



**February 2006**

**SP:** Tammy, can you tell our readers a little about your background?

**TR:** I'm a college graduate with a degree in Business. Like every good college graduate, I landed a job using the skills I learned in school and so I began my career in Information Technology. Essentially, I was a software developer building internal systems to support companies like Verizon, Sprint, and Lockheed Martin. The pay was great, but my heart wasn't in it. After my husband and I married, he supported my decision to follow a new path and soon thereafter marked the birth of my business.



**SP:** Have you always been a pet lover?

**TR:** Yes, since childhood. My very first dog was a mixed terrier, named Peanut. Now I have a golden retriever, Hunter.

**SP:** When did you start your pet care business?

**TR:** I started the business in December of 2000 on a part-time basis while I was still employed as a software developer. A year later, I left my IT career and pursued my new company full-time. In 2003, I decided it was time to expand and I opened our daycare and training facility in Arlington, VA.

**SP:** What services does your Fur-get Me Not offer?

**TR:** We offer a variety of services for pet owners. Fur-Get Me Not is a one-stop-shop for everything pet-related. We offer in-home pet sitting, dog walking, pet taxi services, dog daycare, dog boarding, and dog training. We also have a do-it-yourself pet bath at our facility and a pet boutique in which we sell a variety of things for your pet in addition to trainer recommended products. We even offer dog birthday parties!

**SP:** In the beginning, what was the biggest obstacle standing between you and your dream of starting Fur-get Me Not Pet Care?

**TR:** I originally began Fur-Get Me Not because I wanted my own business training dogs. The biggest obstacle at the time, was that I did not have the dog training experience. So I started out offering pet sitting and dog walking services, while I educated myself more on canine behavior by going to seminars, training schools, and apprenticing. After 5 years of study and experience, I passed the national certification exam and am now a Certified Pet Dog Trainer.

Money was an obstacle as well. I had a huge fear, or maybe it was just my pride, but my salary was about to take a huge pay cut that would affect the lifestyle I had grown accustomed to living. My husband's support and encouragement helped me let go and realize that how much money you make does not always dictate how successful you are in life. Sometimes you just have to enjoy what you do!

**SP:** How do you recruit dog-sitters?

**TR:** Well, it's not easy. Posting help wanted ads on the internet and in local newspapers will only get you so far. The heart and sole of my business is my employees. To offer quality services, you have to invest the time in the right people. Since 80% of my staff are part-time, you can imagine the HR roller coaster. Part-time positions are always more challenging to fill and the retention rate is often low. Through the years, we have matured our hiring practices and as a result our retention rates have increased dramatically. In fact, my very first employee still works for me today! In the end, I think that if your employees are happy, then they help recruit other qualified candidates.

**SP:** How did you choose your business location, what was important to you when you chose it?

**TR:** Well, my business began out of my home so I suppose the initial location chose me. I operated 3 years out of my home before moving to a new location. When I was searching for a location to launch dog daycare and training services, I knew the zoning ordinances would play a huge factor. So I limited my search to industrial areas.

I live in Arlington, Virginia, just outside of Washington D.C. An area that is surrounded by high-rises, and commuter lifestyles so the county has very few industrial locations to choose from. From the onset, I knew I wanted to keep my business in Arlington, have a minimum 3000 square feet, and an industrial location so that the dogs' barking would not get me in trouble with neighbors or my landlord. That was a tall order but after searching for about 6 months, we finally found the right property. I also wanted to make sure my location would be easily accessible by my existing client base.

**SP:** What avenues do you use to market your business?

**TR:** Lots and lots of networking. I cannot emphasize this enough. When I first started my business, I was hitting every pet store, coffee shop, and veterinarian in town! Anywhere I could post business cards or explain my service to someone with an ear, I did. I attended Chamber events, Seminars, Professional Networking events, you name it. Small business owners are a great resource and stay well connected. They understand the challenges you face and are always willing to send a referral your way. Networking is the wisest marketing investment you'll ever make.

**SP:** How much can your average client expect to pay for your services?

**TR:** We do more midday dog walking than any other service we offer. The average midday client pays \$15-\$18 per dog walk. Dog daycare will run \$27-\$32 a day. Boarding runs \$25 a night plus the cost of daycare. And pet sitting runs on average \$50 for 3 visits a day.

**SP:** What were your start-up costs?

**TR:** My initial investment was \$3300. That got me started by addressing basic business needs such as licensing, marketing, etc. Of course, I worked out of my home

so that gave me a huge advantage at keeping start-up costs low. When I moved the business to our dog daycare facility...that was a whole different ballgame. That investment was \$110,000.

**SP:** What kind of certifications did you need to start your pet care business?

**TR:** Affiliations with pet sitting and dog training associations, like Pet Sitters International and Association of Pet Dog Trainers.

**SP:** What did your family and friends think of your business?

**TR:** When I first began, I got a lot of comments like "Are you crazy?" It was certainly a shock to most people. Through the years, it was hard to show how large the company had become since I was still operating the business out of my home. Once I moved to a storefront location, it gave people a better understanding of the business - it had become tangible in their eyes. Now, the daycare is a pit stop for visiting family and friends.

**SP:** Do you have any paid employees?

**TR:** We currently have 55 employees, 45 part-time, 10 full-time.

**SP:** What kind of business did you form?

**TR:** LLC

**SP:** What is your projected revenue for the year?

**TR:** Our revenues have grown tremendously since our early days, but it has only just started to turn into profits.

**SP:** What advice can you offer aspiring entrepreneurs?

**TR:** I would say the number one key to the survival of any business is perseverance. When the chips are low, you've got to keep your cards in the game. There will always be peaks and valleys, but the key to driving your vision forward is the investment you make in your management team. Hire well and you will do well. 📌

