



Fine Furniture on Consignment with Cathy Boytos

Faced with the financial challenges of raising her three-year old daughter, Kristen, on her own, Cathy Boytos struggled with finding ways to provide a good and balanced life for the two of them.

After a 20-year career in Human Resources she knew that she did not want to return to the corporate world: the hours (and the commute!) were long, the job was stressful, and there would be little time and energy left for her daughter.

Self-employment seemed like a good option, but she wasn't sure where to start. She had never run a business but always had a job. She had serious conflict between self-doubt and self-confidence. And starting over was hell."

But Cathy had an idea running around in her head, and it wouldn't go away. After her divorce, she had to furnish her new home on a tight budget, and she scouted second-hand and antique stores without luck. She turned to purchasing used furniture and appliances from classified ads in the local newspaper, and was amazed by the quality of unwanted second hand furniture gathering dust in homes. And the idea for Trading Places started to crystallize in her mind.

Money was an issue and of course money to start the business was an ever bigger issue, and so she had to borrow what little equity she had against her home. To say she was frightened was an under-statement – she was really worried that she might lose it all and not be able to support her daughter. But Cathy had a dream, and she went after it with determination.

In June 2003, Trading Places opened in a 2000 square foot industrial warehouse, taking in used furniture on consignment. Cathy wanted to make it easy for people to find affordable second-hand furniture. "With the number of empty-nesters downsizing to smaller homes, I knew I had a market."

Cathy sent out thousands of letters to local realtors, interior designers and advertised in community newspapers.

Many weeks later the showroom was transformed – the place was brimming full of people as they lined up at the door waiting to discover what bargains might be found. Cathy sums up her personal satisfaction of that day in saying "Somebody actually bought something – they valued my opinion."

Today, Trading Places is located in a busy plaza, in an upscale 4,000 square ft showroom, and Cathy has 6 employees. News of the store has spread through word-of-mouth and most pieces are in and out within two weeks. It is not unusual to see a full-size moving van delivering the contents of a 5000 square foot home to the showroom.

Cathy is still fine tuning the concept. She's learned that you need to trust your gut feeling. When something keeps nagging at you, it's time to listen to that inner voice. Next time, she says she wouldn't have waited so long and paid less attention to the nay-sayers.

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