

PERMANENT CHANGE

nurse entrepreneur gives clients' self-image
BY SANDY KEEFE, MSN, RN

••• KAREN KOTLEBA, RN, LNC, CPMA, finds great satisfaction in being a business woman.

"As a business owner, you can set your own hours, and you're making the decisions about your own life," she said. "I control my own practices, decide which clients to handle and manage my own income. When I want a bonus, I put out an ad with a discount for services, the clients come in and there's your bonus."

As the owner and operator of The Greater Chicagoland Area for Micro Dermagraphics Inc., a permanent makeup business based in Barrington, IL, Kotleba receives the rewards of her work every day.

Early Influences

Kotleba described the early life experiences that helped lay the foundation for the independence she enjoys today as a nurse entrepreneur.

"I was raised in the country and used to being independent; that quality just carried on throughout my life and career. Before I started in the permanent makeup field, I was in business for myself for 10 years, doing insurance physicals," she noted.

Much of Kotleba's nursing career took place in critical care and step-down units, where she cared for acutely ill cardiac patients.

"I got burned-out taking care of the very sick as a cardiac nurse. I was on the code team and resuscitated a few too many people," she noted.

Taking the Plunge

Kotleba depicted the early days of business ownership as relatively comfortable.

"It really wasn't that scary to take the big step to opening my own business, because I just knew I could do it. You have to have that knowledge, that sense, you can make it. It was a little frightening sometimes, wondering if I'd make enough money. But, I always had private duty nursing to fall back

on, which I did from time to time," she stated.

When Kotleba started doing permanent makeup 14 years ago, she made the decision to build up slowly and never took out a start-up loan.

"I got certified, bought my equipment slowly and followed my instructor's advice to 'do five free ones.' Those five customers started to send in others and now the major-



Karen Kotleba, RN, LNC, CPMA

ity of my business is word-of-mouth. When I wanted more business, I'd go to a salon and do complimentary eyeliner on someone who interacted with a lot with customers, and they'd get me new clients," she said.

Running the Business

As the owner and sale operator in her business, Kotleba has established the parameters for her professional practice and customer relations.

"The business world is a tough world. You have to be willing to work long hours, and then you can take off whenever you want. You have to really nurture the clients and

Cater to them. You need to help them be happy with the work you've done - a guarantee of happiness is good! I'll work with them and they'll work with me," she said.

Kotleba incorporated her practice 10 years ago and handles all aspects of the business herself.

"I never wanted to get so big that I'd have to hire other people. I used to have an accountant do my books, but now I do those myself. I'm pretty competent on the computer, so I even do my own Web site to get the word out to new clients," she commented.

Once a Nurse, Always a Nurse

Kotleba is proud to be a nurse and finds her professional background a definite plus to her customers.

"Once you're a nurse, you're always a nurse, so that's just inherent in my personality," she said. "In my field, you're respected more when you're a nurse. Nursing deals with life and death situations and people are more comfortable knowing they have a nurse working on their faces. With my nursing background, I know how important it is to find out exactly what the patient wants, not what I might think they should have."

Kotleba uses her nursing assessment skills to make sound decisions about her clients.

"It's important to know when to avoid working on someone's skin. I wouldn't work on someone who has diabetes, for example, or someone with hemophilia. My nurturing, my ability to listen and figure out what personality type the clients are, what they need, how to document with pictures, how to take a medical history - all of these come from my nursing background."

Although she obtained tremendous satisfaction from her staff nurse role earlier in her career, entrepreneurship is the right choice for Kotleba at this time.

"Opening my own business, becoming an entrepreneur, is the best thing I've ever done. It's made my life so much easier, and I don't have the stress on my body and mind as I did when I was a staff nurse."

Sandy Keefe is a freelance writer and regular contributor to ADVANCE.