

LISA RIEVES THE FRONT PORCH OF VININGS



Lisa Rieves is the owner of The Front Porch of Vinings, a shop located in downtown historic village in Georgia, in a house built in 1828. She offers a fresh rustic-luxe mix of home decor, gifts, and women's accessories hand-picked from across the U.S. Lisa lives with her husband of 24 years, J.T., her two children, Max (22) and Ellie (19), and her two dogs in Vinings, a mile from her shop. Her story is down-to-earth, relatable, and authentic. She is passionate about her business and worked very hard to reach the level of success she has, all in less than two year. People are definitely noticing this little shop where the front steps read, "Every so often, go where you can hear a screen door slam shut."



The fact that I am sitting down to write an article for a national publication about my business journey is mind-blowing and incredibly humbling all at the same time. How in the world did this happen? I hope that my story will inspire you in some small way or offer you the encouragement you might need to take that next step.

I have officially opened four small businesses. It started with a tiny website run out of my basement. I had a passion for shopping and an idea that I could sell things. With a very small budget and very little knowledge of where to start, OnelvyHill.com was born. It was what you might call "homegrown." I built my own website, took my own pictures, paid my own taxes, shipped all the products, and learned how to increase my standing on Google. My husband had given me a huge map of the United States where I put stars on each state that I had shipped to. All in all, it was fairly successful, but the real problem was that I got bored with it. I am a people person who thrives on relationships; the internet may be great for a lot of things, but human interaction is not one of them. The other problem was that I never approached it as a real business, instead treating it as a hobby. This is a big mistake when it comes to business, because then a hobby is all that it will ever be. Whatever your business is, you must go after it with a real plan for growth or it will die. If you strive for mediocrity, that's exactly what you'll get.

Although the website wasn't a smashing success, it was the perfect place for me to start. I learned many things from it, such as I needed to interact with people and that I might have a chance at something bigger. It boosted my confidence that people actually liked the things I was buying! I will never forget my first trip to a trade show: I came home in tears without one single order written. My husband, who is my biggest cheerleader, picked me up, dusted me off, and told me not to come home until my money was spent. That day I met a vendor who gave me a piece of advice that I will always remember: She told me to stop over-thinking it and simply buy what I liked. To this day, that is what I do ... it's all I know how to do. I simply use the rule of thumb that if I would wear it or put in my home, then I will put it in my shop. What is wonderful about this is that I have a real passion for what I am selling. I attract people who have similar tastes and they become loyal customers. This is a very important lesson: When you ask yourself, "Who is my customer?" the answer is not "everyone." Early on, you must decide exactly who your customer is and cater to them and only them. They will love you in return!

I fell into a position as a buyer for a local shop when the owner bought all my leftover OnelvyHill goods right out of my trunk! Armed with a credit card and a friend who already worked at the shop, together the two of us hit the ground running. Within a few months we stocked the store with the cutest clothes in town, and the place was always packed. We worked well together for almost a year, and I learned a lot about how to run a storefront. I also learned that I didn't want to work for someone else — the need for my own shop was bubbling over. →





A partnership developed between me and the friend who I had been buying with, and we decided to open our own clothing shop. From the minute we opened our doors, it was a success beyond our wildest dreams, but sales are not all that matter. After my partner and I opened our second shop, which I named after my dad, I quickly realized our partnership was no longer going to be possible. As hard as our split was, I grew from it. I learned things about running my own business and about myself that could have only been gained through this experience.

