

# neo1



## THE LESSONS OF SMALL BUSINESS BEGINNINGS

### A VP's Years in Small Business and the Tips That Could Make a Difference for a Team of Any Size

*Maria shares her personal connection to small businesses and her business tips for teams of any size.*

**MARIA HAGGARTY**

Vice president and general manager  
at American Express Global Business  
Travel (GBT)

**1**

#### **What is your role at GBT and what attracted you to a career in travel?**

I would say both at and prior to GBT, I've been in a lot of industries. What's driven me throughout my career has been a passion to serve clients and to help clients make the most out of their business. In my current role, that means it's my passion to help them make the most out of every dollar they spend in travel.

**2**

#### **What exposure have you had with small businesses either personally or in a working environment?**

My first professional jobs were with small businesses. My experience working with them was instrumental in making me who I am today. While I didn't realize it at the time, my first job taught me "brand value" at a company level and a personal level. It taught me to know and develop who I am, what I stand for, and how to maintain direct accountability to customers. My second job was with a business that relied heavily on suppliers and third parties. This taught me the value of relationships and the importance of partnering with the right people to represent your company and serve your customers.

### 3

#### In your view, what is the importance of emerging businesses to the economy and everyday life?

I think the obvious answer is that according to the Small Business Administration data, small businesses employ 47.1% of the private workforce<sup>1</sup>. Beyond that, so many small businesses become part of your life and your family story. It's certainly been true for us. When you're a small business owner, the proximity to the experience you provide is just so much more real. That experience is so close to everyone that works at that small business too that everyone feels a sense of pride together.

### 4

#### If you could give a business five tips, what would they be?

1. **Find a simple way to capture customer feedback.** We're in a world where customers have so many places where they can share their experience. If they will share it with you first, you'll be able to use that insight and move faster. Customer feedback is such an incredible kind of loop of innovation.
2. **Measure not just feedback but also quality.** As your company grows, you find out quickly that you must scale. Keeping metrics on how either your product or service is evolving is a critical data point to watch and manage to determine if you can still keep the essence of your product or service as you intended it while you grow.

3. **Always be thinking about how you can keep processes and experiences easy for both customers and employees.** Growth can sometimes add complexity. Deciding whether that complexity is necessary or not is probably challenging for every business owner but more so for a small business owner. Every minute you spend on a non-value-added activity is a minute away from something that can generate a new idea, a new experience, or new revenue, so strive to keep it as simple as possible while scaling.
4. **Find a way to help a customer experience your product or service.** My husband tried this organic body wash from a small business back in 2017. With every order, they included a small sample of a product for him to try. Now, he is not a product person – it's just not his thing at all. It was kind of surprising that he had even ordered anything, but now he uses their products exclusively. He uses everything from their shampoo and conditioner to their skin care products. All these things he would have never tried on his own! The thing that I learned from that is how genius it is to expose customers to things that they haven't tried or they don't know that they need. It's incredible how that can drive brand loyalty and new revenue that wasn't available before.
5. **Focus on culture.** Know what kind of culture you want to have and build. Culture is very malleable when your company is one or two employees. As your team grows to 10, to 100, to 1,000, you recognize that you need that thread back to the culture to help your employees, who have now become your brand, create the same connection you would as the founder.

## Learn More

For more information about the Neo1 platform that helps manage employee spend for small to medium businesses, American Express Global Business Travel (GBT), and the services we offer, visit [www.amexglobalbusinesstravel.com/neo1/](http://www.amexglobalbusinesstravel.com/neo1/)



1. [2020 Small Business Profile](#), U.S. Small Business Administration Office of Advocacy.