

## Chapter 5

*Magical Animals Help Kids Believe in Themselves from THE T-SHIRT TO PROVE IT! The successful journey of 25 passionate women entrepreneurs by Sherry Sexton, Mill City Press, Minneapolis*

### **Magical Animals Help Kids Believe in Themselves**

"Kids & Animals - A Healing Partnership" is the documentary that I researched, wrote and produced with great interest and passion. It had aired on both Animal Planet and the Discovery Channel and was later distributed to independent television markets throughout the world. Shortly after its distribution, I began receiving letters, phone calls and emails from all over the globe expressing excitement from viewers who witnessed the animals' acceptance of children with extreme challenges in their lives. It helped to pen the minds of the audience and provided them with a better understanding of what acceptance really means.

I had successfully imparted the message to my audience; each and every one of us has something important to offer the world in which we live. We all need to keep an open mind and an open heart. However, I realized I needed to do more to share this message with children all over the world - and the "Manadoob journey" officially began.

In 1999, we began formulating our company, Sadiki LLC (Sadiki translated means "to believe") and we slowly and methodically developed "The Manadoob Secret Connection Program for Self-Esteem," which teaches children self-respect, respect for others and respect for our environment. Awareness and education are achieved through the use of entertaining stories, educational pay and multi-cultural art and characters. The Manadoob characters are magical, misfit animals who know that children can sometimes feel out of place and need guidance, just as they themselves do. These animals are made up of a combination of several different animals, so their appearances are also interesting and unique.

By example, the Manadoob offer children the courage and confidence to simply be themselves... and by giving voice to animals, the Manadoob become allies and allow children to explore their own thoughts and feelings. Our original target audience was children ages 7 -11 with high school kids working as mentors to younger kids, but we are happily finding a broader audience. We are reaching our audience through schools, after-school organizations such as the Boys & Girls Clubs and through corporations that provide support for children's outreach programs.

When we began receiving feedback from teachers and Boys & Girls clubs telling us the program really helped children, we experienced tremendous fulfillment. After performing a considerable amount of testing, receiving that unsolicited feedback was a wonderful gift.

As the business developed, the downfalls we experienced were from "experts" in the field who advised us that we could never manufacture such a high quality product at a cost-effective price. Also, because we were "breaking all the rules" in finding our niche market and moving forward in

unconventional ways, that we would not succeed. However, we learned that **HARD WORK AND A STRONG BELIEF IN WHAT YOU ARE DOING CAN BREAK DOWN ALL OF THOSE BARRIERS!**

The entire process of creating the Manadoob and introducing them to the marketplace has been a 100% commitment of my energies. Manadoob has also been an enormous financial commitment, as I dedicated myself and my limited financial resources to Manadoob, with no income source. That is when you realize that you better not go down this path unless you have the courage and strength to ride the rollercoaster of ups and downs - a true test of character!

Sadiki, was officially organized in 2008 when we knew we were finally ready to introduce the Manadoob to the public. We started to deliver product at the end of that year. Although this is a very young company, it has been a labor of love for over ten years. With an incredible advisory committee of child psychologists and educators, we now have something very special that actually helps kids.

I couldn't ask for a better partner than Susan Cooper. She has poured her heart and soul into the Manadoob. We were young business associates, who initially bumped heads, but a friendship developed and over 20 years later, we decided to start the Manadoob journey together. We are closer now than ever before. It's a marriage of sorts - a total commitment!

The involvement of my family has been invaluable to me. My sister, Janis Salin, remains committed to our vision and is very involved with the company as she offers her support. My brother-in-law and my husband have also been an integral part of this journey. This is truly a team effort.

My mother, who died in 1999, was probably the most influential person in my decision to take this step. She showed me every day what courage and personal perseverance truly means. As a Holocaust survivor, she believed with all of her heart that we should extend ourselves to help others and that we can accomplish anything we set out to do if we work hard and believe. I carry that message with me as I move forward with the Manadoob. She was one of the most positive individuals I have ever met and I am very grateful to have had her as my mother.

The "Kids & Animals - A Healing Partnership" documentary continues to be utilized as a teaching tool in numerous universities, schools and organizations throughout the world to demonstrate the importance and value of the human-animal bond and animal assisted therapies. The documentary has also become an important element in the Manadoob Program for Self-Esteem.

In addition to begin used throughout the country in Boys & Girls Clubs, schools and many other after-school programs, we anticipate the Manadoob Program for Self-Esteem will soon be present in children's hospitals. Also, we are discussing the development of a children's edutainment series for domestic and foreign markets. Ancillary product development will be an on-going by-product of these efforts. We incorporate languages from all over the world through the Manadoob's Moobia Stones, which is an important element in reaching kids globally. Our goal is to get Manadoob into the hands of children everywhere in order to pursue and continue making a positive difference in their lives.

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