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'House of Steep' Warms Up to the World of Small Business



Many learn by doing, while others learn by example. For small businesses, success not only depends upon getting one's feet wet, but also gathering insight and advice from those that have come before. For [House of Steep](#), a tea house and foot sanctuary located along the Lee Highway in the Washington, D.C. area, community plays an integral role in offsetting the peaks from the pitfalls.



Having opened just this past September, the establishment aims to promote relaxation through tea, soaking the feet, reflexology, and foot massage, allowing customers to step away from their busy days to center, connect, and then return their rejuvenated selves into the world by spending 30 minutes away from daily demands. "The idea was borne out of my love for tea and rooted in some holistic and herbal wisdom that my great grandmother planted in me at an early age," explains Lyndsey Clutteur DePalma, owner of House of Steep. "She also soaked her feet regularly in Epsom salt baths and lived a very long, healthy, and entirely happy life. I felt this area really needed something different and head-to- toe healing through tea and feet were the perfect combination to soothe the bodies and spirits of the busy Washington, D.C. area."

Though a relaxing concept, DePalma notes that running a small business isn't exactly peaceful. Here, we speak with DePalma to explore the obstacles that arise and how House of Steep has made its mark on the surrounding community:

Lyndsey Clutteur DePalma: House of Steep is a new business so it's tough to compare current rates and impacts to historic success. However, I'm nervous about the constant rise of taxes--both federally and locally imposed--and my ability to employ the number of staff I do. So far, the demand has kept revenue high enough that we've been able to manage within these increases. However, over time, and with the threat of more creative solutions that will likely be passed along to businesses, I'm concerned that maintaining success to offset these costs will either mean an increase in prices which can impact our brand, or even more carefully managing expenses.

1to1: What struggles have you encountered as a small business owner when it comes to working with banks, credit card companies, and other such large companies to accommodate the needs of your business?

LCD: Being a small business with little history, asking for a better rate on my credit card or limited features on our phone services isn't well received. Earning a partner's flexibility does take time-- something I had heard but didn't want to believe. I had this idea that small businesses were like little gentle giants, taking a risk for something good and making a difference for the economy. I reasoned that everyone was once a small business so surely I could count on some kind of compassion. I found these only in local businesses that were close enough to their own start up that they wanted to see us do well and were willing to take a risk without knowing our potential. In

my large partner-vendor relationships, I still keep asking because it's in the best interest of my business, but the obstacle is patience in earning the flexibility because they too are looking out for their best interest.

1to1: In what ways has your business embraced new technologies to streamline the customer experience? How has this impacted your company overall?

LCD: We use an iPad and apps for our point of sale, customer loyalty, gift card, scheduling, and reservation processes. It's been nice to incorporate the newest technology in our business and the customers are generally impressed with the simplicity and ease of experience with us. It does mean, however, that much work is required on the back end since none of these tools speak to each other. The communication between most of them is usually done offline or reconciled manually. But as a start up, I couldn't afford my own platform, so this is the reality we accept because we wanted to be technologically advanced, and therefore more efficient, in the individual aspects of our business, rather than the whole complex picture.

1to1: What sort of role does the local community play when it comes to establishing a successful small business?

LCD: Being a small company in a neighborhood that is entirely local-centric has been the key to our success so far. They are excited to have something unique and organic take root in their

community is so proud to bring their friends to our little shop because they love our employees and what we are doing for health, relaxation, and peace. We've only been open since September but have seen exponential growth in this time and much of this has to do with the fact that the neighborhood we are in is making it their personal goal to ensure we stay in business. Instead of supporting a successful coffee or tea chain up the road, they want to spend their carefully monitored money on something that matters to them and to their community, and they get a bonus of a calming atmosphere, too!

LCD: I'd advise small businesses to share stories and have a sound support network. I've been in a position to both learn from my peers and help them grow through my experiences. This has proven beneficial in gaining understanding of the many hats a business owner must wear. It's easy to get lost in the details of the small business, but relating to other business owners helps you see the big picture. In that same vein, it's easy to lose sight of the mission. To effectively drive the business, do whatever you need to do to center yourself and make decisions with clarity. Your business should receive the attention it deserves to achieve the results you dreamed of. The business is an extension of you and if your spirit is weak, that will be reflected in the level of success you achieve.