



## WINNER'S CIRCLE

The act of survival pays off for this award winner. **30**

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The American Express OPEN State of Women-Owned Business Report issued earlier this year found that the number of women-owned businesses in the United States increased by 50 percent from 1997 to 2011. That's significantly higher than the 34 percent increase in all new businesses started during the same time frame.

However, the percentage of women-owned businesses that reach \$1 million or more in annual revenue stands at just 1.8 percent of all private companies, compared with 6.3 percent for men-owned firms, according to statistics from Babson College's Center for Women's Leadership.

"I certainly see a greater understanding of what women think they can do in a business, but it's going to take a steady drumbeat of encouragement to just get them to step over these lines that they know (held back) their mother or aunt or sister," said Nell Merlino, founder, president and CEO of Count Me In for Women's Economic Independence Inc., a nonprofit that works with women entrepreneurs.

Women's traditional roles play a part in the current situation, Merlino said. Women are relatively new to the boardrooms, financial systems and business in general, so they're still learning to navigate an environment that was, until recently, almost exclusively male. Keep in mind, for example, that the Rotary Club — a key networking institution for generations of businessmen — voted to admit women just two decades ago, in 1989.

Susan M. Adams, a professor of management and senior director of the Center for Women and Business at Bentley College, sees similar reasons for the lower percentage of women-owned businesses reaching \$1 million. She said women generally haven't had the same connections and networking skills that men use to get in front of venture capitalists or business mentors. It also means that women have fewer female role models who can help them navigate.

Women also often lack the prototypical career path that VCs like to see when deciding to fund businesses, Adams said, explaining that company leaders might wrongly assume women don't want certain positions because of false ideas about what women want.

"They make assumptions that might not be true, so women don't get the opportunities to make the leaps in their careers that the men get," she said.

In addition, Merlino said, women themselves tend to limit their vision of how big they can grow their companies — the result of societal expectations, conditioning and education that encourage more passive characteristics in females.

And even when women decide to think big, she said, they often fail to take key steps to make it happen, such as delegating work.

But not everyone sees that as a gender issue.

Jennifer McKinley, founder and CEO of Boston-based Cor LLC, manufacturer

and distributor of the Cor Silver luxury skincare products, said her parents were in business, so she grew up with entrepreneurial ambitions.

After earning her MBA from Yale University and working in the corporate world, McKinley launched her first business with a partner and then, in 2008, spun Cor out of to own and run on her own.

McKinley said she wants to run the show, so she's not taking on any investors, a decision that she said has probably limited her ability to grow as quickly as she'd like.

"I just don't want to answer to anybody else. I want to grow it on my own terms, even if I grow more slowly," she said.

Whether influenced by gender or not, her approach hasn't slowed her down too much: McKinley said she plans to get to \$1 million in revenue in 2012.

Marlene Ketchen, president of The Cabinetry, a kitchen and bathroom cabinetry design studio in Hingham, also questioned whether gender plays a role in women-led businesses and their ability to succeed. She said she thinks how fast or large a woman can grow a business comes down to individual traits and choices.

She said she believes people either have that entrepreneurial spirit or they don't, and that they're either going to find a way to succeed in all economies or they'll fail. They also have to decide how much time they're going to commit to their businesses and how much will go to family. As the mother of two young children, she said she won't work the same long hours she did before she was married.

"Is that an obstacle? I guess," she said, adding that she knows men who make the same decision.

Still, Ketchen is nearing that \$1 million mark, something she also had achieved prior to the recession.

Ketchen is just one of a growing number of women who are getting there.

Susan Duffy, executive director of Babson's Center for Women's Leadership, credited programs — such as Babson's Entrepreneurial Winning Women program with Ernst & Young LLP — for helping businesswomen to grow their businesses.

"There are a lot of women-owned firms that are growing and have the potential to be very large," she said. "And they're finding more resources out there to do it. That wasn't the case necessarily a decade or two ago."

Meanwhile, Pizzi said she's looking to reach \$1 million in revenue by 2015. But even with that goal in mind, Pizzi said she's not motivated by the money. She said her biggest motivation is ensuring that those asking for music therapy can get it — and that means hiring staff and expanding locations.

"When I think about the number of people I can reach through therapy, for me, that makes it a very worthwhile goal," she said. "And that may be more because I'm a woman. Men might be more driven by that dollar figure."