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Gail Perry • May. 22, 2018

My father owned his own business. He got up earlier than the sun in the morning and came home after dark every night. He worked harder than any of the dozens of employees who punched a clock in his tool and die company. All I knew about his business when I was little was that sometimes he would bring home treats from the Wrigley gum company or M&M Mars candy company because he had made parts for their machines and they gave him goody bags when he called on them.

Once I made it to teenage years and started thinking about summer jobs, I asked if I could work at his company. He explained the apprentice and journeyman requirements to me and said it wasn't a part time job (he also said it wasn't for girls, lol). So working at his company seemed hopeless, until the day my dad decided I should learn some basic bookkeeping skills.

It was a Saturday and I was in my early teens. He woke me up in the morning, told me to get dressed and that I was coming to the office with him. Once I got there, I discovered he had asked his company's CPA to spend the day with me. I got a deep dive into payroll, accounts receivable, payables, general ledger, 10-key, the filing system, petty cash, and writing checks.

From that day forward, throughout high school, when my father's office manager took time off in the summer, I got to fill in and take her place. I didn't think it was as glamorous as working back in "the shop" with the machinists, but at least I was part of the team. And whenever anyone needed information related to the bookkeeping, or if they needed a bill paid, a petty cash reimbursement, or even paychecks, if I happened to be working on a payroll day, I was the go-to person.

What I learned during those summer part-time stints at the office, in addition to

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There's a lot more to businesses than knowing the names of your co-workers' pets, but the values established in mom-and-pop businesses – taking a personal interest in the people you work with, making sure you all share together in the company's successes, solving problems together – can carry you far in life. As an adult, I've participated in several family businesses, some of them my own. The best business experiences I've had have been those where the people matter most and care about each other. Those are lessons we learn first at home, and then, if we're lucky, by working with people who either are family or who treat us as such.

Small Business

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