



Networking's Just Desserts

Sheri Tate's Silver Moon Desserts

BY JACKIE FLATEN

Key to success as an entrepreneur is cultivating relationships with those “who’ve been there”.

Following her dream, Sheri Tate successfully transitioned from hard-charging Silicon Valley technology executive to hard-charging founder of an award winning, artisan ice cream and sorbet company, Silver Moon Desserts.

Tate says working in tech startups, where one wore many different hats each day, honed her ability to strategize, multi-task, and execute efficiently with minimal resources. While these skills have helped fuel her success in the artisan food industry, Tate says she could never have gotten where she is today without her personal and professional network.

Upon leaving the tech industry, Tate realized she needed to expand her Rolodex, and began seeking networking groups of women, food industry professionals, and successful entrepreneurs to help her succeed in her new venture. She insists the art of networking is a crucial aspect of running a business—and the contacts and friendships she has cultivated with like-minded professionals have “made all the difference.”

As vice president of marketing at a California startup, Sheri Tate was no stranger to hard work, long hours and complex negotiations. To balance the hectic demands of a corporate career, the Michigan native indulged her gourmand lifestyle by entertaining her foodie friends whenever she had free time.

“Being a tech executive was my day job,” says Tate. “But somewhere in my heart I couldn’t ignore this powerful urge to be an entrepreneur, to start my own company—I just had to figure out where I could be innovative and find the right product. Like my mother and grandmother, I loved to cook, to create, to explore

flavors and culinary sensations, so it was probably inevitable these two passions would merge.”

One of Tate’s favorite creative outlets was making homemade ice cream and sorbets—with a twist. Memories of her mother’s decadent desserts—ice cream studded with pecans and drizzled with Irish Cream, sophisticated cocktails blending ice cream and liqueur—inspired Tate to find new ways to combine spirits and ice cream. The lucky friends who benefited from Tate’s kitchen marvels were enchanted by her unique and imaginative creations.

Tate did not make the decision lightly to leap from tech to artisan ice cream. The recession was settling in for the long term and financial markets were shrinking. The specialty food industry is probably one of the most volatile market sectors, with razor-thin profit margins. Foodie audiences are notoriously fickle. And, not least, there were already several highly rated artisan ice cream products already aggressively competing for share in the \$21 billion U.S. market for frozen desserts.

So, while still working, the San Jose, California businesswoman spent weekends studying the industry and was clear-eyed about the risks...and the potential. Tate had a strong belief she’d found a product niche that would be game-

changing; ice cream combined with liqueur. So, in 2008, Tate turned her hobby into a full-time career when she founded Silver Moon Desserts.



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Tate quickly turned to networking groups to find others who had been successful in launching and growing their own business. On the advice of a friend, she attended a monthly meeting of National Association of Women Business Owners-Silicon Valley (NAWBO-SV). She immediately felt welcome among this group of successful, accomplished women, all of whom were running their own businesses, from service to financial professionals, to CEOs of large companies. As she told her story, she received overwhelming support and encouragement for her ambitions, even though the Silver Moon business was in the infancy stage compared to most of those at the event. She left the meeting inspired.

On the business side, Silver Moon was initially sold in bulk containers to restaurants and hotels.

"Because of my 'other life' as a foodie, I had some contacts within the restaurant and catering industry who were willing to give me a chance," Tate says. "I started supplying them and it was thrilling when they came back for more, saying their customers loved it!"

One year later, she launched a retail line and embarked upon sales to local specialty retail stores. Right out of the gate, Tate's products received broad acclaim, from national food publications as well as a coveted award from the National Association of Specialty Food Trade (NASFT). Her ice cream and sorbets have been featured as "favorites" in national magazines including *O*, *the Oprah Magazine*, *InStyle*, *Brides*, as well as in hip online outlets

like Daily Candy, Dolce Dolce and by dozens of food bloggers.

As the months progressed, Tate became more involved in NAWBO and food industry groups to fuel her desire to expand her professional network. She learned business owners are very skilled networkers, and are typically eager to share advice and resources to help a fellow business owner. Tate says the concept of "pay it forward" is second nature for the most successful people in business for themselves. And, in the beginning, it seemed everyone was "paying it forward" for her—whether offering advice, making an introduction, or sharing resources and lessons learned.

"Making a cold call to a chef, versus getting an introduction from someone who knows that person well is much different," Tate says.

Carla Cobb Davis, CEO at BizBox Technology and president of NAWBO Silicon Valley at the time, is one of the women who provided much inspiration and support.

"Carla is a truly remarkable business woman, and what I call a 'power-networker,'" says Tate. "She knows everyone from small business owners to executives in large companies to people at the highest levels of government. Passionate about helping women business owners succeed, Carla is always making key introductions to help women find partnerships that fuel their success."

Davis now sits on the advisory board of Silver Moon Desserts, and is one of Tate's biggest fans. "Sheri is

smart, an incredibly hard worker, and is very methodical about building and growing her business. It is a big risk in particular for women to launch a new business, and I am so proud of what Sheri has accomplished in such a short period of time."

Tate has, in fact, partnered with many women she met through NAWBO, in fact, the creative agency that designed her award-winning packaging is owned by a member of NAWBO. "The NAWBO women have helped me so much, and if I can partner with them to give something back, I jump at the chance. Not to mention I have found such quality professionals here in this network," Tate adds.

And now, two solid years into her business, Tate tries to pay it forward as much as she can too. With great conviction she says, "In life, what you give comes back to you. Paying it forward keeps positive karmic forces alive and well."

Today, Silver Moon's liqueur-infused ice creams and sorbets can be found on shelves in high-end retail stores all across Northern California, including Whole Foods Markets. Competing on the basis of flavor, texture and originality, Silver Moon's sophisticated desserts have earned a devoted and growing customer base. As Tate's business grows, she makes sure to make time to attend networking events despite her busy schedule because, in the end, it makes "all the difference."

To find a retailer near you, or order Silver Moon online, visit www.silvermoondesserts.com **WIBI**

