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## Featured Topics

### What They Didn't Tell Me

12 young entrepreneurs under age 40 tell what they've learned.

By Julie Bettinger

#### Amanda Harkins, 26

##### Mouse Pads Orlando Vacation Rentals

- **Established 2004**, Orlando
- **Annual revenues:** \$1.5 million

**What she's learned:** "How to trust myself. I've also learned there's no such thing as luck. God has a big hand in my business."

**Milestone:** "Getting an office. It was a dream of mine to move (the business) out of my apartment and into the old Angebilt hotel building downtown. We did that last June."

**Surprises:** "The amount I have to pay in taxes is shocking. And it takes so much time, energy and resources compiling information for the accountant. It's probably 15% to 20% of what I do."

#### Will Prather, 36

##### Broadway Palm Dinner Theatre/Prather Family of Theatres

- Broadway musicals in dinner theatre environment
- **Established 1993**, Fort Myers
- **Annual revenues:** \$16 million

**What he's learned:** "The show we choose to produce is the single most important element that contributes to our success – and it's not necessarily the one I would select. We have to really listen to our customers."

**Biggest challenge:** "Retrofitting supermarkets to create 36,000-sq.-ft. dinner theatres with 500 seats."

**Surprises:** "For us to grow, I had to change my management style and be more hands-off, empowering those in our management structure. I had to kind of get up in the trees and focus on the strategic and long-range plan. I was surprised how hard it was to step away from the day-to-day operations."

#### Amanda Laudadio, 35

##### Gateway Real Estate Inc.

- Residential real estate sales
- **Established 2000**, Tallahassee
- **Annual sales (office):** \$18 million

**What she's learned:** "How to balance family and business. It's very easy to get caught up in work and never stop. We cut the phones off at times and help out at the kids' schools."

**Milestone:** "Reaching a set dollar amount in sales. Once I did, I realized it's not about the money. It's about the people – your buyers, your sellers and the community."

**Surprises:** "I'm amazed at the loyalty of the clients. The majority of my business is referral. In this high-tech world, you don't see much loyalty, so that never ceases to amaze me."

#### Leigh Haller, 37

##### Haller Industries, Inc.

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- Electronics manufacturing services
- **Family business established 1986; she became owner in 2003**, Tampa
- **Annual revenues:** \$2 million

**Biggest challenge:** "I took over an established company from my father, and he stayed in operations. He and I have a 180-degree difference in the way we run things, so we had to overcome some obstacles together."

**Milestone:** "My biggest was completing a huge NASA contract on time and on budget. It involved three critical path items for them, so we had NASA reps here all the time making sure everything was OK, and it was. It gave me a lot of satisfaction."

**Surprises:** "When you're an employee, you only see a small piece of what the owner of a company shoulders. It was a shocker when I absorbed that I was that owner and I had all these different realms to worry about."

### William Perego, 39 Success4RealAgents

- Creates marketing and lead generation systems for small businesses and Realtors
- **Established 2003**, Miami
- **Annual revenues:** \$1.5 million

**What he's learned:** "In order to be successful in business, you need three things: A good idea, a good plan and good execution. And then you have to keep fine-tuning the execution."

**Milestone:** "Starting my first business (a film and video production company in Buenos Aires, Argentina) with \$400 and making it profitable."

**Surprises:** "With my first business, I learned that you always overestimate the sales and underestimate the costs by about 50% in the planning stages. So before you launch, you need to multiply those figures by two. Most companies that fail underestimate the cash needed to get the company to a break-even point."

### D. Travis Proctor, 30 Artemis International Technologies Inc.

- Solutions – computer systems, phone, security, etc.
- **Established 1995**, Melbourne
- **Annual revenues:** \$3 million

**What he's learned:** "That owning your own business doesn't mean you don't have a boss. Every customer and every employee is your boss."

**Biggest challenge:** "Building legitimacy. I started this business when I was 20 years old and had to convince people to hand over their IT to me. People wanted to know when my dad was going to show up."

**Surprises:** "I'm solid in other areas, but I didn't have a full appreciation of the human resources aspects. I have 24 employees, and all have different motivations."

### Nadia Lombardero, 38 ANAMAR Environmental Consulting Inc.

- **Established 2000**, Gainesville
- **Annual revenues:** \$1 million

**What she's learned:** "To trust my instincts."

**Biggest challenge:** "Being squeezed by the cost of insurance. After payroll, insurance is our biggest expense; it's almost 17% of our overhead. We do a lot of federal and state work, and the rates they use to estimate reimbursements for our true costs are outdated. Small businesses often can't get the discounts that are available to larger companies for the different types of insurances a business must carry."

### Natalie Padveen, 37 Firmagen Labs, Inc.

- **Manufacturer and marketer** of antioxidant skin care products
- **Established 2004**, Boca Raton

**What she's learned:** "I'm actually a physical therapist with no sales background. It helps to know your product, be good with people and want to help them."

**Biggest challenge:** "Differentiating ourselves from other products. A lot of companies have big marketing dollars behind them. We've got to really cater to the needs of the customer."

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**Uri minkoff, 37**  
**Fortis Software, LLC**

- **Software development firm**
- **Established 2001**, Clearwater

**What he's learned:** "The values of working with other people. Our (work) environment is like a big family. We have juggling equipment, big beanbags and mini basketball hoops. It's a culture that fosters great relationships and allows us to create really amazing products."

**Surprises:** "Just how immediate and how close all this is. I'm not using somebody else's money, so I feel everything. What my businesses are doing day in and day out hits very close to home for me – personally and professionally."

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**Tanya Stewart, 31**  
**Destin Center for Cosmetic Dentistry**

- **Human resource and career consulting**
- **Established 2004**, Jacksonville

**What she's learned:** "I've definitely learned the meaning of the word 'perseverance.'"

**Surprises:** "What surprised me most was the need. I went in with one perspective, one vision. As I got involved, there were so many other angles. I guess I've been surprised what people will pay for."

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**DR. Dennis Lichorwic, 37**  
**A More Confident You**

- **Spa Dentistry**
- **Established 1999** (purchased existing practice), Destin

**What he's learned:** "That people will seek out higher end products and be willing to pay for them if you deliver and actually go beyond their expectations. We provide a service that's dependable and caring, then try to go a step beyond. Patients can have a hand paraffin wax treatment here, plus a massage chair and headphones for music and movies during procedures."

**Milestone:** "I graduated from college in 1997 and had my own practice in 1999. I doubled (the production) in five months, and then doubled it again two years later. We built a new building with double the square footage and moved in June 2005."

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**Bridgette King, 37**  
**Get the Scoop Inc.**

- **Publicity and public relations**, specializing in IT
- **Established 1999**, Lighthouse Point

**What she's learned:** "Time management and organization. Being a small business owner, you have to do everything. There's no employee base for delegation."

**Milestone:** "Going up against large agencies in New York, Boston or San Francisco for an account and getting picked – the little PR firm in Florida that doesn't even have a website."

**Surprises:** "The hours. I definitely work a lot more hours than in an office job."

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