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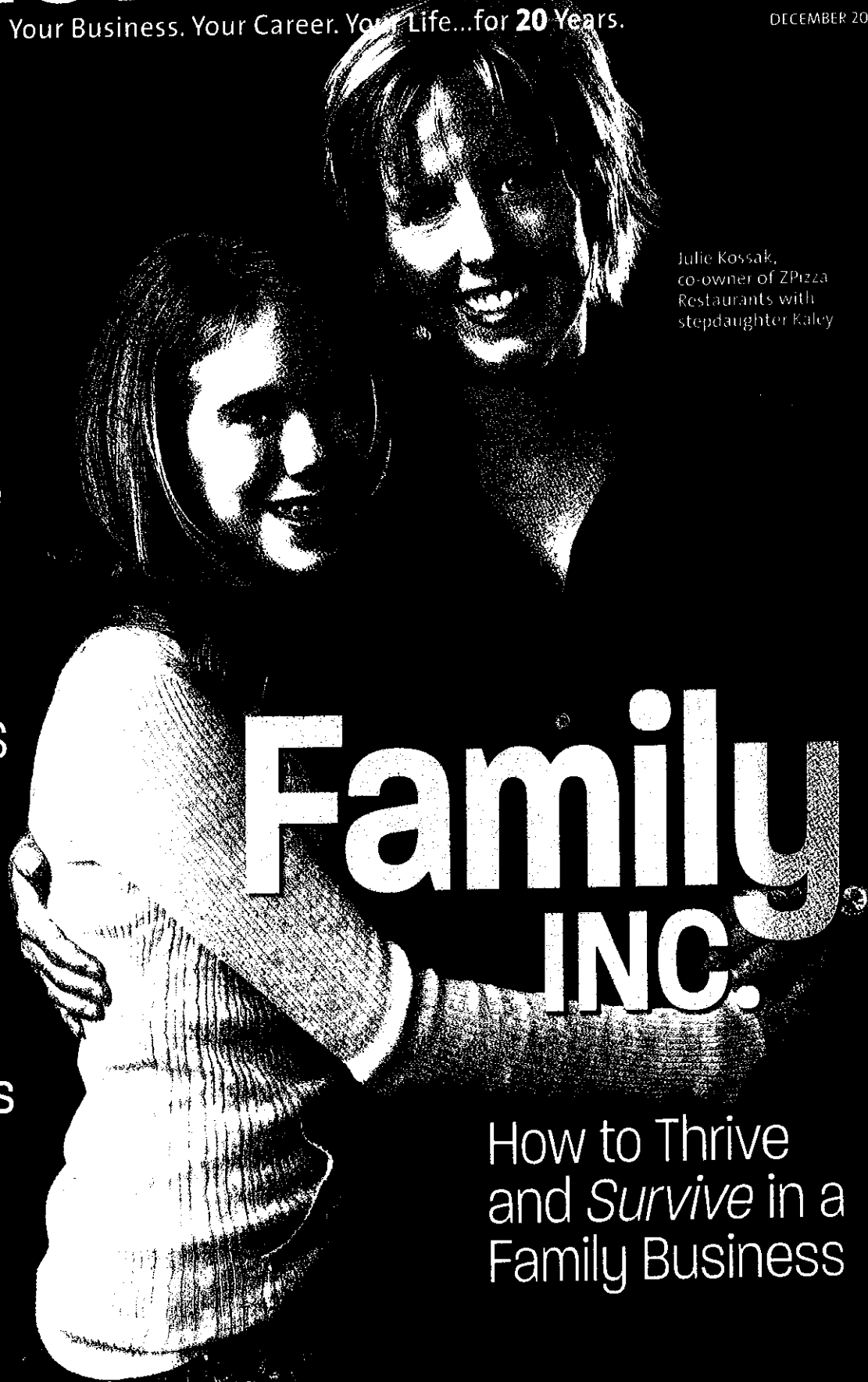
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Julie Kossak,
co-owner of ZPizza
Restaurants with
stepdaughter Kaley

