



### May 2005 Feature

## Never Give Up

### Sheila Shechtman

CEO  
Giftcorp, Inc.

Twenty-five years ago Sheila Shechtman had a supportive husband and two baby daughters, but, like many other homemakers, she wanted something more. For Sheila, more meant owning and building a lucrative business from the ground up—quite a departure for an American Studies major. She and a friend decided to open a high-end food emporium, which at that time was a "new idea." Using their business sense, they headed to the Big Apple and went directly to an established source for guidance. They practically knocked down the doors of Joel Dean and Giorgio Deluca (founders of Dean & DeLuca), accosting them on the sidewalks of Soho until they agreed to apprentice the two struggling entrepreneurs.

For six months, Sheila and her partner were given an insider's view into the industry, and by 1981, they felt ready to open their own gourmet food store, Nanshe's. Again, they were met with resistance, as more than ten banks rejected their loan applications before they finally received start-up money from the Small Business Association. Ultimately, Sheila gained national recognition as one of Connecticut's leading businesswomen, proving to all naysayers that she was "no mere housewife destined to fail," as one of the banks had deemed her.

Twelve years later, Sheila took some time off to stay home with her teenage daughters, but that plan lasted only two weeks. A seasoned businesswoman, she embarked on her second entrepreneurial endeavor—this time, solo. She began to make gift baskets in her home basement, first selling them to old friends and customers. Within ten years, she was shipping gifts nationwide from a 25,000 square foot facility. Now Giftcorp, Inc. is one of the twenty

largest women-owned businesses in Connecticut, and the National Association of Women Business Owners (NAWBO) has recently named Sheila Outstanding Woman Business Owner of the Year.

Committed to the community of businesswomen, in 2003 Sheila launched Gifted Expressions, a spin off company allowing women to sell Giftcorp gifts from their homes. Gifted Expressions gives working women the chance to subsidize their incomes, while empowering them to become part-time entrepreneurs.

Still, through all of her business ventures, Sheila has not become just another woman with dollar signs in her eyes. For her, success doesn't lie exclusively with earnings. It resonates from the confidence you build by achieving your goals. An avid believer in taking chances, Sheila advises burgeoning entrepreneurs to take risks, but calculated ones. **"Risk is about two things—believing in yourself and surrounding yourself with good advisors,"** she says. And Sheila insists that enthusiasm is vital. "I know passion sounds like a fuzzy, overused word, but if entrepreneurs don't have that, forget about it. There are many days that passion's going to pull you through when nothing else does."

Sheila believes that **the key to entrepreneurial success is to keep evolving, both in a business sense and as an individual.** As she says, "today, many of the banks that said 'no' to me twenty years ago are not around, but I still am!"



Sheila Shechtman

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