

WOMEN

Psst! Pass It On

ENTREPRENEURS REFLECT ON THE HAND-ME-DOWN ADVICE THEY'VE LOVED AND LOATHED.

BY ALIZA PILAR SHERMAN

NOT ALL ADVICE IS CREATED equal. We asked several women business owners about advice they received and whether they successfully applied it to their businesses, or ignored it for the better. Here's what they said:

fluent business leader, laughed and knew the advice was right on. The trip yielded contacts that could open doors for her company to expand overseas. Now, she says, "I use this advice every week."

Saying yes to a dinner invitation from an old business associate resulted in the New York City-based HealthExpo gaining a new investor. More recently, Tsai took another chance. "I met a friendly young man from Brazil at a train station, and [he] asked for my card. Within weeks, we had met several of each others' friends, done a business deal together, and planned a party at the Brazilian ambassador's house." Tsai's initial instinct may have been to decline giving her card to a stranger, but instead, she said yes to opportunity and reaped the rewards.

BEST ADVICE

Laura Roberts, 37, CEO of Pantheon Chemical, a \$3 million industrial chemical company in Phoenix, received the following advice from her friend and mentor Paula Adkins, a senior executive at General Dynamics Corp.: "Small people talk about people, medium people talk about events, and big people talk about ideas." Roberts used the advice to gauge the health of her company and the types of people she was hiring. "It enabled me to weed out the wrong people, and that really changed my business," she explains.

Roberts got Atkins' advice at a time when her business development group was performing below her expectations. She realized her own business practices were partly to blame. "We would go through a simple interview process to assess a candidate's skills, meet a few times, then hire them," explains Roberts. "Technical knowledge, initial personality impressions and sparse reference checks were our only criteria."

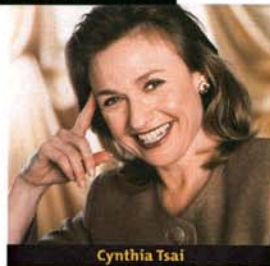
The advice helped Roberts understand she had built a business development team with the wrong people, and her tendency to "try to keep everybody happy, fix problems and be a peacemaker" barely covered up the issue. Since rebuilding her business development group with driven people, productivity has soared.

NONTRADITIONAL ADVICE

Not all advice sounds like business advice. Cynthia Tsai, 48, president of HealthExpo Inc., a \$1 million-plus company that organizes consumer health events, received this advice from advertising executive Lois Wyse: "Always say yes. Nothing ever happens to girls who say no." Tsai, who had been debating going to London with an in-



Laura Roberts



Cynthia Tsai

THE ADVICE NOT TAKEN

Sometimes, advice just doesn't fit, or the receiver can't or won't accept it. Lynda Weinman, 49-year-old president of Ojai, California-based Lynda.com, a \$2 million software training and publishing company, received dubious advice from her mother: "Marry a guy with money so you don't have to earn your own." For perspective, Weinman offers, "I was born in the mid-1950s. While my mother wanted me to go to college, it wasn't to prepare myself for

a career—it was to meet a man and marry and have babies." She believes her mother simply couldn't conceive of her daughter having her own career, much less helming her own company.

At the time, starting a business was not an obvious choice for Weinman, either. "It didn't occur to me [that] I could find my own viable calling," she admits, explaining that the process of starting Lynda.com in

October 1998 was an evolution. Weinman went from retail to animation and special effects before starting a computer graphics company and writing her first book on Web design in 1995.

"We forget how recent it is that women are respected or successful in the business field," says Weinman. "I say to my daughter, 'Find something you love, and you won't mind hard work, because it will be enjoyable.' I wish that's what I had been told, but in truth, I learned it on my own through experience."

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