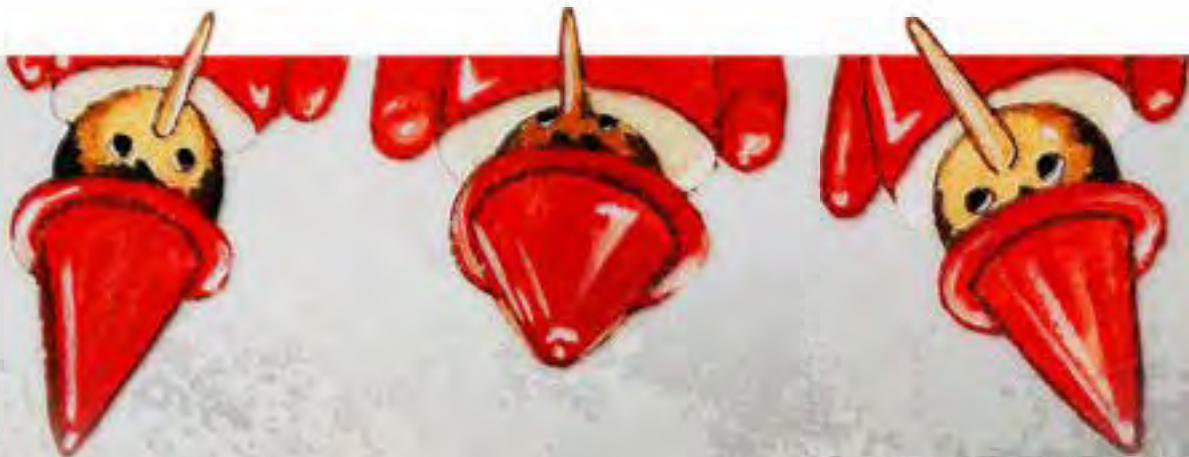




SIX LIES TOLD

TO THE MODERN BUSINESSWOMAN



BRENDA LA BOLT

SIX LIES TOLD

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THE WORKBOOK

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To my husband: I need you.
My pastor and his wife: I thank you.
My children: I treasure you.

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INTRODUCTION

You reach into your bag and pull out an unfamiliar key. It grinds a little as you wiggle it into the slot in the faded brass knob. The lock releases and the door to your new studio opens.

Along with the flood of new smells, dust mites dancing in the sunbeams, and visual overlays that your imagination places over the blank space, you will be flooded with advice. Usually unsolicited advice.

Why will you find advice pushed upon you so easily? Why does it run cheaply? Because much of it is wrong.

Yep. I said it. At the time of this writing, I have been an entrepreneur for more than fifteen years. I have had advice stuffed into me like I'm at my Aunt Lillian's Christmas dinner. Don't you love those force-feeding aunts? I do. But I don't care for force-feeding advisors.

I work with new entrepreneurs who are looking to set up a sewing business. I often see them trying to follow some of the common advice that is proffered these days. I like to help them avoid the waste of time and energy that is poured into unfruitful areas of business.

Sure, I could continue to help only through private consultations. But why should I repeat myself to a narrow audience when I could write a book for a broad audience that would have access to this information day and night? It was this line of thinking that led to my writing this book. After thinking it over, I realized the lessons I had learned were not just for seamsters; they applied to many other business situations.

I thought and thought, mulling over the many different suggestions I'd heard through the years. Which ones do I hear the most from individuals? Which ones do I see repeated in print? Which ones are so clichéd that even first-year business majors are growing tired of hearing them? After rolling these around in my head like a motorized rock tumbler, six main gemstones rolled out. Or I should say, six pieces of fool's gold.

Here they are: *Six Lies Told to the Modern Businesswoman*. If you're a man, welcome. No offense is intended. My audience just happens to be 98 percent female, so the title references a woman but the advice still works.

This is not a book with a long list of contributors and I don't have initials after my name. This is an authentic account of what I've learned through experience as a small-business owner.

I'm going to reveal the Six Lies one chapter at a time. For each lie, I'm going to turn the boggart on its head and tell you the truth that has worked for me. Before we delve into the brainstorming activities that this workbook contains, let's start with some untruths that you have heard since you began your business.



**WHAT ARE SOME LIES THAT YOU HAVE BEEN TOLD
SINCE STARTING YOUR OWN BUSINESS?**

HOW DID THEY HOLD YOU BACK? / OR DID THEY NOT HOLD YOU BACK?

