

Business

2B The Detroit News | Sunday, June 13, 2004 †

SMALL BUSINESS REPORT



David Guralnick / The Detroit News

Mary Lynn Silveri, left, assists Diane Corrigan at Unique Critique, which shows businesses how to make a better impression on customers. Corrigan ignored people who doubted her service would survive.

Image consultant credits her success to persistence

By Eric Pope
Special to The Detroit News

SHELBY TOWNSHIP — It isn't easy to start a business that no one has ever heard of, but Diane Corrigan is convinced persistence will pay off.

Two years ago, Corrigan started a business image consulting firm called Unique Critique to show businesses, restaurants and professional offices how they can improve their physical appearance to create the best possible impression on customers and the general public.

Using a checklist with more than 40 items, she or one of her four part-time inspectors look for anything that could leave a bad impression. It mostly involves janitorial or landscaping tasks that need to be done better, but Corrigan also notices when the decor is outdated or uncoordinated.

An initial inspection usually takes an hour or two, and Corrigan recommends follow-up visits. She can work directly with janitorial and landscaping services to get the problems corrected or find a qualified contractor to do a specific job.

The problem Corrigan finds is that potential clients don't know what a business image consultant does.

"People think an image consultant talks about how to dress and what colors you should wear," she said. "People don't understand what I do at first, but once they get it they're very enthusiastic."

Dennis McQuiston, the owner of the Airport Inn in Waterford, plans to use Unique Critique to prepare his restaurant for the increased exposure he hopes to get from the Ryder Cup competition in September.

"Sometimes it's good to have an outside view of what you're doing," McQuiston said. "Something can be right in front of you, but you don't notice or don't think it matters."

A car accident forced Corrigan to change careers. For almost 20 years she owned You Have It Maid, a residential and commercial cleaning service, but recurring neck and back pain prevented her from standing for very long or working alongside her cleaning crews.

She thought about becoming a nurse practitioner, but finally decided to capitalize on the knowledge gained by running her cleaning service and managing a restaurant. "I had all this experience, and it was a revelation to realize that I could use it in a new way," she said.

With her keen eye for detail, Corrigan could tell when the walls hadn't been scrubbed in the bathroom for a long time. She noticed things that shouldn't be there such as toilet brushes and things that are missing such as coat hooks.

She found that many businesses weren't aware of the bad impression they were making on their customers and decided they needed someone to point out these details. But there was no model to follow because she couldn't find anyone who provided such a service.

Your experiences

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Many people doubted her business idea would work.

"I've had to overcome a lot of pessimism," Corrigan said. "People said there must be a reason why no one else had done it."

Those objections helped motivate Corrigan to become better prepared. She earned her business entrepreneur certification at Macomb Community College and took a master gardening class at Michigan State University. She surveyed more than 200 businesspeople and professionals. She's currently taking a sales course.

Starting a new business always involves taking risks, and that's especially true with a new concept like Unique Critique. Whenever she encounters setbacks or delays, Corrigan likes to refer to a quote from former President Calvin Coolidge: "Nothing in the world can take the place of persistence. Talent will not; nothing is more common than unsuccessful men with talent. Genius will not; unrewarded genius is almost a proverb. Education will not; the world is full of educated derelicts. Persistence and determination alone are omnipotent."

Eric Pope is a Metro Detroit freelance writer.

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