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How did you get started in the business?

I always wanted to own my own business. I actually got a very scary call from the doctor who told me I had a tumor inside my heart, so I told myself if everything went smoothly with the surgery, I would go after my dream and start my own firm.

How long have you been at it?

Just over a year.

What was your background before becoming involved in the business?

I always knew I wanted to start my own design firm, and always knew I wanted it to be a sustainable business. I made sure my career path prepared me for starting my own firm one day. My undergrad degree is in architecture, and I also got a master's degree in architecture in London. I worked as an architect for several years in San Francisco. I chose to work in both small and medium-sized firms. The small firms helped me learn how to run a business, while the larger firm taught me how to efficiently run an architectural project. I also found a job as a furniture designer where I was involved in sales. This let me improve my design skills while also learning what people really want from their furniture selections.

How is your business "green-friendly"?

My husband and I are both LEED-accredited architects. [The U.S. Green Building Council's Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) has a green building rating system]. This is a measuring system for designing a green building, and we're trying to get as many LEED-certified projects under our belts as we can. Of course, we recycle, and we also buy wind energy instead of energy from coal burning power plants. We've joined the Sustainable Furniture Council, which makes sure what you design is sustainable.

Why do you feel the "green theme" is important?

My two passions are modern design and the environment, so I wanted to focus on something that combined those two ideas. Not damaging the earth is one of my core values. Every day I try to do something to lessen my carbon footprint. We're at a critical point right now, and if we don't make some changes, the planet won't be able to recover from what we've inflicted.

Did you have an "oh no" moment in your business?

Some weeks are harder than others, but I haven't had a critical moment that I can think of.

Have you had an "aha" moment?

We're getting to that point now. We have several furniture pieces that we've gotten back recently that look really nice. It's a confidence boost, and makes you think, "I can do this."

How do you deal with conflict in the workplace?

We try really hard to avoid conflict, because dealing with it is something I'm not very good at. My husband recently joined as a partner, so we make a ton of the decisions upfront together. As far as other employees, we don't move forward with something unless the whole team is happy with it.

Lisa Richardson Elkins
33, owner and principal
of the Chicago, IL-based
2 Point Perspective,
which specializes in
eco-friendly architecture and
furniture design.

Have you ever had to fire someone?

No, and I don't want to get to that point because that would be an awful day for me.

What's the secret to your success?

I think if we continue to design spaces that people really love, and furniture pieces that make people stop and say, "Wow," then we're on the right path.

Where do you see yourself in the future?

I want to move toward even more LEED-certified projects, and possibly design eco-furniture for larger companies.

What advice do you have for starting a green business?

Whenever you're starting a business, it has to be something you're passionate about. You also have to draft a solid business plan, and get good business advice. But don't "green wash," which means don't say your business is green if it's not. That's the biggest way to turn off your client base. Make a plan early, and find jobs that will help you learn everything you need to know along the way. **CW**

"I love what I do, but the hours can be exhausting. I work about 12-hours a day, six days a week—probably 70 hours a week."