WHAT TRUTHS DID YOU LEARN FOR YOURSELF?



CHAPTER 1

~~NETWORK: BUILD BUSINESS RELATIONSHIPS~~

BUILD GENUINE RELATIONSHIPS

The oversized scissors snipped the bright red ribbon and everyone cheered as the Chamber representative took a photo. Congratulations were offered with handshakes and dips of the temple region of the head. Elevator pitches were exchanged in the background noise. The business card stack grew in my damp hand as I was introduced to the crowd.

Funny. Celebrating with people I didn't know.

What's a leads group? Face after face mentioned they were in a leads group with another attendee. "It's a good group," he said, nodding.

"We don't have a seamstress yet," a young woman said.

"Are you coming to the awards banquet next week?" a frail little man inquired.

"I ... I don't know. I'll have to check my calendar," I said.

For several years, I had been closing my little studio for an hour or so at a time while I attended various meetings and events. I cheered with the other vaguely recognizable entrepreneurs and business representatives as other red ribbons were cut. I read flyers that were mailed to my shop. The businesses featured were often shuttered by the time the flyer made it into my recycle bin.

I gave it a shot. It just didn't feel right. Only a few people in my local business clubs were genuine friends and understood my business and goals.

I slumped in my chair as the total amount of money I had spent in club fees congealed in my mind. I had been told many times the importance of joining a local business club or leads group. Had I gained any new customers through these connections? Was the income generated from these customers more or equal to what I had “invested?” No.

Besides joining clubs, leads groups, and networking organizations in my early days, I was often prompted to attend Bridal Expos for exposure. Bridal Expos aren’t altogether bad. Some of them have a large attendance and can get you face-to-face with many potential clients. But there are a few different ways I sliced the information in order to conclude that Expos were not working for my business model.

Time is the treasure of every entrepreneur. Time is money. Time is an investment. You never get it back. In my experience, a good solid Expo is going to take up a weekend or span a couple of days. That represented a loss of earnings for me.

A good Expo or Bridal Show is usually going to come with a hefty booth fee. There was my second money drain.

The third problem with the Expo is related to the previous issues. The connections were very superficial; there was no potential for a genuine relationship to form. I know every relationship starts somewhere. I’m just trying to relate the expense with the outcome. For me, it wasn’t worth it. I’ll share with you very soon how I still manage to have my presence at an Expo with no cost at all—and at multiple booths!

The glitter and glass surrounded the silvery space. Assistants in black rushed from one post to another, sweeping thousands of dollars’ worth of gowns around the store. I was briefly introduced to the manager of this store, arguably the finest bridal salon in New York City. She told us who our hostess would be for the day’s meetings and the manager briefly glossed over the detail that she couldn’t spend more time with us personally because she wasn’t feeling well.

As the rest of the group moved on to the next area, I stayed with the manager and asked about her health. She said her diabetes was giving her trouble and she was in the throes of medication changes. I looked in her eyes as we spoke and I felt genuine concern for her. She could feel that concern. I told her that I knew, from experience, how hard it was to be sick and still manage a shop. I said, “You don’t get a pass, do you? You have to be on point every day.”

When I showed compassion and an understanding of her situation, the veneer came off. She stood closer. She spoke quietly but more personably. We shared a moment of comradery that day and, for the rest of the meetings, I wasn't just another face in the small group. There was a real connection and I bet she didn't forget it the next day.

Communicate genuinely. Have a genuine concern for others. Are you seeing a pattern emerge, yet? Be genuine.

When you meet an accomplished mentor, try inquiring about her frustrations with the industry rather than directly asking for advice. People are people. We are all human. We all have our pain points. It's common in our nature to be more eager to engage our emotions when venting about negative experiences.

It is often said that we can hear nine positive things, but our minds will replay the one negative thing that we hear. Our humanity is linked to our struggles. When you ask a mentor for advice, you are just another taker. When you ask about her pain points, you become a giver in her view. You are lending an ear, a shoulder to cry on, or a few minutes of your time. You are giving her license to blow off steam, and that may be rare for her.

In my experience, you may get a minute-long answer when you ask for advice, but you will get five or ten minutes when you ask about struggles. You are forging a deeper connection with a potential friend when you give a person space to complain. At the same time, those few minutes of information can be invaluable to you.

When people open up and vent, don't step out of your position and try to solve their problems. Remember, no one likes unsolicited advice. When you offer solutions to their problems, you are no longer listening and learning. You are making a statement that you know more than they do. If they are truly mentors and you want to learn from them, you don't know more than they do. It's disrespectful to pretend that you do.

