

# No 'I' in team: Execs share ways they've scaled up their business ... and made sure it can go on without them

By Meg Fry  
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Donna Miller, left, founder and president of C3Workplace, and Sally Glick, principal and chief growth strategist at SobelCo, speak at a recent SobelCo Executive Women's Leadership Breakfast.

At the recent **SobelCo** Executive Women's Leadership Breakfast in Livingston, Donna Miller, founder and president of **C3Workplace** in Montclair, and Sally Glick, principal and chief growth strategist at SobelCo, discussed the importance of scaling one's business, both as an entrepreneur and as an employee within a company.

"I started my company with the intention of leaving my company and retiring at the age of 50," Miller said. "I am now way north of that because I love what I do; however, I still set myself up for retirement with a company that can run without me, and I can now work how, when and where I want."

Since 1994, C3Workplace has helped thousands of small business owners and entrepreneurs grow and improve their revenues with adaptable, affordable, coworking office spaces; likeminded business-oriented communities; business education and back office resources, including a telephone answering service; bookkeeping; marketing; sales and meeting support; database and contact management; project coordination; administrative tasks; and more.

Now, with two coworking facilities, in Montclair and Sparta, Miller is thinking about how she might begin to transition out of the company she has built.

"Maybe I'll eventually sell, or maybe I'll make it an employee-owned company, but, having built a scalable company, I now have options," she said. "And financial empowerment is all about having options."

Glick, who has worked with SobelCo for nearly 14 years, said that, as a key employee in the company, it also is her responsibility to begin thinking about a succession plan moving forward.

"As much as my ego loves when people go out and ask, "Are you going to Sally's program?" the reality is that, while I love what I do, it's not really about me at all," she said. "Someday, I won't be here, and if all that loyalty, respect and interest were to go away without being translated and converted back to SobelCo, I've not done my job – and, you can really only do that when you leverage the right people."

Read on to learn more about what Glick and Miller had to say.

### **On women-owned businesses:**

**Sally Glick:** It isn't that women are not opening businesses, and at a great rate, but often it's about the type of business — there is a difference between working as an individual and growing a scalable, sustainable organization. So many women build businesses around themselves and their own skills, because, at one point or another, people have said to them that they ought to go out on their own, but the words 'tangible asset' are not always a part of those conversations. ... We often do not think strategically, whether we are building our own company or a niche within our company, but I think the most important thing is to be strategic in our decisions by having a vision of exactly where it is we want to be.

**Donna Miller:** Many times in my career, people have asked me why I don't franchise, but, for me, 'giant' isn't what I'm going for. What I want is to be able to live the life I want to live at the financial level I need while, at the same time, making sure I am building a business that has value and can run without me. ... The National Association of Women Business Owners says there are 11.5 million women-owned firms in the U.S., producing \$1.7 trillion in sales — that's a force to be reckoned with. However, 88% of those businesses generate less than \$100,000 in revenue and only 1.7% generate \$1 million or more. That may be by choice, and that's OK, but if you're looking to build wealth, you must build an asset that you can sell.

### **On starting a business with scalability in mind:**

**DM:** When I opened my company, my goal was to get out of my company. With the end in mind, I followed the four Ps:

1. *Plan:* You must have a written business plan that encompasses finances, operations, your competitive landscape and more in order to scale. ... You also must be willing to constantly revisit this plan. I love working with entrepreneurs because, while they are wonderfully creative, they usually are also attention deficit, with 8 billion things running through their heads at all times. This plan helps to anchor and focus them, reminding them of their priorities.
2. *Profit:* Your business plan must outline a clear path to profit, with one of the most important things being to unapologetically charge what you and your time are worth, as if you have already hired others to do the work you will inevitably end up doing.
3. *Process:* Keep it simple and duplicatable in order to expand, and have interns work on documenting those processes.
4. *Perspective:* When I opened my company, my children were 7 and 10, so that was a driving factor for me. I wanted flexibility, I wanted to be a mom, and I also wanted to make a certain amount of money. Both my kids were also special education students, so I was also a part-time advocate to get my children what they needed for school. I therefore had a partner for the first eight years of being in business, which helped me achieve external perspective. I ended up giving her equity even though people told me I was crazy, but it was the absolute right thing for me, having bought her out amicably and remaining great friends. Then, when I didn't have a partner, I always made sure to have an outside coach or consultant, like becoming a member of Women Presidents Organization. I am exceptionally good at what I do but I have the least amount of perspective on what I am doing.

