the right focus to put these to work! →





FAVORITE QUOTE

“Look at a stone cutter hammering away at his rock, perhaps a hundred times without as much as a crack showing in it. Yet at the hundred-and-first blow it will split in two, and I know it was not the last blow that did it, but all that had gone before.”
— Jacob August Riis

2. Work Hard

While I was not trained as an artist, a writer, or a businessperson, I was looking for a career change that could build upon a variety of my life experiences, incorporating my love of painting, my teaching experience, and my ability to write things in an uncomplicated, direct manner.

At a friend's suggestion, I decided to explore the greeting card industry and summoned the courage to visit the National Stationery Show in New York. After walking the aisles for a few days, I found several different greeting card companies that accepted freelance artists. One of them in particular, Recycled Paper Greetings, provided the creative freedom I craved. This was the start of a 20-year partnership with RPG that became the cornerstone for my new business.

To make a freelance career work, disciplining myself was an absolute must. There was no one telling me what to do, so I had to take responsibility for how I spent my time. Knowing that my two young children were counting on me for support drove my work ethic. Protecting time from outside influences while working at home was key to staying focused. Meeting deadlines, responding to client requests, and building business skills as I grew was critical to success.

In order to make a new business work, sacrifices need to be made, and unfortunately that never seems to go away. But if you're doing what you love, working hard is not all that painful. I learned that you have to accept the fact that it takes a lot of time and effort, planning, administrating, and delegating certain responsibilities in order to build a career doing what you love.

3. Take Risks

The first risk I took was in committing to try this new venture without a safety net. I quit my part-time jobs, and despite my fear of failure and the unknown, my desire to trust my gut ultimately won out. I've learned that without taking leaps of faith, you will never learn what things will or will not work. Making peace with failures and learning from them is what's important. You just have to keep moving forward, which does get a little easier once you have done it enough times to realize that the worst that can happen is usually not all that bad. Trusting my intuition and allowing myself to take risks has been a key to growth for my business.

4. Keep an Open Mind

Some people build their business with a well-defined plan, including financial projections and specific, measurable goals. In certain circumstances, this is essential to attract partners, investors,

or bankers; however, I chose a slower, more organic growth path. I created my path as I went along, one greeting card at a time, and I chose to not borrow money, take on business partners, or invest in a business plan. While I do have goals and visions for my company's growth, I still enjoy a somewhat uncharted course. Staying open to opportunities without limiting my options has always worked for me.

When I attended my first stationery show with the hopes of finding some companies to work for, I created designs using a cut-paper collage technique that I felt good about. I also took just one sample of an unfinished watercolor sketch. But after meeting with several creative directors at that show, I quickly noticed that my watercolor sketch was getting a lot more notice than the collage pieces I was so fond of. I changed course, adapted to what the market wanted, and today I try to continue to look at new opportunities with an open mind.

5. Accept Your Limitations

It's critical to build on your strengths, but just as important to recognize and compensate for your weaknesses. Right from the start, I hired a part-time bookkeeper and a copyright lawyer, since I was clueless in those important areas. Then, as I began to accumulate a lot of paperwork, card samples, and clutter, my friend Lorraine offered to →



5 SIMPLE SECRETS TO LICENSING

1. CHOOSE YOUR LICENSING PARTNERS CAREFULLY.

We've learned that the best licensees for us are not just financially sound; they also understand and value our brand and our message and share a similar vision and product aesthetic. I've been fortunate to work with larger, well-established partners who helped grow my brand, but I've also had great partnerships with smaller, more specialized companies where my brand became a significant part of their growth. Quality partnerships, big or small, are rooted in good chemistry and the mutual commitment to develop and market quality products.

2. BE COLLABORATIVE.

It's important to know what you're good at and to choose licensing partners who are experts in their fields. We work to create good communication and marry our mutual strengths to successfully reach the market.

3. BE PATIENT.

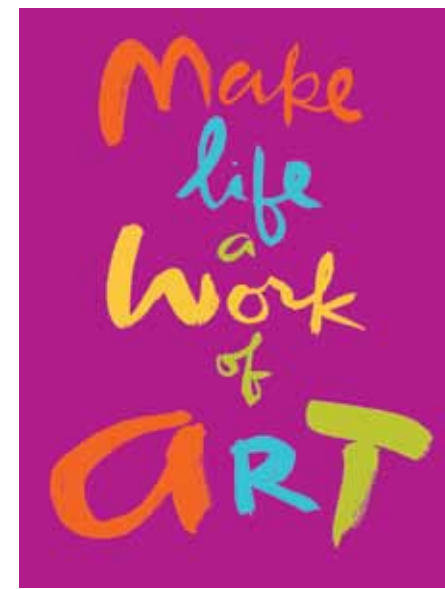
After you decide to work with a company, the next steps are many (from contract negotiation, to product development, manufacturing, sales and marketing, and then shipping). It can take anywhere from 6-18 months before products get to market. The financial return on your efforts only happens after the customer buys your product, and that takes time.

