



Dr. Chris Allen

Be a woman entrepreneur! Support a woman entrepreneur!

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Recent surveys of women's entrepreneurship in the United States have shown that women-owned businesses are one of the fastest-growing segments of our economy. Although woman entrepreneurs are good for the economy, we also know that women, especially women of color, face more barriers than business owners in general when starting and growing their businesses. In fact, the COVID-19 pandemic has affected women-owned businesses more negatively than businesses generally, which is true not only in the United States but worldwide.

The demands on women entrepreneurs have been greater, given prolonged and constantly changing school closures, childcare issues, and senior care challenges during the pandemic. Women are still more likely to be in primary caregiving roles and thus, juggling more responsibilities at home and work, especially if they are full- or part-time business owners. Also, women-owned businesses typically have fewer cash reserves and access to financing. Thus, they are more vulnerable in times of crisis.

The benefits and challenges of being a woman entrepreneur are deeply personal to me. Over the past 15 years, I have transitioned my own business. For many years, I was a psychologist/therapist who helped individuals improve their lives and cope better. Working in mental health was a noble and satisfying profession. However, I dreamed of using my skills to have a broader impact on society. So, over several years, I worked to develop my business as a workplace psychologist/coach. As such, I now work with leaders, teams, and organizations to better meet the needs of all their stakeholders: their employees, leaders, teams, shareholders, customers, and the wider community. This opportunity for a broader impact has been immensely fulfilling.

However, as someone who received NO business training (somehow graduate schools don't think that psychologists, social workers, and similar professionals are indeed business owners in need of business skills!), I was terrified about some aspects of business and lacked confidence in myself as a business owner. I needed help and support as I retooled my professional goals and grew a new business.

Fortunately, here in Central New York, I discovered many resources and supports for my business through local business organizations and companies that support women entrepreneurs. These include Syracuse Woman Magazine, the WISE Women's Business Center, the Women's Business Opportunities Connection (WBOC), and many others. This issue features some of these organizations.

During the past 10-plus years and through these community resources, I have developed terrific partnerships with other women in business who have become vendors, suppliers, contractors, and clients. I have hired and partnered with women to help me with website design, photography, graphic design, promotional materials, insurance, email marketing, government contracting, legal matters, business development, and more.

While my business has grown financially during this time and in its reputation and brand, what has been most rewarding are the friendships I have developed with so many women of diverse backgrounds. Through these relationships, I have gained the support, knowledge, and confidence I need to succeed as a business owner.

So whether you are a "sidepreneur" (someone starting a business on the side of other work), a "solopreneur" or "mompreneur," someone considering starting a business, someone in business for years, or a business owner who employs others, the Central New York community has a lot of help to offer YOU!

While women have had a positive impact on the local and national economy over the past two decades, there is still work to be done to help women in business. Barriers for women remain in terms of adequate financing, sufficient time to devote to the business, and sufficient skills and knowledge. And to be clear, successful entrepreneurship for women benefits everyone, not just women. For example, more goods and services that are bought and sold helps our economy. In addition, successful companies can pay their employees more and support families.

So I encourage you to: attend WISE and WBOC events virtually or in person; hire women entrepreneurs when possible to revamp your website, develop your business marketing materials, deliver programming, or coach your employees; buy products when possible from local, women-owned businesses. Be a woman entrepreneur! Support a woman entrepreneur! *sww*

Dr. Chris Allen is the president/owner of Insight Business Works, Inc.

S Y R A C U S E
WOMAN
magazine

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The publication is available free of charge.

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315.434.8889 | 2501 James Street,
Suite 100, Syracuse, NY 13206

The magazine is published 12 times a year by
Community Media Group, LLC
and Eagle Publications,
2501 James St., Suite 100, Syracuse, NY 13206

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