



Your Story

Meet GBA Member, Caroline
Cheshire of Healing Gift Baskets



Tell us about you!

I'm 49 years old, and a happily married Mom to four girls. I'm English and moved to the States with my husband and two girls, 13 years ago for 'one year' with my husband's job. We are now American Citizens and love living on the East Coast, North of Boston. My background is in Marketing. I worked in Advertising as an account manager for many years and then moved over to the client side once I was married and looking for a more stable work environment. After I had children I consulted for a bioscience company in Cambridge, England. Marketing is about reaching an audience with a message, so it doesn't really matter what the company is selling, you don't need to understand the product on that deep a level. Once I had my work permit in the States I worked for a computer company as a Marketing Manager until I had the twins. Then it was time to do my hardest job - be a full time Mom to four daughters!

Everyone asks me what made me start Healing Baskets, a gift basket company devoted to the challenges of life. Like most people it was because I had experienced a run of challenges myself. After having two children, I suffered an unexpected miscarriage. It hit me really hard. And the experiences I went through had a great impact on me. I thought it was barbaric that I had to go back to the same clinic and sit with pregnant women to get the blood test telling me that my hormone levels were back to normal after losing my baby. Friends didn't know what to say to me. Some even avoided me. I received so many flowers that the delivery guy asked me if it was my birthday.

Following that, my daughter's 10 year old friend died from cancer. We were very much involved and I watched people struggling to support the family. They were desperately worried about saying the right thing, or wrong thing. Giving the right thing or wrong thing. It was heart wrenching.

Finally, when I went looking for a sympathy basket to send from myself and saw such a poor offering, I knew my next challenge would be to try to empower people to reach out, and support friends. They just needed guidance and thoughtful quality products.

When did you get started in the GB industry and why?

I launched www.healingbaskets.com six years ago. And I have to say at this point, I may never have got off the ground if it hadn't been for my family's support and my husband's computer skills!

What has been your biggest challenge?

Like every business owner I would say financial. You want to do it all. But you can't. You want to advertise, to have the best web site, to buy every perfect product. But you have to make hard decisions.

It is also very hard for me to turn people away who want free product for a cancer auction or walk. As you can imagine I get weekly requests. I hate saying no but I wouldn't be in business if I said yes to them all. As it is, we give over 20% of our profits back to charity.

What advice do you have for other gift basket professionals?

Look for free ways to promote your business. Social networking is the way to go for now. Put up a Facebook page. If you don't know how, ask a teenager! You may feel like a dinosaur, but blogging and tweeting works and you can't bury your head in the sand forever. You can hire a 'social networker' to do this for you on an hourly basis.

The world is getting greener, thank goodness. So keep abreast of using recycled packaging and containers. They are also getting healthier. Find healthier snacks for your baskets like nuts and sunflower seeds rather than cookies and cakes.

Treat a customer as you would like to be treated. If something arrives broken go above and beyond to replace it. Don't quibble over a few dollars or the exact rules of your return policy. You will lose that customer and all the potential customers that that person will tell about it.

Like every business owner don't let it take over your life. Carve out family time. I have to 'resist' checking email every 10 minutes during evenings and weekends. Your family will notice and don't like to 'share you'. Do it when the kids are in bed if you have to. If you take a vacation, make it a vacation. Don't spend the week on your cell phone.

Links. Be careful which companies you exchange links with. Linking with the wrong people can give the wrong impression about your company. There are some very dubious link set ups around. I actually only link to support organizations and a few like-minded people. Linking may improve your search statistics, but the wrong links can damage your reputation. ■