

BUSINESS EXTRA

VENTURES



“The shirt . . . has complete fabric coverage over the hands.”

Dina Mauro, who created My Special Shirt to help children stop sucking their thumbs and fingers

Special Solutions LLC

■ My Special Shirt

Price: \$32.95 for one and \$49.95 for two

Where you can get it: Web site

Business owner: Dina Mauro

Location: Littleton

Tidbits: According to the American Dental Association, 15 percent of 4-year-olds suck their thumbs and fingers.

Mauro's son was one of them. After trying several products to stop the habit and conducting some research, she decided to create her own meth-

od. She spent six months working on a prototype, then launched her company, which designs and sells the My Special Shirt.

“The shirt is 100 percent cotton and has complete fabric coverage over the hands,” Mauro said. “I also include programs that teach parents how to introduce the shirt to their child in a positive manner.”

Mauro says the key to making the shirt successful is first to get the child excited about wearing it. Another

important component includes using the personalized rewards chart to track each time the child puts the shirt on and wakes up in it the following morning.

“Thumb sucking is an emotional habit,” she said. “The program explains this to parents and teaches them how to approach the habit in an emotional way.”

For more information: myspecialshirt.com or 1-888-557-4478

Stories by Bianca D'Angelo

Functional Innovations LLC

■ P.A.S.T. 2-in-1 exercise system

Price: \$119.95 (limited time only)

Where you can get it: Web site

Business owner: Todd Langer

Location: Longmont

Tidbits: Langer tried everything to overcome his chronic pain. It was after trying balance boards that only hurt him further that he started to ask himself “Why?” He then took his professional training and physics background, and came up with a solution — his own balance board, 2-in-1 exercise system.

“My boards are designed to center you,” Langer said. “The boards attach to rubber pivot points. This



creates a fixed center of axis, teaching you how to center yourself on a reduced base of support. It's very difficult to balance on the boards with poor posture.”

Langer says the pivot points are made of a harder rubber, designed to match the human body, while the

boards consist of durable plastic.

In addition to improving posture, Langer's balance board system can also be used as a mini gym. Each system includes ergonomic, adjustable exercise handles; exercise cords; and rug adapters for use on carpeting.

He added “The system is a 6-pound functional gym that trains you for everyday life.”

For more information: 303-666-0505 or balance2posture.com

Doomed projects don't necessarily ruin careers

Nobody likes working on a project headed for failure. But almost everyone lands some such dreaded tasks.

A whopping 78 percent of 589 professionals and managers say they're now involved in at least one project they expect will fail to produce its advertised results, concludes a recent survey by VitalSmarts, a corporate-training firm in Provo, Utah. Another surprise finding: 61 percent say they knew a project would flop before its launch or soon after.

“When you're assigned to a project that seems bound to bomb, you are playing a high-stakes game,” warns Linda

Dominguez, an executive coach in Coarsegold, Calif.

Yet you can minimize the career damage and maximize the benefits from accepting a doomed gig. “Getting involved in a high-risk, high-failure situation is a way to make a name for yourself,” says Laurence J. Stybel, co-founder of Stybel Peabody Lincolnshire, a Boston leadership consultancy.

Ask trusted associates whether you landed the assignment for punitive or positive reasons. Senior officials may “want to push you out,” Dominguez observes. Or, she adds, they may “think you're the one who can make it work.”

It would help to give higher-ups a well-documented explanation for why you believe your project won't succeed — along with a persuasive substitute strategy. More than 80 percent of individuals polled by VitalSmarts said a flop might have been salvaged — except the key decision maker was difficult to approach.

“Make sure you are crystal

clear with your boss about your conclusions” without exaggerating the impact of failure, recommends Joseph Grenny, co-chairman of VitalSmarts. At the same time, “discuss the alternatives with other team members to get their feedback, buy-in and ideas” before presenting them

Joann Lublin

MANAGING YOUR CAREER

Sixty-one percent say they knew a project would flop before its launch or soon after.

to your superiors, suggests Stefanie Smith, a New York management consultant and executive coach.

Your alternate scenario should make the top brass look better.

Even if you can't rescue a flawed project, it could raise your visibility and credentials. Just be confident your judgment is right, says

Mike Miller, a vice president at DST Output, a printing and mailing business in El Dorado, Calif.

Miller once worked for a big telecom company that spent two years exploring expansion into local phone service. Many saw the initiative as “a death march” because the employer often didn't stay the course, he recalls. He built the software systems used for billing and other customer needs. The unit didn't meet expectations and shut down in two years. But a former colleague who had joined DST was so impressed with Miller, he recommended his company hire him. “He is now my boss,” Miller says.

So, don't resign because you're frustrated over a failed project. But if you've been assigned to yet another likely flop, wonders Don Schmincke, a leadership coach in Towson, Md., “aren't you kind of wasting your time?”

Joann Lublin writes for *The Wall Street Journal*.

ADVICE

David E. Carter

Executive director, National Bison Association

■ “Listen, learn and laugh.”

Carter still remembers his father sharing the simple advice with him when he was in the eighth grade.

“My dad was very involved in school politics,” Carter said. “He attended school board meetings for six months before he spoke up. He believed people needed to listen and learn before opening their mouths, and to laugh along the way.”

“My dad was very well-respected in the community,” he added.

Carter feels following his father's advice has worked well for him and proved successful no matter where his career took him.

“I've gone from writing for a newspaper to lobbying to nonprofit work, and his words always applied to what I was doing.”

FIRST JOB

Erin Trapp

Director, Denver Office of Cultural Affairs

■ **First job:** corporate intern

Trapp graduated from Swarthmore College in 1992 and was hired by Merrill Lynch as one of several corporate interns for its private client development program.

“It was really a management training program,” Trapp said. “I received training in marketing research and corporate leadership, and gained presentation skills. The program was the A to Z of management training.”

Trapp says the experience she gained in marketing research was invaluable, and she has used it throughout her career. In addition, she learned every sector of the business and had access to training that was offered to the highest level of managers.

“I was pulled in lots of different directions while in the program, but the experience was worth it.”

AT THE WATER COOLER

Office managers wear many hats

Ever given your boss a haircut or paid her rent? Ever shooed trapped bats from your office? How about storing cremation ashes in your desk?

If you answered yes to any of those questions, you're probably an office manager.

A new study shows that more than half of office managers report performing at least 10 different jobs in a given week, including customer relations, computer support, human resources and accounting.

Nearly 75 percent of office managers consider themselves

workplace housekeeping supervisors, while 71 percent lend an ear as office psychologist.

“They tend to be the glue that holds the office together,” said John Giusti of Staples, which conducted the “My Real Job” study.

Tasks falling safely under the “not in my job description” category included breaking up an office romance, cleaning pigeon poop off the sidewalk — and signing for deliveries or unclogging the toilet while talking on the phone.

The Associated Press