### **On the importance of scaling one's role within a firm or company:**

**SG:** One of the key things we have done at my firm is to create niche areas and unique processes for serving and growing our clients in those spaces. Forensics, nonprofits, small businesses, whichever group it is, the firm is not going to be thrilled about investing in just one person and their commitment to that space, knowing it could all disappear if and when that person retires, moves away, leaves the company or if their personal circumstances change and they must now work part-time. ... That is why, now, whenever I pitch my managing partner an idea, he will say, "Is this a one-off or can this become a duplicatable process?" If I cannot prove we can build a process around it and set in motion a plan for growth that will allow this idea to grow, renew and sustain itself to create a profitable legacy within the firm, he's no longer interested in hearing about it. We cannot invest ourselves in building around a unique individual rather than the firm itself.

### **On integrating balance into one's professional life:**

**SG:** Because I started my career working with my father, I didn't fight many battles and I didn't have to fight for work-life balance, either. At 3:30 p.m., I'd say, 'Dad, I have to go get the kids at school.' Even as a single parent, I may have juggled less than someone else because of this extraordinary opportunity. ... But, what I've come to learn in my career afterwards is that, some days you have more and some days you have less, but you do achieve a sort of equilibrium. If you are building a scalable business or a scalable career, you must learn to prioritize. Because many of us are Type A personalities, we tend to like to do a lot of things ourselves, but, at the same time, it's important we find and surround ourselves with good people we can trust, people who will say no to us, people who can help us grow and flourish, because we cannot rely on one person to come up with all the answers. Everyone needs to rest and rejuvenate, but we can't do that unless we leverage.

**DM:** One of the challenges I had in scaling my business was that I began by sitting at the front desk and doing absolutely everything better than anyone could ever possibly do it. Then, when I started to bring people on because I wanted to scale my business, I had to evolve from doing everything and anything to understanding that if I didn't get off that hamster wheel, I was headed for a heart attack, never mind a scalable business. I now refer to myself as a recovering micromanager, because there was no situation I couldn't make 1,000 times worse by needing to have my hand in everything. ... We have to stop being mothers in the workplace. Our job is to teach and inspire our team, and, while empathy is something women are better at than men, we still have a job to get done. ... We also need to stop saying yes to everything. We must instead figure out what makes us uniquely good at driving our business or our career forward to assure we are driving our lives forward, too, because when you have a crystal clear idea of what it is that will drive your life forward, you won't want anything to take away from that and it becomes easier to say no.

### **Boss beginnings**

Donna Miller, founder and president of C3Workplace in Montclair and Sparta, said she ran another coworking firm for seven years — one she had always intended to buy.

“The owner and I shook hands – lesson learned – and the deal was that I would eventually buy the business from him,” Miller said. “Then, when I offered him nearly 50% more than the business was worth, he turned around and did something truly devastating, but what turned out to be a huge blessing in my life – he turned me down.”

Miller said she then spent six months taking a course offered by the New Jersey Association of Women Business Owners on how to write a business plan.

“To tell you that it was painful would be an understatement; however, it was the foundation for my early success, and it’s been the foundation of my success ever since,” she said. “I was able to raise \$100,000 through friends and family, opened C3Workplace just 1.2 miles from where his company used to be located, and never looked back.

“My former employer did slap me with an injunctive order, which was kind of scary, seeing as I had just borrowed \$100,000, but I made the business decision to settle. I simply decided to be happy and move on.”

### **Conversation Starter**

Learn more about Donna Miller at [c3workplace.com](https://c3workplace.com). Reach Sally Glick at [sally.glick@sobelcollic.com](mailto:sally.glick@sobelcollic.com).