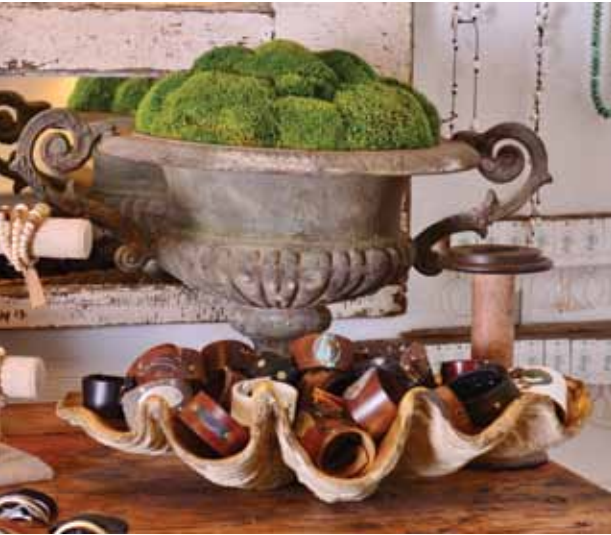
You may think that opening a business with a partner will make life easier, or perhaps it's financially necessary, but you need to enter a partnership with your eyes wide open. Take your time and make sure you choose your partner wisely. You must understand that a business partnership is very much like a marriage; you will spend almost as much time with this person as you do your own spouse. You will learn things about them and about yourself that you thought you already knew. There will most likely be days when you love each other and days when loving each other is hard to do. Define very clear roles by deciding who is responsible for what: paying bills, hiring, firing, marketing, events, etc. Discuss schedules, how you will approach vacations and holidays, and salaries. You should both agree on what professionals you will hire, such as an accountant or bookkeeper. Another very important topic is family: Do you both agree that family should come first? You need to discuss all of the ins and outs of running a business, from customer service to leadership style, communication, etc. Finally, make sure you have an operating agreement that is rock solid. I hope to spare someone the incredible pain of a failed partnership/business. I highly recommend that anyone who wants to open his or her own small business read "The E-Myth" by Michael E. Gerber (Harper Business, 1986). If you have a business partner, make sure they read it as well. This book will help you both identify where you stand with the principles it is based on.

The next two years were honestly spent grieving. I was grieving the loss of a friend and of two businesses that were my world. I kept trusting that God had a bigger plan for me. I was in the process of sending my firstborn off to college (if you haven't done this yet, brace yourself!) when my mother was diagnosed with cancer. She spent the last four months of her life here in our house. There is nothing that compares to losing your mother. She had been my source of strength and encouragement through all of my business ventures. At that time, I couldn't dream of opening another shop, especially without her there. →



LISA'S BUSINESS TIPS

- Only surround yourself with people who share your values.
- Recognize roles that you are not good at and hire other people to do those jobs, which will also help you keep a healthy work-life balance.
- Lead your employees and help them grow so someday they might follow their own dreams. Treat them with respect while demanding the very best from them. Don't ever put the weight of owning your own business on their shoulders.
- Every single time your customers set foot through the door, treat them the way you want to be treated and they will come back over and over again.
- Be certain that your point-of-sale system can keep up with all of your reporting and inventory needs.
- Create an "open to buy" max when on buying trips to avoid overspending.
- Be strategic when planning for sales and markdowns. Be careful not to create an environment where your customer will simply wait for you to put something on sale.
- Plan all of your big events at least six to eight months ahead, delegating along the way.



"BUILD YOUR OWN DREAMS, OR
SOMEONE ELSE WILL HIRE YOU TO
BUILD THEIRS."

— FARRAH GRAY



Then one day, a dear friend encouraged me to call about a little old house that had become available. It had a front porch and a white picket fence, and was in the heart of my neighborhood. After a few months of contemplation and prayer, I made the call. I believe that The Front Porch of Vinings has been in my future all along. Each one of these experiences along the way prepared me for this. By the grace of God, I had come out stronger than I had ever been. I grew from a girl who wasn't sure if anyone would buy her things to a woman who is being asked to write for a national magazine. When I made the decision to open my fourth business, there were some things I wanted to approach differently. I decided to build my business on doing what I love most, which is "picking" through any kind of antique market, festival, or fair to find things that have had a long life and a story to tell. I also have a real passion for local handmade items and fair trade companies. I, of course, had to mix in women's accessories to satisfy what every girl needs: shoes, jewelry, and clothing! I carved out a unique collection of items that weren't offered anywhere else and really couldn't be duplicated. I also made the decision to be closed on Sundays and Mondays to keep my work-life balance in check.

My brand, my customers, the way people feel when they set foot in my shop or when they read my social media posts, the reason they want to bring their friends and family in — it is all because I believe in what I am doing. I believe in it being more than just a shop that sells things. I want to create an experience people crave, a place they want to visit and just hang out. My shop is an extension of who I am and my brand is the same. I hope that when customers see my logo, memories of great experiences will come to mind. People can choose to spend their money anywhere they like, so I consider it a privilege if they choose to spend it at The Front Porch of Vinings.

Where Women Create BUSINESS would like to thank Lisa Rieves for her involvement in our summer issue. To learn more, visit thefrontporchofvinings.com, contact lisa@thefrontporchofvinings.com, and search "The Front Porch of Vinings" on social media.

Photography by Karen Roberts. Learn more in Traveling Companions on page 138.

