



Collaboration is key for women business owners

BY VICTORIA PELHAM
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Carolyn Brown, CEO of the Accountant's Office, began her involvement with the Phoenix Chapter of the National Association of Women's Business Owners soon after its inception in 1985.

"There weren't that many women-owned businesses in Phoenix, and it was really interesting ... we thought we had to try to run our businesses like men ran their businesses," says Brown, who has operated accounting firms for 37 years. "We were like little men in skirts trying to run businesses."



Brown

Since then, women have taken ownership of their different management styles, starting more and more businesses. In fact, they are set to generate between 5 million and 5.5 million new jobs nationwide by 2018, leading other forms of job creation, according to a 2010 study by the Guardian Life Small Business Research Institute.

These numbers don't surprise women business owners in the Valley.

Arizona had 133,253 privately held, majority-owned women-owned companies in 2006, according to the most recent numbers provided by Susan Ratliff, who owned Exhibit Experts for 16 years before selling it recently.

"(Phoenix has) always been in the top five for growth development of women small-business owners — at least top 10," says Ratliff, who is gearing up to launch her annual Women's Small Business Boot Camp nationally.

Brown agrees that Phoenix's women-owned businesses have generally been ahead in job growth. Although the area was hit hard by the recession, she says, local women-owned businesses will grow over the next five years.

"Women-owned businesses are going to continue to grow — in number, and in size, and in the number of people they employ," Brown says. "That is going to be a real benefit not only to our economy, but just to our society in general."

Some female business owners attribute the trend partly to differing management styles between the genders.

"The things that make women different from men — their caring, nurturing attitude — are the exact same things that attract clients to women-owned businesses," says Brown, adding that women business owners' desire to bring people in and work with others helps to create more jobs.

Many say collaboration is a key component of women's leadership styles. "(Women) tend to be much more relationship-oriented," says Cindy Hynes, president of the Phoenix Chapter of NAWBO. "They tend to treat their employees maybe more in that family-type fashion."

The Guardian Life Index, a survey of American small-business owners, showed similar traits in female owners, including being "proactively consumer-focused, likely to incorporate community and environment into their business plans, receptive to input and guidance from internal and external advisers."

Women are starting their own businesses at a growing rate for a variety of reasons. The index reported that women often start businesses because they're unhappy with corporate life.

"Women tend to go into business because they're passionate about whatever they're doing, but they still want work and family balance," says Hynes.

She also says the recession is pushing many women to start their own businesses.

Others cite financial inde-

pendence, schedule flexibility and the ability to balance work and family life as reasons for becoming self-employed.

Women also are realizing they don't have to stay in the corporate world, says NAWBO member Kristine Kassel, president of Benefits by Design in Tempe. The Internet has provided widespread knowledge, pulling away the safety blanket of Corporate America.

"Back in the day, you had people who were afraid to break out in the corporate world," says Kassel, who will take over the reins of the Phoenix chapter of NAWBO as presi-

dent for 2011-2012. "Today it's like, you're unhappy? I'm going to do something."

There are still challenges for women-owned businesses. NAWBO Phoenix lost 25 percent to 30 percent of its membership during the recession.

But there still are about 200 members, Hynes says, and she sees that number increasing again.

"When you have that kind of adversity in the job market, people start finding ways to create their own destiny," she says.

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Kassel



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Susan Ratliff
Women's Small Business Boot Camp

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