Know your place. Listen. Allowing mentors to speak will help them feel your empathy. You will set yourself apart from the takers.

When you see an old friend and begin to catch up, you talk about family.

"How are your children?" or "How is your mother doing?"

These are common inquiries among those who care about one another. Try to apply this to your new relationships in the industry. Learn about their family. Inquire about their family, and genuinely care about their family.

I was once at a meet and greet with a small group and we were meeting one of my favorite bridal designers. I asked her about her children. I asked their ages. I asked if she had pictures. She and I stood apart from the din and shared cell phone photos of our young children. We laughed about how much they hate having to come to our salons after school. Her kids hate having to play under the cutting table just as much as mine! My meeting with her was much more memorable than the experiences the other guests had. They just wanted to take selfies.

The following year, when I met this high-profile bridal designer again, I was surprised when she remembered me. Little ol' me. Can you guess what she remembered about our conversation? She remembered the similar ages of our children and the shared experience that afforded us.

Give the gift of a humanizing moment and you'll build real relationships in the industry. These designers, managers, and buyers are all real live humans, believe it or not.

Keep all this in mind when you hear of a loss a business colleague has suffered. When I was seriously ill and fighting a stage-four disease for a couple of years, it wasn't only social friends who helped me. My doorstep was occupied not only by church family, blood relatives, and neighbors; I had meals brought to me by bridal shop owners and managers as well. Cards came by mail, many containing gift cards. I received texts of prayers, well wishes, and general "thinking of you" messages.

Those dark years showed me who my real friends were. These bridal salon owners didn't ghost me when hard times came. They proved their true love and concern by being there for me. Be that person for your fellow industry professionals and they will never forget it.

I can flip these stories of relationship building and also tell you endless stories from the perspective of someone who often mentors others in my industry. I have had many takers come along who had no genuine interest in me personally. They wanted my clients, my sources, and the ego boost of dropping my name. I'm not saying that I am worthy of anyone feeling that way, but when you work hard and begin to achieve something, no matter how small, you will have takers come out to "mooch" off you.

When someone approaches me with a real relationship in mind, I will do everything I can for that person. Kindness goes a long way. But, when people approach me the wrong way, asking for my clientele, referrals, or worse—lies to get something from me—I have no desire to help them. They will have revealed their poor character to me and I would find it difficult to trust them or feel comfortable working with them. Would I forgive them if they apologized? Yes, I would. But I have never had takers come back and apologize. They have been, in my experience, incapable of seeing how ugly their behavior is. Don't be a taker. Let your heart grow big and your genuine relations grow bigger!

Oh, and about that Expo I mentioned earlier? I can get free exposure at Expos because I'm willing to lend sample gowns and mannequins I've collected over the years. Those and a box of business cards get loaded into the van by wedding industry colleagues that are one degree away from what I do. For instance, I'm a bridal seamstress but my cards are on display at Expos by bridal shops that want to show their full-service abilities. Also, a gown on a mannequin and my cards are displayed by a dry cleaner who wants to show high-end altering capabilities. Those relationships that mutually enrich our service to our customers are a tremendous boon to my business.

BUILDING GENUINE RELATIONSHIPS



NAME THREE PEOPLE YOU ARE CLOSE TO THAT YOU CAN COUNT ON FOR PERSONAL ENCOURAGEMENT OR EMOTIONAL SUPPORT. THESE ARE YOUR CHEERLEADERS IN LIFE!

NOW NAME THREE PROFESSIONAL RELATIONSHIPS THAT ALSO GIVE YOU A BOOST!

NOW GO BACK... BESIDE THEIR NAMES, WRITE HOW *YOU* HELP THEM. CAN YOU DO THAT BETTER?

THINK ABOUT WHAT YOU NEED FROM THESE PEOPLE... COMMIT IN YOUR MIND TO THANK THEM TOMORROW FOR HOW THEY HELP YOU.

NOW, THINK OF THREE *NEW* RELATIONSHIPS THAT YOU NEED TO REACH OUT FOR, NURTURE, AND GROW... WHO ARE THEY?

Three large, empty circles drawn with a light blue outline, arranged horizontally. These circles are intended for the user to draw or write the names of the three new relationships mentioned in the text above.

WITH THEIR NAMES, WRITE AN IDEA OF HOW YOU WILL REACH OUT THIS WEEK.