4. TRUST YOUR GUT AND COMMUNICATE.

In product development, there is a lot of back and forth with discussion about materials, price points, end consumers, and how to approach the market. I have always tried to trust my gut and stick to what feels right.

5. BE PRODUCT SMART.

It's important to know your market and have a way to test your ideas. We use our new flagship store as a laboratory to try new things, get feedback, and test new concepts. Success comes when you understand your market, your consumers, and how your product meets their needs. Look for opportunities to test your ideas, and get feedback from outside resources — it really helps. Good luck!



help get me organized. Lorraine has been with me every step of the way from that first day, and she continues to be an instrumental part of our growth.

Over time, as I became busier in the creative parts of the business, I struggled to keep up. Luckily for me, a high school art student asked if she could help me out, and I soon put her to work cutting paper and doing simple tasks. I decided right then to hire and train others to assist in the creative and production aspects of my business. This helped me delegate some of the work while I focused on the creative and design direction of the business. My little company has grown from a couple of trusted people to the team of 25 talented and dedicated employees that we have today. I try to hire the best people I can find — those who fit our mission and our culture, and are enthusiastic, caring, dependable, and open-minded team players.

There are times as a business owner when you feel pulled in a million different directions. Finding the right balance for me between my creative and business sides is my biggest challenge. I have to protect time for my creative development work, since it not only drives much of the vision for my company, but it is truly a reason why I started my business in the first place. →

Create
a life
you
Love



6. Treat Others with Respect & Kindness

The Golden Rule really speaks for itself ... in business and in life. Enough said.

7. Never Stop Dreaming

I've learned that when one dream comes true, it's important to continue to dream. Doing just that helped me to realize many amazing dreams so far – from becoming an art teacher, to working for myself and growing a business.

My dream of having a retail gallery became reality as we opened the Kathy Davis Gallery last spring. At the 2013 National Stationery Show, we launched a new Kathy Davis signature brand that has exciting possibilities for specialty lifestyle and product development.

Another dream of mine is to help promote the arts with an arts center that supports my mission to scatter joy through art, living, and giving. Today we host art classes and gallery shows and partner with charitable organizations to help bring this mission to life.

I have learned that ideas are precious ... not all of them germinate, but the ones you nourish can take on growth in the most unexpected ways. The organic approach to growing and nurturing the business, pruning as necessary, is a method that has worked for me.

My dreams take on new life every day, and I look forward to seeing where they may lead. As time goes on at Kathy Davis Studios, we will continue to approach whichever dream or whichever business segment we are pursuing with a simple purpose in mind: to inspire. My advice to you is to keep dreaming ... as you create a path that's right for you! ■

7 Simple Secrets to Success

#1 Believe in Yourself

Always stay true to what makes you unique and trust your gut. See your differences as strengths rather than handicaps. And, instead of comparing yourself to others...be inspired by them.

#2 Work Hard.

pure and simple. Ideas aren't worth anything unless you put them to work. You have to be **DISCIPLINED** *Responsible* *dependable* and never stop learning or growing

#3 Take Risks

It's O.K. to be afraid but you just have to plunge in anyway. I'm not saying this is easy, but it's just necessary to take risks in order to stay fresh and relevant. I love the quote by hockey player Wayne Gretzky...

"You'll miss 100% of the shots you don't take."

what a great reminder for all of us. And you will make mistakes...but your efforts will also make a difference just take a deep breath and step out of that comfort zone!

#4 Keep an Open Mind.

Be willing to adapt to change when you need to. Adjust your sails to catch that wind. Be strong... yet flexible... like bamboo... and bend rather than break.

#5 Accept Your Limitations.

Ask for help...and be able to say no. There's no way you can be everything to everybody all the time! Surround yourself with good people and enlist their help when you need it most.

#6 Treat others with Respect and Kindness.

That golden rule never, ever goes out of style and last but not least...

#7 Never Stop Dreaming

Your visions can guide you to great things... but be patient and don't give up on yourself or on an idea that might seem slow in coming. It just might need a little more time to germinate and become strong.

Promise yourself to keep dreaming those

BIG bright Beautiful dreams!

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Where Women Create BUSINESS would like to thank Kathy Davis for her involvement in our Winter Issue. To learn more, visit kathydavis.com.