

CORPORATE PROFILE

She gets her clients organized

But first consultant had to do that for herself

By Mike Rasor

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Whether it be for businesses or college students, Chris Perrow is obsessed with organization.

It leads to better productivity and time management, the president of Perrow Systems said.

The Silver Lake resident created her company in 1996, after working several jobs in different fields of business. She decided it was time to work from home to be with her three young children.

Her company recently launched an online tutorial for time management on its site, www.organizingsos.com.

1. What was the biggest driving factor in your decision to become an entrepreneur?

It was sitting down and having a conversation with myself. I said, "OK, Chris, what do you want to do next?"

We had three children, and at the time, they were very little.

I wanted to find something that could work around their schedules. I went through past job appraisals to find my strengths. Over and over, they showed that I was strong in problem solving and organizational skills. A week later, I saw a small article on the National Association of Professional Organizers. I joined them immediately.

2. How did you determine whether your product or service was feasible to provide and would be appealing to customers?

The article made me realize that I'm not the only person that has these skills, and if there's a whole organization, there must be some need out there. When I joined in '96, there were approximately 800 members. Today, there are 3,000 members. So this has continued to grow across the country and the world. It certainly tells something about our society. We're stressed, overwhelmed.

3. Did your family and friends support your decision to go out on your own?

Absolutely. My husband said, "This is great. Go do it." He was very supportive in helping me do work on the weekends. He would take care of the kids so I could spend some time to clear my head. My children have all been my best supporters.

4. In the dark hours of the night, what worried you most about your business in its early days?

Would I be able to transfer my knowledge and ability in organization and problem solving successfully to people?

5. Do you think Northeast Ohio is a good climate in which to start a small business?

Absolutely. Any place is a wonderful place to start a small business as long as you have an idea, the commitment and an awareness that it's hard. It's definitely not always comfortable. You often have to push yourself to limits and make phone calls that you don't feel comfortable about. I certainly never would have imagined that I would have written this online course five years ago. Kent State said, "Can you put it online?" I said "Oh, no." Then I stepped outside my comfort zone, looked at it and said, "Yes, I can do this."

6. Is there anything you'd like to see in place in Northeast Ohio to help small businesses?

Maybe coming up with better resources for people to find mentors would be good (for Northeast Ohio). I wouldn't have been able to continue on without the groups that helped me.

7. How much did you know about running a business when you began? Was it enough?

I knew enough because I've been running what I call "the business of life" for our family. I'm still the one who pays the bills and searches for insurance carriers.... My father and his brother owned a business in New Jersey. I learned a lot watching them and working for them. He worked a lot of hours, but he loved what he was doing.

8. Over your career, what is the single most important thing you have learned?

The incredible value of knowledge. Sometimes you don't realize how much you know. I was raised by two very organized people. I thought the whole world went that way. Once I started my business, I continued to be amazed by how much I had in my brain that I just took for granted that was new to other people.

9. What was the biggest mistake you made, and how did you fix it?

Everything that's been a mistake has come back to be a positive at the other end. I wouldn't say there are mistakes. There were several detours that I have taken, but they have helped me learn more.

10. Did you have a mentor or adviser?

There are a lot of people (at Kent State's) Small Business Development Center. Also Norma Rist, who is a small-business owner and coach in Akron. She has constantly challenged me to think broader and higher. That's been very good. It helps to go out and find other people who are doing the same thing. I find that people who have their own businesses are just a wealth of knowledge and they want to share that knowledge.