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Interview with Christine Clifford

The author, consultant and entrepreneur talks about her businesses and the leap of faith that created them.

BY STEVEN SCHUSSLER

HER EXPERIENCE TAUGHT HER HOW TO MARKET and sell products, services and herself. Now, Christine Clifford shares that message with others.

Christine Clifford definitely cracked “the glass ceiling.” By 40, she was senior executive vice president for The SPAR Group, an international merchandising and information services firm in New York. As the top salesperson in the multi-billion dollar retail services industry for more than eight years, Christine’s accounts included Kmart, Toys ‘R Us, Wal-mart, AT&T, Mattel Toys and Revlon. Diagnosed with breast cancer in 1994, Christine took her leap of faith and left the corporate world to start not one, but four companies. Today she is founder and CEO of Christine Clifford Enterprises in Edina.

SS: What is Christine Clifford Enterprises? **Christine Clifford:** Christine Clifford Enterprises is the umbrella under which four companies reside, offering a variety of products and services including professional speaking on the topics of sales, marketing and using humor to get through life’s adversities. I also am an author and a consultant, providing education and support to two specific groups of people: divorcees and those dealing with cancer.

SS: You founded a company called The Cancer Club in 1995. What inspired you to leave the corporate world where you were a highly paid senior executive to become an entrepreneur? **CC:** I asked myself the questions every entrepreneur should ask: Can I offer something or have I done something unique that no one has done before? Is there an area in this particular industry that is untapped or unfulfilled? Do I have much competition? And can I put a new twist on my subject matter that will appeal to a broad range of people?

SS: You started a professional speaking career speaking to hospitals and healthcare organizations. What led you to speaking and consulting with corporate clients and what are your specialties? **CC:** I came from a very strong sales and marketing background with the packaged goods industry, yet I was selling an intangible service:



multi-million-dollar retail services contracts for which there was no tangible proof of performance. This combination of recognizing how to brand and market products, combined with selling the intangible—services—proved to be a topic near and dear to every corporation’s and organization’s heart and bottom line.

SS: I understand you have recently created a new business called Divorcing Divas. How did that evolve? **CC:** After going through my second divorce, I really felt empowered, like a bird out of a cage. Divorced women didn’t know where to turn, or who to talk to. So I designed a company to offer all-day educational conferences for people on this journey.

SS: You have said many times that a great passion of yours is philanthropy. In what ways do you give back to the community and why is that important to you?

CC: I hosted a celebrity golf tournament for five years, and we raised over \$1 million for breast cancer research. Now, Divorcing Divas has partnered with Tubman, a non-profit shelter in Minneapolis for abused women, a cause near and dear to my heart. I have also served on several boards including Angel Foundation.

SS: Who is your inspiration? **CC:** My mother. She died of breast cancer when she was only 42 years old.

SS: What advice do you have for entrepreneurs? **CC:** Don’t be a jack-of-all-trades; instead, become a master of one. Each of my companies has a very specific function, and I don’t wander away from our missions. Use the media to gain recognition and grow your business. Create connections that can help you drive your business. And don’t forget to laugh!

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