



# Inside Tucson BUSINESS

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## Consultant takes business-planning book on the road

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Inside Tucson Business

Just a few years after filing for Chapter 13 bankruptcy protection, Jennifer Utken's business is back on its feet, due in large part to the guidance and counseling the small-business woman received from Cherie Sohnen-Moe.

Ms. Utken opened a small retail shop featuring hard-to-find plus-size clothing 12 years ago at the Grant and Swan roads intersection. About three years into the business, Ms. Utken found herself in bankruptcy and looking for ways to keep her business — Fit to the Tried Inc. — alive.

"I am more creative than business-oriented and Cherie has a way of taking ideas and putting them to work," said Ms. Utken. Both were members of a group of self-employed women called Women In Tucson.

Ms. Sohnen-Moe helped the entrepreneur structure the business, transition from consignment to buying resale clothing outright, and in setting goals and deadlines, said Ms. Utken. "I didn't want to admit that I didn't know what I was doing. . . . I wish I had gone to her before I had started out."

Ms. Sohnen-Moe asks basic, yet tough questions about plans and goals, said Ms. Utken. "She makes sure that I know and can justify what I am doing. It's interesting, there's something zen to it. . . . She's not a traditional business consultant."

Ms. Utken paid off her bankruptcy five years ago and now is considering expansion. Although she hasn't worked with Ms. Sohnen-Moe this year, she does anticipate future interaction when the time comes for expansion and for a new five-year plan.

With a degree in psychology from the University of California in Los Angeles, Ms. Sohnen-Moe started her own training and consulting business in 1978. During those years, she developed various handouts and worksheets for her clients, which eventually developed into Business Mastery.

Business Mastery is a planning guide that helps the reader assess strengths and limitations, discover what their business is about and how it fits into the rest of their life. Originally published in 1988, the book is in its sixth printing, and more than 18,000 copies have been sold worldwide.

While the book can be useful at any stage in a business' development, Ms. Sohnen-Moe recommends getting focused and setting goals as early as possible. "Ideally, they'll start using the book when the business is just a

glimmer in their eye, but the information can be taken at any stage."

Business Mastery was originally written to healing arts professionals, she said, but the principles and worksheets are applicable to any small-business person: "I wanted to write to a market I knew, so I took healing arts practitioners and made business more palatable for them," Ms. Sohnen-Moe said, noting that for six years she was a massage therapist.

Ms. Sohnen-Moe, working from her home west of Tucson, uses the book in her consulting, teaches at the Desert Institute of Healing Arts and conducts seminars worldwide. While she used to teach the introductory business class at the Desert Institute, she now teaches the more flexible advanced business classes.

Her book is a staple at the Desert Institute, as well as at 250 healing arts schools worldwide, she said. Ms. Sohnen-Moe began teaching at the Desert Institute in 1987. "A lot of them are just starting to come into the view that they need to teach students more than just art and science. Students also need to know how to earn a living."

Because most healing arts practitioners are self-employed, they need to learn about marketing, documentation and the how-to's of running a business, she said. "A lot of it is more discipline than knowledge. . . . And most don't have a marketing plan or they have one that is hit-and-miss."

As healing arts take a larger role in the health-care industry, these professionals are having to learn the language of insurance companies. "In the past the medical health-care system has not acknowledged them as much as they have lately."

While most healing arts practitioners don't go into the profession to earn a lot of money, in the past many left school with inadequate tools to even earn a living, Ms. Sohnen-Moe said.

"Few get into it to be rich, but they deserve to be able to pay their bills. They deserve to earn a living," she said. "Most of the time they end up

their own boss, and I don't think they realized what was involved."

Ms. Sohnen-Moe helps her clients — both those in the healing arts and those not — set five-, 10- and 20-year goals. "Most have goals, but if they don't alter what they are doing dramatically, they won't achieve them. Most run on a crisis management basis."

While large businesses tend to plan things to death, Ms. Sohnen-Moe said small businesses often have just the opposite problem. When working with the client, she typically checks in once a day, meets in person once a week and holds a longer in-person meeting once a month.

While Rich Landergen has been a woodworker for more than 20 years and self-employed for most of that time, he turned to Ms. Sohnen-Moe for assistance with cash-flow problems, money difficulties and learning to juggle projects.

"I called her for the purpose of wanting to improve my business and to make the business run smoother," he said. "I've worked with her on a little of everything — time management, goal setting, crisis support. . . . She is creative and supportive."

Ms. Sohnen-Moe currently is working on several other books and offers a catalog business as well. Although she currently works on her own, she is looking to hire someone to help her conduct workshops, she said.