



Neighbors NY Inc.

President – Nancy Talarski

Vice President – Sandra Fowlkes

Success Magazine: When did you become interested in caregiving and working with seniors?

Nancy Talarski: For me, it started when my sister and I alternated caring for our mother during her terminal illness. Those four months helped me understand the joys of caregiving as well as the potential for burnout. Then, fourteen years ago, my husband and I made the decision to move to this area. I was lucky enough to find employment as the marketing representative for The Glen at Hiland Meadows retirement community and later as the project director of RSVP (Retired Senior Volunteer Program), where I had the opportunity to spend time with a lot of seniors. Both of those jobs—and my life experience—seem to have just been a lead-in to Neighbors NY. We never know where life will lead us!

SM: What services does Neighbors NY offer?

SM: Where did the two of you meet and why did you decide to go into business together?

Sandy: Nancy and I have known each other for a number of years through community organizations and through my work at a local bank. When Nancy decided to start this business and was looking for a partner, she contacted me to see if I had any interest in joining her. I was thrilled! What I enjoyed most about my years as a trust officer at a local bank here was working with people and helping them meet their goals. At Neighbors, I can continue to do meaningful work while owning my own company and enjoying the challenges of running a small business.

SM: What was the greatest risk associated with the start-up of this new business?

Nancy: Failure! Like many entrepreneurs,

Sandy and I started off flying by the seats of our pants. We considered a franchise but were unhappy with the restrictions that would place on us. So we learned by trial and error. Fortunately, about a year into our business, we found an organization called The Senior's Choice that consists of independents in our business. This group provides us with ongoing training and support and has helped us to revamp our systems to be more efficient. Today we operate with web-based scheduling and time tracking systems that work together with our accounting program. The time tracking system lets us know right away if someone doesn't show up for a scheduled shift so that we can remedy the situation. That's invaluable to us and to our clients!

SM: What parts of the business do you each handle daily?

Nancy: Much of my time is spent in strategic planning, operations, and client fulfillment. In addition, I spend quite a bit of time developing marketing materials, preparing payroll, and generating the billing statements. Because we are small, many of the day-to-day tasks are shared between us. As we grow, our roles will become more delineated.

Sandra: I am the scheduling leader, so I spend a lot of my time talking to caregivers and creating and updating schedules to ensure that all shifts are

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covered. I am also the on-call supervisor, and I am responsible for most of the outside marketing in hospitals and rehabilitation centers.

SM: Why should a prospective client use your services rather than finding an assistant through the newspaper?

Nancy: Oh my, there are so many reasons. Using a caregiver from Neighbors NY protects both the employer and the employee. First, we make sure that all of the various federal and state taxes are paid in a timely manner. People think they can save money by hiring privately, but, in reality, they are liable for any unpaid taxes plus penalties and interest and may even face civil fines and criminal penalties. Second, we provide workers' compensation insurance and liability insurance for all of our employees. Most homeowners' insurance policies specifically exclude employees from coverage—leaving the private employer personally liable for any injuries and damages sustained by the employee. Also, we do thorough background checks on all prospective employees and provide ongoing training and supervision as well as liability insurance. Finally, if one of our employees is ill, we have on-call caregivers who can fill-in for them.

SM: How do you ensure that you employ only the best people for the job?

Nancy: We are very particular about who we hire. Besides honesty and integrity, we value people with compassion and good common sense. And we use the "Mom Test" (i.e. if we wouldn't hire someone to care for our own mothers, they are not right for Neighbors NY).

SM: What steps do you take to ensure that your clients can rest assured that they are in great hands?

Nancy: Sandy and I pride ourselves on being hands-on managers, and we stay in frequent contact with our clients and caregivers to ensure that our clients' needs are being met. Caregiving is not just our business—it's our passion.

SM: What is the most rewarding aspect of this new business so far?

Sandra: I think it's seeing the close bonds that form between our caregivers and clients. When you see someone beam when their caregiver arrives, you know you've got it right!

SM: What have you learned about yourself through the entrepreneurial process?

Nancy: I think the most important thing I've learned is that I am capable of doing whatever needs to be done to make Neighbors a success. When you are in business for yourself, if you don't do something, it simply doesn't get done. So, while there are tasks that I really would prefer not to do, I do them anyway. And I'm learning to be good at them.

SM: What advice would you give to someone considering starting their own business?

Nancy: Be adequately funded to survive the first few years, and be flexible. No matter how carefully you plan, you will need to change that plan as you go along.

SM: What is your five-year plan?

Nancy: We have been in business for about two and a half years now. Currently we employ thirty-five caregivers, and the majority of our clients are in Queensbury and Glens Falls. By year five, our plan is to have over one-hundred caregivers and expand our service area so that we have clients in all parts of Warren, Washington, and northern Saratoga Counties. We want Neighbors NY to be synonymous with quality, in-home care!