

HEY SARAH BEAR,



Well, it looks like we're on track for you to take over the business, the No. 1 exit option since I started it 11 years ago. Since this is the maga-

zine's "women's issue", I thought I'd write you an open letter to pass along my lessons learned, not that I'm done yet, but you know that.

You've left Syracuse for the big city Chicago — fine with me and actually part of the plan, as long as you come back and bring everything you've learned home! You're working for an amazing company that has its act together and treats it employees well, and you're learning lots about goal-setting, how to cultivate customers and grow and manage sales. Keep fresh, keep learning. When you're ready to run the business (not that you'll ever be "ready" — it's like getting married or having a baby) keep at the top of your mind five fundamentals:



1. Take care of yourself. For me, this has meant health first. If I get enough sleep, good food and lots of sweaty exercise, everything else seems to fall into place. Finding quiet time helps, too.

2. Do what you love. Repeat: do what you love.

3. Surround yourself with good — no, the best — people you can find. Not that you can afford. That you can find. Search hard and be patient in recruiting them. This means employees, independent contractors and vendors. Once you have them, then treat them right, with compensation and attention. They will flourish, the business will thrive and you will all have fun.

4. Know your stuff. Know the basics to the state-of-the-art. Read. Talk with peers. Keep on top of trends. Always, always keep learning.

5. Watch cash flow. Know how to generate it, keep an eye on it, keep it flowing.

If you have the above nailed down, you're golden. A few other things I've learned along the way:

- Your reputation is everything. It will make you or break you. Integrity and plain old niceness will serve you well.
- Use your common sense as well as your smarts. You're great at doing your homework. Learn to trust your gut as well.
- Never work for a bad boss. How many times have I told you that? Oh wait, that's for a regular job. In this case, don't be a bad boss. We've talked a lot about retention, how much it depends on one's relationship with one's manager.
- Positive reinforcement is much more constructive than negative reinforcement.
- Remember that a small business owner needs to be prepared to do it all, from determining strategy to giving raises to emptying the trash and scrubbing the floor. Don't mix ammonia with bleach.

Love, ML! 

Anne Messenger, SPHR, is president of Messenger Associates and is also known as Mama Llama, but that's another story. She is a recognized career strategist and has practiced in the field of human resources for over 20 years. Her daughter Sarah Longley comes from a long line of entrepreneurs and may take over the business someday.

LESSONS LEARNED

As a small-business owner, be prepared to do it all

- Have a vision
- Learn QuickBooks
- Use Lisa DeVea's (Completely Organized) organization system
- Don't mix ammonia with bleach

Maintain Key Relationships

- With your banker, in good times and challenging ones
- With your accountant
- With your top 12 customers

Always keep polished

- Shoes
- Nails
- Car
- Manners