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WHEN MOMS, SISTERS, BROTHERS AND PARENTS WORK TOGETHER, THERE ARE UNIQUE REWARDS AND CHALLENGES
■ HERE ARE TIPS ON FINDING SUCCESS

Family

In

STORY BY
STEPHANIE PATERIK
PHOTOGRAPHY BY
JEFF NEWTON & N. SCOTT TRIMBLE

Workplace politics can be tricky to juggle at any job. What happens when you throw family politics into the mix? Women in all types of business, from banking to pizza making, are choosing to work with their parents, siblings, spouses and children. They say the benefits of working with the people you know, trust and care for the most are immeasurable and can propel companies to long-term success. >>

Working with family members also poses unique challenges, such as launching a business while juggling other jobs and family, negotiating a salary with parents, competing for a top position with siblings, and talking about work at family gatherings.

Women from four Valley family businesses share their successes and advice about climbing the corporate and entrepreneurial ladder alongside loved ones.

SISTERS ... IN LAW

Sisters Hope Kirsch, 50, and Lori Kirsch-Goodwin, 42, were like any siblings with an eight-year age difference before they started working together: They got along but lived separate lives. Both New York natives, Kirsch was a teacher in New York and Kirsch-Goodwin a lawyer in New Jersey.

But their lives and careers began to merge when Kirsch, inspired by her younger sister, decided to become a lawyer, too. Kirsch-Goodwin landed a job at a Phoenix law firm eight years ago and moved across the country. Kirsch took a job in Tucson to be nearby. Eventually, they ended up at the same firm, and earlier this year, they quit to start their own civil law practice in north Scottsdale.

Says Kirsch: "We always figured it would be so nice to work together."

Of course, the sisters had worries, too. Would there be jealousy if one were more successful? Would there be friction if co-workers liked one sister but not the other? Would personal problems snake their way into the office?

"We didn't know what it would be like," Kirsch says. "We thought, 'Are we really doing this?' But life is about challenges and risks." And this gamble has paid off: The sisters quickly discovered they loved working side by side and taking a bigger role in each other's lives. About 75 percent of their clients have followed them. And Kirsch-Goodwin & Kirsch PLLC is taking on about three new cases weekly.

The few times they've fought, they made a point not to bring it to the office. They always consult each other when making decisions about money. And when they disagree, the person who cares less about the topic defers.

There are loads of familial perks. When Kirsch-Goodwin wants to leave work early to see her kids, she knows Kirsch won't mind. And when Kirsch goes on vacation, she trusts Kirsch-Goodwin to take care of her clients. They easily agreed on decorating the office with family photos and cartoons drawn by their late father.

Although lawyers and insurance agents urged them to draw up contingency plans in case the business dissolves or they have a falling out, the sisters declined. Instead, they made a handshake agreement to split the investment, profit and workload equally. That kind of trust and reliance can't be duplicated even among friends, the sisters say.



Tips from the Trenches

- Having a business is like having a baby. If the relationship is troubled, working together will only make it worse.
- Work somewhere else to achieve success on your own, and bring back what you learned to the family business. Decide what will happen to the company if business, or the relationship, goes bad.
- Consult family about major business purchases.
- In a large company, follow the usual channels of communication, even if it is easier to pop into your relative's office. Avoid competition by valuing each other's unique strengths. Act with integrity. It's the family's reputation on the line, not just your own.
- Don't let work monopolize the conversation on weekends. Groom the next generation, but don't pressure family members to join the business if they don't want to.
- When the older generation is reluctant to step aside, make it a gradual transition. Find ways to keep the older generation involved, like inviting them in for inspections, letting them monitor the business via video and asking their advice.

"Who do you trust but your sister?" Kirsch-Goodwin says. "We knew we wouldn't be fighting over whose name comes first. We don't go through marriage (as sisters) and we won't have to go through a divorce. We'll always be sisters."

MOONLIGHTING WITH FAMILY

Julie Kossak, 40, is a lawyer by day but at night and on weekends, she's a restaurateur along with her husband and children.

