

THE POWER OF MOTHER-DAUGHTER BUSINESS PARTNERS

Mothers and daughters make fierce friends and powerful allies, but what about business partners? Intrigued by the idea of blending personal and professional relationships, I joined forces with portrait photographer Maureen Cotton to get to know several mother-daughter entrepreneurial teams on Boston's North Shore. We set out to discover the secret to turning an intimate personal relationship into a successful business partnership.

We asked the same questions of each pair. While the lives, businesses, and answers of each pair varied widely, we did see common themes emerge: respect, joy, and roles defined by personal strengths and interests. These vibrant, hard-working women had much to share, and we enjoyed every minute of it. Get to know these incredible women through the interviews below. Then, check out their businesses!



Katie and Karen Shernan, co-owners of [Port Plums & Newburyport Olive Oil](#) and [Port Blue Accents](#), both in Newburyport, MA

"I couldn't partner with anyone else; partnerships are challenging and we have been partners since she was born." — Karen

How did you come to work together?

Karen notes that Katie was always a "foodie," even as a small child. It is a passion she shares with her mother. Karen says that she visited Katie in Spain during her college semester abroad, and the whole visit was an ethnic food tour. They started talking about creating a food-oriented business together, and two

years ago both left corporate jobs to buy Newburyport Olive Oil. They quickly expanded by adding Port Plums, a culinary store. Next, they opened Port Blue Accents, a curated collection of New England-made products.

What has surprised you about working together?

Katie: "I expected interpersonal issues, but we don't have any."

Karen: "I am pleased to find Katie's work ethic is as strong as mine."

Describe your individual roles in the business. Has working together changed your relationship?

Katie handles employee development, marketing, and online presence. Karen is CFO, CEO, and the head buyer.

Katie: "We work freakishly well together. We love what we do, so there is not a lot of separation of business and relationship."

Karen: "We have been officially working together since we bought the first store, but really, we've always worked together."

How would you sum up the experience of working together?

Karen: "One plus one equals three. Together we are much more than we would be separately. Everything we do is to lift each other up – that's where the thrill comes from. Being a small business is being part of a community. It is about connection."

What are your thoughts about today's photo-shoot and interview?

Katie: "It was a very comfortable experience." Both: "Girl power!"



Sandra McIntyre Lowe and Vivienne Lowe, jeweler and clothier and co-owners of Tien 2 in Beverly, MA

"I can't imagine a better business partner. Our brains are wired so differently. We are always learning together." – Sandra

How did you come to work together?

Sandra was a working jeweler with her own shop, and Vivienne was creating signature clothing on a freelance basis. Sandra often bought Vivienne's creations to sell in her shop, so it made sense for Vivienne to join the shop.

What has surprised you about working together?

Sandra: "How difficult it was to get over the mother-daughter relationship and find equal footing. Neither of us wanted to criticize the other. We were too intimate and knew each other so well."

Describe your individual roles in the business. Has working together changed your relationship?

At first, Sandra and Vivienne avoided telling customers that they are mother and daughter. Now, however, they promote it, and even have overlapping clients. Sandra says that they find balance in their workplace roles, but "We have to create clear boundaries so we don't lose either relationship."

How would you sum up the experience of working together?

Sandra: "Phenomenal."

Vivienne: "The Power of Two"

What are your thoughts about today's photo-shoot and interview?

Vivienne: "I feel connected, like we broadened our world today. It is nice to see women working collectively."



Sarah Baker and Helen Friedman, co-owners of Country Farm Candles, a soy candle company in Burlington, MA

"Being in business together has definitely brought us closer; we respect what the other person brings to the business and we each do the things we like." – Helen

How did you come to work together?

Mother and daughter were hiking together in 2015 when they "hatched the idea to make candles." They decided on soy candles, a healthier alternative to paraffin wax, and started making candles with the holiday season as motivation.

What has surprised you about working together?

Helen: "How naturally we find which tasks we will do. We spend time doing the things that we like."

Sarah is surprised by how well it has worked. She says, "I wasn't sure if it would be too much time together."

