



Renée P. O'Brien
Business Consultant, SharpChip, Inc.

"Tales Of A House Cleaner"

Renée O'Brien is the founder and owner of SharpChip, Inc., a business development and custom software design firm which works with small businesses on accomplishing their dreams of success.

Renée is well equipped to help small businesses work their way to the top because she has done it herself.

Renée's calling began to be fulfilled when at 23 she took a leap of faith and left her corporate job as a business consultant, to take her \$50 and a vacuum to become a true entrepreneur. In 1991 Renée started a house cleaning business in Seattle, Washington. Friends told her that she was... well..."crazy"... to be exact, to leave her very attractive job with Accenture Consulting to "go clean toilets for a living" (as they so elegantly put it). Renée was driven, however, and knew that she was ready to take her skills and education, and put them to work on building her own enterprise.

Renée's research showed that service businesses were (and still are) one of the fastest growing industries in the U.S. Renée wanted to capitalize on that market growth, and build a service business that was a cut above the rest; one that would earn the reputation of being the best in the region. Eight years later when she successfully sold her 25+ employee business, she was proud of her accomplishment of building a great business, with a stellar reputation, that was the 2nd largest in the region.

After the sale of her cleaning business, Renée realized that she wanted to take what she had learned about building businesses and work with other entrepreneurs to help them achieve their goals. "I think that I was born with an entrepreneurial spirit. I love building businesses, and helping others do it, too. It's such a rush!" says Renée.

Renée works with business of all kinds, but has a special kinship for cleaning businesses. She explains, "I enjoy working with small businesses of all kinds, but especially cleaning businesses because they are part of my roots. Cleaning businesses are real diamonds in the rough...At first glance they may not be glamorous, but with a little bit of effort they can be amazing businesses! It's one of the business world's best kept secrets."

Renée comments on why her clients hire her as their consultant "**Get there faster with SharpChip!**" is my slogan, and I really mean it. I have been down the road of building a business from scratch, taking it to higher levels, making all of the mistakes, and ultimately succeeding and accomplishing my dreams. With the lessons that I have learned I have the experience to help my clients build their businesses quickly, and accomplish *their* dreams of success."

When asked about SharpChip's consulting approach Renée had this to say. "One of the biggest contributors to a business' success is the enthusiasm, focus and individual direction of its owner. Business owners know what their vision of their business is. My approach is to take that vision and help business owners get more of the good things with it, like...more profits...more time off...faster growth...absentee ownership...and, long term security."

Renée O'Brien's consulting firm, SharpChip, Inc., was established in 1999. And, Renée now takes great pleasure in using her 15 years business experience to help small businesses build their businesses quickly and accomplish their dreams. SharpChip assists small businesses in improving their organization, personnel and profitability, and does it through consulting, coaching, training and automation.

Consulting, coaching and training make sense, but where does automation come in? Renée answers, "From my education and my work with Accenture, I have learned about the great financial benefits that are to be had for a business that embraces technology. I have a computer programming background, and with that I developed an easy to use software program for my cleaning business that enabled it to be fully managed by one person; a task that often took three people in similar sized businesses that were not properly automated. Automation is essential for efficient business management, and through SharpChip I am able to bring this benefit to my small business clients, and they see results quickly."

Renée provides the management consulting services for SharpChip herself, and she works with other developers on the software development projects.

When Renée was asked if she has any advice for a budding business owner she had this to say, "Focus on your vision, learn the skills needed to accomplish that vision, ask for help when needed, and don't let anyone stand in the way of your dreams!"

10 Achievements: *Renée's Secrets to Her Success*

For Renée, like for all business owners, building her business was a series of successes and challenges. Some of her accomplishments that led to her business success are as follows:

- **RENEE GREW HER COMPANY QUICKLY BY STARTING WITH NOTHING.**

Renée created a "little or no cost" marketing strategy that grew her business quickly in a highly competitive market.

- **RENEE GAINED CUSTOMERS AND MARKET SHARE BY NICHING HER BUSINESS.**

Renée built her business by niching it as an "earth-friendly" company that used environmentally safe products. The company's niche opened up an untapped market. Renée's company was written up in local businesses for its unique approach, and Renée was frequently consulted for local news articles on earth-friendly cleaning methods.

- **RENEE INCREASED PROFITS BY IMPROVING THE STAFF'S SPEED AND ACCURACY.** Renée improved staff productivity by an estimated 35% by writing, publishing and instituting an integrated training program, a training manual, a continued learning program, and an employee handbook. Later, a University of Washington group of MBA students chose Renée's company for a class study, and concluded their research by identifying the company as "a successful continued learning business model".

- **RENEE KEPT PROFITS HIGH WITH LOW STAFF TURNOVER.** Renée developed unique recruitment, training, motivational and management methods that helped her business hire the best employees, and maintain a 6 months to one year staff retention rate, in an industry that averages 3 - 4 months for employee retention (that 300% improvement on the industry average fostered a great work environment, and saved her company thousands of dollars every year).

- **RENEE KEPT REVENUES GROWING BY BUILDING LONG-TERM CLIENT LOYALTY.** Renée researched the industry and reviewed her company's fundamental values to develop a "service strategy" that put into action the company mission, on all levels of the business. With a good service strategy the company's mission was clear, and clients could count on getting the same great service from everyone in the organization.

- **RENEE ATTRACTED AND MAINTAINED THE BEST CLIENTS WITH ITS SATISFIED AND PROFESSIONAL STAFF.** Renée created a compensation and incentive package for staff members that rewarded initiative and individual responsibility, resulting in satisfied employees who repeatedly exceeded expectations.

- **RENEE KEPT MANAGEMENT COSTS LOW, AND PROFITS HIGH BY DEVELOPING AND IMPLEMENTING A SERVICE MANAGEMENT SOFTWARE PROGRAM.** Renée developed a software program that is now used by service businesses of all kinds to manage clients, services, staff, time and scheduling, referrals, invoicing, and much more.

- **RENEE HELPED IMPROVE THE STANDARDS AND PROFESSIONAL IMAGE OF HOUSECLEANING BUSINESSES IN HER COMMUNITY.** Renée was an active member, and at times served as both President and Vice President of the Washington State Housecleaners Association. One of Renée's main goals while participating in WSHA was to work to raise the standards and professional image of the housecleaning businesses in her community. Renée initiated and authored the organization's "How to Choose a House Cleaning Company" guidebook, that was distributed as an educational tool to local consumers looking to hire a quality house cleaning company.

- **RENEE SUCCESSFULLY SOLD THE HOUSE CLEANING BUSINESS AND IT CONTINUES TO BE A LEADER IN THE SEATTLE COMMUNITY.** Renée identified the business value, confidentially prepared it for sale, and actively worked to find a great new owner who would carry on the legacy and continue to grow the business. The business sold for top market value.