One of a growing number of entrepreneurs who anchor a family business with a steady job, Kossak and her husband, Mark Weeter, 49, own two Zpizza franchises in Phoenix. When Kossak is not in court, she is overseeing things at one of the family's restaurants with her stepdaughter, Kaley, 14, and often with her daughter, Gretchen, 4, in tow.

After two years in business, Kossak says the family is planning to expand again next year with a third location, and they may branch into another type of franchise.

"Both of us have an entrepreneurial side we wanted to explore, and owning a restaurant sounded romantic, believe it or not," Kossak says.

The reality was a lot of hard work and not so much romance, but the results have been very satisfying, Kossak says. "We're starting to make money, and the risk and long hours are starting to pay off," she says.

Kossak and Weeter have business skills that complement one another, says Kossak, who works for the federal government handling bankruptcy proceedings.

"Mark is the risk-taker, and I'm the cautious one. I do the research and organizational planning, and he makes it happen," Kossak says. Throughout the experience, she says, her legal training has been useful in handling contracts and real estate negotiations, while Weeter's sales and management skills got them off to a fast start.

"We work together very well," Kossak says, but she says the couple has to be careful to avoid burnout. "At first, Mark was working 70 hours a week, but we have gotten help where we needed it. We know we cannot do everything and we have to balance work with having a life together."

That help has come from their children in many cases, a common practice for family businesses. Kaley works during summers and school breaks, collecting lots of tips. Kossak's stepsons Cody and Dustin also help, and her brother-in-law is the emergency call for cashing and driving in a pinch. And Gretchen eats a lot of pizza.

Running a business while holding down a full-time job isn't easy, Kossak says, but she plans to continue the dual career paths for the foreseeable future.

"In my day job, I see the details of a lot of bankruptcies, and I see that things go wrong for a lot of reasons. Sometimes it's bad planning, and sometimes it's just bad luck. There is a fair amount

of mismanagement out there when people try to launch their own businesses," Kossak says.

Research is the key to success, she insists.

"We did extensive research before selecting a franchise, and it was a clear choice when we found Zpizza. We were extremely analytical about our decisions, and for the most part, we made good ones," Kossak says.

Making money is the reason Kossak and Weeter went into it, but there has also been satisfaction in success. "It's really exciting to see what we did together and to have it all come together," Kossak says.

DADDY'S NOT-SO-LITTLE EXECUTIVES

What do you call Dad at the office?

That was a big question for Kari Dorris, 35, and Elizabeth Lamb Sawyer, 38, when they decided to work for their fathers at 1st National Bank of Arizona in Scottsdale. Dorris' dad, Gary Dorris, is president and chief operating officer of the heritage bank. And Lamb Sawyer's dad, Ray Lamb, is the owner and CEO.

Both women forged successful careers before their dads recruited them to join the family business. The men founded it as a heritage bank in 1999 with the idea that it would be passed from one generation to the next.

Dorris is senior vice president and director of wealth management strategies, and Lamb Sawyer is senior vice president of the nonprofit division.

The two women decided to call their fathers Ray and Gary at work, both to be professional and avoid resentment from co-workers. But that wasn't the only land mine they had to negotiate. There was the matter of salary.

"We got into salary negotiations, and my dad actually negotiated against me," Dorris says with a laugh. "People think all that stuff is handed to us, and it's actually the other way around."

Psychologists say it's easy for families to fall into the roles they had growing up when they work together later in life. Dorris, who also works with sister Kimberly, says it was important for the women to assert themselves as professionals right away, not daddy's little girls.

"Our families hadn't seen us in professional roles," Dorris says. "I found my dad trying to fix things for me that I didn't want him to fix."

When Dorris' dad tried to help her negotiate with a client, she asked for the freedom to do it herself. Her dad backed off immediately and let her take the reins. She says it hasn't been a problem since.

Lamb Sawyer, who works with three of her brothers, had dropped her maiden name but recently reclaimed it to tip off co-workers. Before, her colleagues would talk about her family members, usually innocuously, not knowing they were related.