



“I didn’t know when to **keep my mouth shut.**”

—Ann Siner, on why the corporate environment was not right for her.

Consignment Queen

Ann Siner, 44
Owner, Eco-Chic Consignments, Inc.
Phoenix

Biggest compliment: Having people come in and say, “Why are the prices so cheap?” because they don’t realize it’s a resale clothing store.

Business philosophy: Run the business based on the customer’s needs rather than your own as business owner.

Sitting on a folding chair in the office of her first store, knee to elbow with merchandise as the store gets ready for an end-of-season sale, Ann Siner laughs as she admits that when she started My Sister’s Closet 13 years ago, one of her biggest concerns was, “Can we continually get in a high quality of used things?”

Taking her savings and a year-end bonus from her previous job and maxing out her credit cards, Siner skipped past the need to find financing. Also in her favor, she points out, is that in the consignment business, “you don’t have to put your cash up front for inventory.”

The first challenge, then, was finding a location. Her concept of an upscale consign-

ment store for recycled women’s designer clothing and accessories was viewed as just a thrift store by many landlords who did not want that kind of traffic in their shopping center. Siner landed retail space in Phoenix’s Town & Country Shopping Center, but had to sign a lease that gave the landlord the right to ask her to leave if he decided he didn’t like the look of the store once it opened.

Successful now to the tune of nine stores, 65 employees and more than \$6.5 million in annual sales, My Sister’s Closet no longer scares the landlords. But it was not started with a careful business plan and model. “It was more: Let’s do this and see where it goes,” explains Siner.

Leaving her position as director of marketing for PETSMART to found her own company was a very scary move, she recalls. Not just financially; she felt valued as an employee and was doing what she calls “fun stuff”—directing TV, radio and print advertising campaigns. But the corporate environment was not right for her. “I didn’t know when to keep my mouth shut,” Siner admits lightly.

Her three years with PETSMART spanned the time the company changed its

name from Pet Food Warehouse and expanded from two stores to 40, all over the country. She credits then-CEO Sam Parker with providing a leadership model she’s followed in her own business: putting the business focus on meeting the customers’ needs rather than hers as a business owner.

“He set a tone,” Siner adds. “Being in business is about making money, but there are other things, too.” PETSMART’s decision to serve as adoption centers for homeless animals meant losing out on the lucrative area of selling purebreds, Siner explains. Active herself in animal welfare organizations, Siner draws her own line in the sand at the sale of real fur or ivory products.

Now with three locations, My Sister’s Closet has expanded its family to include My Sister’s Attic (home furnishings), Well Suited Men’s Resale and Small Change (kid’s stuff). And Siner sees more to come. “There’s more potential in the Valley,” she predicts, pointing to the east, northwest, Chandler and Ahwatukee. Nor has she ruled out other cities.

And in a complete turnabout, landlords now come to her, offering her space in shopping centers that, she says, “a year ago I couldn’t buy my way into.”