

“How I Started MY OWN BUSINESS”

Two women share their stories about what it's really like to be in the trenches with only *you* on the line.

BY Tracey Porpora

Photography BY Parrish Lewis

Where did the idea for Sarah's Pastries & Candies come from?

Ever since I was little, I always loved eating

“try” at all the Whole Food stores. **Worst “oh-no” moment?**

I was all excited that Amazon.com was going to start selling my chocolate. But after a lot of correspondence,

they told me they were “putting meltables on hold.” They never ended up ordering.

What's it like being your

SARAH LEVY

25, owner of the Chicago, IL-based Sarah's Pastries & Candies Inc., which creates morning pastries, specialty cakes, hand-made chocolates and gift baskets.

desserts. In high school, I thought about how work takes up more time than any other single activity in your life. I knew I needed to do something I enjoyed, so it wouldn't really feel like work. That's when I realized I wanted to have my own bakery.

How much money did you have at the beginning?

I began running the business out of my mom's kitchen for the first year and a half, so I didn't need much money to get started.

What was the biggest struggle?

At the very beginning when you don't have a lot of places that carry your product or press behind you, it's hard to get the wholesale accounts and get your foot in the door.

Best “aha” moment?

After I graduated from Northwestern University I went to the French Pastry School. I heard of a woman from there who was selling a product to Whole Foods Market. So I literally called the Whole Foods closest to me, and they gave me the number of the Midwest Office in Chicago. After dropping off samples, it led to them giving me a

own boss?

There's a lot of pressure at times because at the end of the day a lot of the responsibility is on you. But it's nice because you're working for yourself, so even if you're working really hard and long hours, you know what you put in is what you get out of it.

What hours do you keep?

In the beginning I was working 16 to 18 hours a day, seven days a week. In January of last year, I decided to close the store one day a week on Mondays. Now I work between 11 and 12 hours a day, six days a week.

Do you have any employees to boss around?

Yes, I have about 14 people.

Ever thought “What the hell did I get myself into?”

In the very beginning when the store first opened in September 2005, that was the most overwhelming part, because I didn't have any retail experience and it was very challenging.

Any advice for others wanting to start their own business?

Just jump into it and give it a try. Don't let people's opinions make you feel overwhelmed. It's important to listen to what people have to say, but it's also important to listen to and trust yourself.



Hair & makeup: Randy Wilder