

# Forbes

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## [Sweet Smell of Success Comes with Help from Others](#)



Chellise Michael Photography

### **Take the help that's offered.**

"GrowthVentures changed my life and is the reason I am in business," says Amy Deguilio, founder of Sugar Flower Cake Shop, which was a hobby as 2009 began and now employs 12 part-time staff.

The Kauffman FastTrac GrowthVenture program, held at the SUNY Levin Institute, is one of several NYC Business Solutions programs offered to small business owners by the city of New York. Another is mentoring, which Deguilio also used.

These are city services that generate new income and new jobs, as Deguilio can attest, and they are there for any entrepreneur willing to admit s/he doesn't know it all. States — particularly

California, Texas, Florida and Virginia — are reaching out to small businesses with financing, training, relocation, and other services as are other cities, such as Detroit.

Deguilio believes these resources are especially important for women entrepreneurs who often start businesses because they are good at something — such as making sugar flowers — but don't understand all the business that needs to go on to support a business.

### **Know that you don't know it all**

A mathematician by training, she still needed the expertise of others to get her business growing. Knowing the Fibonacci sequence for every flower and how to calculate the amount of butter-cream frosting needed to frost a cake by calculating the surface area of the cake weren't all it takes to run a business.

But knowing how to price her products, figure out her market, and decide which clients to focus on were invaluable. For Deguilio, it meant timing how long it took to deconstruct each species of flower, recreate and paint its petals in edible material, then reconstruct the bloom. She found that pricing according to what her initial market of bakeries and do-it-yourself brides could pay wasn't paying off.

"I never realized it took five hours to make some of these. I couldn't charge \$5," she says. But the spreadsheets and time studies gave her the data to explain her prices to customers and to refocus her marketing efforts on the right targets: venues and wedding planners. She is now the exclusive wedding cake provider for several higher-end venues.

Much of her marketing is face-to-face, building relationships at conferences and trade shows. She also added Pinterest to her outreach because it is an

increasingly popular online resource for wedding planners.

Her use of local-sustainable-organic ingredients sets her apart from most custom wedding cake designers and is another ingredient in her new marketing mix. Her honey is grown on New York City rooftops, the berries and cream are from the Hudson Valley. This is a valued added for her socially conscious customers.

Through the NYC Business Solutions program, she met with a mentor once a week, who helped her finalize her business plan, kept her on target with each step she had to take, helped her navigate the permit process for opening a commercial kitchen, and made her take time out from running her business to plan her business.

### **Keep learning from others**

The GrowthVentures program gave her information from facilitators, guest speakers, and other entrepreneurs. The latter resources, one she has neglected, led her to become an active networker. She has joined a network of wedding professionals as well as Business Networking International.

There's a wealth of information to be gotten from "tapping into other entrepreneurs who have already been in my shoes," she says. Networking groups give a place to go where she can say, "Here is what I am thinking. Is this a good idea? What are my strengths and weaknesses? What can I make better?"

Of course, the corollary to learning from others is sharing your own knowledge with others, something Deguilio is eager to do. She shares her class notes and her "lessons learned," things she did that didn't work out so others don't have to make the same mistakes.

Deguilio herself is looking three to five years ahead in growth plans for her one-time hobby. She has a grasp on what's needed to grow and is firmly convinced that the resources are there to help her succeed.

What about you?