



A Personal Business Story

"You can do it."

"Yes you can."

These phrases I've heard over and over again the last couple of years. No, I'm not talking about reading a child's storybook aloud, although I've had the great pleasure of doing so on a regular basis. These positive words of encouragement are those spoken to me by my greatest supporters. If you meet me, you will likely see a confident, young business woman who genuinely enjoys helping people. While most of these characteristics have remained a steady pattern in my life, the confident part wasn't always so.

Let me properly introduce myself before I invite you to share a personal journey that is special to me. My name is Jen Denys and I am principal of The Right Path Consulting Group. We provide valuable services that optimize personal, professional and organizational growth. Our areas of expertise include: HR Consulting, Career Management, Mentoring, Retirement Lifestyle Planning, Executive Coaching and Mediation. We are located in Parkhill, Ontario and serve clients in London and the surrounding area.

Running my own business has always been an aspiration of mine. But, I honestly didn't expect that it would happen so soon. It was when I gave birth to my first son that my mind began to open to the possibility. I was at the early stages of my career in Human Resources. I had been fortunate to have roles that were diverse, interesting and provided me with a decent level of responsibility. I loved it! I loved going to work, I loved the people I worked with and I loved being part of organizational change. At the same time, I was equally excited about the small life that was growing inside me. My husband and I had only been married a short time and were ecstatic knowing we would have a child so quickly. While I was pregnant, my mind wrestled with the work-family balance question that most parents face. I thought about it. I talked about it. I prayed about it. But really, I had no idea what my life would look and feel like in the year ahead. I decided the "wait-and-see" approach was my only option. (For any of you Myers-Briggs® fans, that did not sit well with my Judging tendencies.) It turned out to be the best and only choice I could have made at the time.

After my son was born, life did change and ironically, things become clear. I was surprised to find out how much I enjoyed being at home with my little man and focusing on managing a household. While I was grateful for the time at home, I wondered how I could maintain my professional skill set so that I could re-enter the workforce – whenever that time may come. This is when a number of my supporters stepped up to the plate. My former boss asked me to come back to work as a consultant to complete a project that I had unique expertise with. With a baby less than three months old, I wasn't sure, but my husband encouraged me if I thought it was right for me. Finally, my mom – a grandma for the first time – was happy to assist with childcare. One day a week this opportunity made a big difference to the path my life would take. The first few times it was difficult

to leave my son, but I quickly began to appreciate the time away and the challenge the work presented. I found I came home refreshed and content.

I could tell you that this first contract led to other projects and that my business was established as a result, but that would be a superficial description. While continuing to devote one day a week to my first client and as my son flourished through his first year, I used the free moments I had to do some planning. I applied for a business license, I developed a website, I wrote a business plan and I participated in several training programs. Months later, I rented office space and introduced myself and my business to people in the community. I realize this sounds very forward-thinking and relatively simple. For the most part it was, but some days it felt more like two steps ahead and three back. Whether a barrier arose or self-doubt plagued my thinking, I would call on my support team to get involved. They were there to brainstorm with, vent to, plan, laugh and cry when the situation called for it. Having these committed people in my corner at these key times are instrumental in my business being where it is today.

Now two years later, I continue to strive for work-family balance. It is not a static equation. I am blessed to have a handful of exciting projects that capture my interest while spending at least half of my time with a now three-year-old who is bright, kind-hearted and loves everything about the farm we live on and our newest edition, a 3-month-old who knows the quickest way to his mom's heart is his great big, toothless smile. I do still rely on my support network. Through their continuing support, I have learned to be more confident, to trust myself and understand what I am capable of doing. It's like they've physically transferred their encouragement to me. As a result, when we do talk now, we spend more time brainstorming ideas and sharing information than conquering doubts and fears. These people have truly given me a gift, and to honor them I now look to help others who are getting started on making their dreams come true.

I decided to share my story with you because I hope it is helpful in two ways. First, I have found the most valuable business activity that I have invested my (limited) time in is building a network of supporters. My network includes colleagues and peers with whom I can share ideas and resources with and who are equally motivated to creating interesting work opportunities. My supporters also include friends and family, men and women who share my values and can be counted on to offer encouragement, support and feedback in good times and when I face challenges. Both groups of people in my network are worth their weight in gold. In their own unique way, they help me to stay focused and motivated.

My second message to share with you is one of encouragement. To any of you out there who have ever toyed with the idea of venturing out on your own or creating an unconventional work environment, I hope you will give it a try. As you probably already know, anyone who is planning to be active in the world of work in the foreseeable future, the outlook has never been better. Skilled professionals, for one, will be in high demand. At the same time, contracts, outsourcing and flexible work arrangements are gaining in popularity. With that in mind, be courageous! Find out what you love to do and create an opportunity that fits your life and matches your values. I took that chance and have never looked back.

I'd love to be one of your supporters... share your story with me by emailing: rightpath@isp.ca

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