

This is Erin Dunn from the Fortuna Chamber of Commerce with a Community Comment.

I've been doing some prep work for a speech I'm giving at the Fortuna Business Women's Luncheon next month and talking with several business women to find out what they did to prepare for their professions. Some of the women are business owners, some are in management. Some of the women had or still have home businesses.

I really admire the women—and men—who have their own small business. I grew up in a family of retailers and worked in my mom's store from the time I was 14. My family's stores were open six days a week and for most of that time, there were no full-time employees besides family. I always chuckle to myself when I hear advertisements that push the glory of all of the freedom you are going to have when you work for yourself.

So what did these businesswomen have to say about how they prepared at the start of their career?

For many, the biggest tests were mental.

Attitude was a key component for their success.

First there was the attitude they brought to the office. To be successful they needed to be flexible. There had to be an attitude of commitment, and preparation and willingness to learn and adapt. They worked hard to learn what was appropriate behavior for their respective business. They look for that same positive attitude when they are hiring.

For me and my first job, I had to learn about paying my dues. That a 25-year-old was not going to become the department head after nine months.

And that having a college degree didn't exempt you from what I thought were lowly tasks. Fortunately, that attitude didn't last long because I had a really good boss who took time to mentor me.

What that mistake gave me however, was empathy for young go-getters who think they aren't progressing fast enough. When you are young even two years can seem like a lifetime.

I think all of the women I talked to would agree that there is no skipping the learning curve and that the mistakes we make when we first start out are the lessons we build on as we go on.

The other common thread among many of the women was that they worked at all kinds of different jobs when they were in school—both high school and college. They brought some lesson from each of those different jobs to their current situation. You never know what you are going to take away from a job at the pizza parlor or grocery store. The lesson from the businesswomen was every job has something you can learn from—whether it's a new way to do something, or how not to do something.

My hat is off to everyone who has their own business. And to the managers who make businesses run.

The thing is--it's so easy to be lured into the underground economy in our area in order to make a quick buck. We owe our businesspeople a great deal of gratitude for sticking with their commitment to bring a high level of service to their trade and making Humboldt County a better place to live.

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