Describe your individual roles in the business. Has working together changed your relationship?

Helen does sales and marketing and Sarah takes care of website and business management. They both make candles.

Sarah: "When we have family time, we try very hard not to have candle time."

Helen: "It hasn't changed how I feel about being her mother. It is still very strong and true." The two credit success to a strong mutual respect and the joy of learning together.

How would you sum up the experience of working together?

Sarah: "Complimentary and creative."

Helen: "We always did projects, this is another one. There is more risk but in the best of ways."

What are your thoughts about today's photo-shoot and interview?

Sarah: "It is interesting to see ourselves in photos and to think more deeply about our relationship now."



Jessamyn Anderson and Sheila Bridgland, co-owners of [Dingo Creative](#), a full-service design and marketing agency in Newburyport, MA

"We work all the time, but we have so much fun. We collaborate, but have very different roles so we don't collide." — Sheila

How did you come to work together?

Thirteen years ago, the birth of Jessamyn's daughter coincided with a job transition for Sheila, who had been working in England. Sheila: "That's when we got together and said, 'wait — let's start something.'"

What has surprised you about working together?

Sheila: "That we are still working together and how well we collaborate."

Jessamyn: "So many people say that they couldn't work with their mother or daughter, but we don't fight."

Describe your individual roles in the business. Has working together changed your relationship?

Jessamyn is the web design director and Sheila is the graphic designer and sales lead. They collaborate on ideas. Jessamyn says that their family is eccentric, and that personality bleeds into the business. Sheila: "We haven't really changed. We've always been close. Our secret of success is always being positive and working hard."

How would you sum up the experience of working together?

Jessamyn: "Trust, family, fun."

Sheila: "We have the best of both worlds. We have our own lives but work together. It is always fun."

What are your thoughts about today's photo-shoot and interview?

Sheila: "It was exciting to be featured because women, in general, are amazing. The photo shoot solidifies our relationship as business partners and mother and daughter. It is all about love, friendship, and trust."



Izzy Veno, Betsy Holtzinger, and Amy McLaughlin-Veno, three generations of event planners behind [Amy McLaughlin Lifestyles](#), a full-scale lifestyle design firm in Newburyport, MA

"The best of both worlds is when you can involve your child. It is quality time. That is what my mother did with me." — Amy

Amy McLaughlin-Veno graciously hosted the photo shoot at her Newburyport lifestyle design and event planning business, Amy McLaughlin Lifestyles. Amy's company handles wedding planning and events, floral arrangements, and interior design. She says, "We can do your wedding, decorate your home, and decorate you."

Amy has her own multi-generational mother-daughter story. Her mother, Betsy Holtzinger, was a wedding planner. Amy learned about the business as a child and says, "Creativity was soaked into the walls." After working in Los Angeles and New York, Amy opened her business in Newburyport. Her young daughter, Izzy, often helps after school. Of this Amy says, "Sometimes I pick her up and she doesn't want to go to the office. I have not yet found the perfect recipe for balance. I feel guilty if I'm not working, and I feel guilty if I'm not with my child." We asked Amy and Izzy a few questions of their own.

To Izzy: What does your mother do and how do you help?

Izzy: "We help people have their weddings. She talks to them. People come in and they buy stuff. I eat snacks here."

To Amy: How would you sum up the entrepreneurial experience?

"Sleepless. It has to be fun – the work is too hard to not have it be fun."

To Amy: What are your thoughts about today's photo-shoot and interview?

"It was a very gratifying experience, and the first time we've ever had all three generations in a portrait. We made memories, and we will have them forever."



Tara Brophy is a freelance education and business writer and storyteller based on Boston's North Shore. She can be contacted at tarabrophy.com. Tara's own 9-year-old daughter, Anna, helped with the interviews for this article.



Maureen Cotton runs Inner Life Portraits, a family photography studio with a unique approach. With Maureen “a photo shoot” is quality family time and “family photos” are works of art. She also creates editorial style portraits for business owners and creatives to infuse their presence in their marketing. She can be contacted at innerlifephoto.com.