



Businesswomen Dispute Survey, Say They are Serious about Growth - Southern Maryland Headline News

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By TIFFANY MARCH

WASHINGTON (March 10, 2010) -- The American public's attitude toward women business owners hasn't changed much in recent decades, according to a new national survey, with 94 percent saying women only want to contribute to the family income and not grow a business.

But Maryland women entrepreneurs argue the perception doesn't match reality. They say women want to develop their businesses just as much as men do, but are often the primary caregiver in the family and must make time for other priorities.

Janine DiPaula Stevens, founder of Vircity, a Baltimore-based small business takes issue with that stereotype: "I wouldn't be in that category...You always want to contribute to your family, but no, I'm going to grow the business."

A nonprofit organization, Count Me In for Women's Economic Independence, commissioned the survey, and the woman-owned business Candice Bennett & Associates Inc. conducted it.

At a news conference Wednesday, Count Me In founder Nell Merlino said the survey shows the issues preventing women from expanding their companies at a time when the country desperately needs job creation.

More than three-quarters of people surveyed said profit isn't very important to women owners, and 84 percent agreed women are more risk-averse than men. Merlino said the results show perceptions have not improved much since the 1970s, when many women began entering the workforce.

A companion survey of women business owners said more than 80 percent of women want to grow their business, but half think hiring new employees could hurt revenue.

"Unemployment is a huge issue," Merlino said, adding that women own one-third of all small businesses in America and employ 23 million people.

Women own more than 137,000 companies in Maryland alone, according to the most recent U.S. Census Bureau business survey results from 2002. New survey results will be released later this year.

Stevens, whose husband works in one of her company's divisions, said that being afraid to hire new employees is not unique to women business owners in this economically difficult time.

"Unless you're independently wealthy, you'll take into consideration the largest cost of your business, which is employees," she said.

John Hickman, director of the Maryland Small Business Development Center in Salisbury, said he also disagrees with the public opinion survey results. "I actually see women being equally focused on bottom line and growth of their business," he said.

Hiring more employees depends on the kind of company a woman runs, Hickman added, because a skilled worker like a plumber or electrician may focus more on operating her business than managing others.

Women owners may even be more inclined to hire than men, said small businesswoman Caity Lovett. Lovett owns Shades of Shamrock, a window treatment company in Bel Air.

"Men look at the numbers," she said, but for women, "it's what are you contributing to society -- if you are going to be able to hire a neighbor or someone from the community."

There is no gender gap when it comes to hiring or being risk-averse, said business consultant Karin Schwartz, who owns her own company, Schwartz Associates LLC, in Baltimore.

"I see the same thing with my male clients as I do my female clients, right now there is a lot of fear, a lot of concern," she said.

Another recent survey by the Tri-County Council for Southern Maryland said two-thirds of women and minority business owners are focused mainly on growing revenue. Hiring and management came in second place at 15 percent.

The perception that women don't focus on growth is a product of our culture, said Kathleen Dorsey, who owns a Maryland search engine optimization and social media company, Global Results.

"I would say I think we grow up like that, that we're not supposed to be aggressive, we're not supposed to take charge," Dorsey said, but, "you're still running a business the way you need to."

Monyka Berrocosa, an Internet entrepreneur in Baltimore, agreed women face different challenges than men and "part of the problem is perception."

One of the biggest challenges is that women business owners with children have to make decisions about their time, said Berrocosa, who has a 7-year-old son.

"It may not be that (a woman) doesn't want to grow the business, it may just be the need for one of the two (parents) to be present," she said. "I think there are a lot of concessions that are made for the greater good of the family situation."

Capital News Service contributed to this report.