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**POSTED BY ME IN AN ONLINE
BOUTIQUE-OWNER FORUM
AUGUST 11, 2017**

Looking for some support ~ I am really needing a place to reach out and am hoping this is it!!

For those of y'all who don't know me I am Jessi and am the founder of Cheekys aka The Bosslady ~ and wow things have gotten crazy around here . . . I kinda feel like when I was young and had too much to drink and needed to put one foot on the floor! 🙄

This last year we had HUGE growth. I started this baby in 2011 and that was only because I knew I wanted to do something in my tiny town and I didn't want it to be a laundry mat. And in Jan of this year we did as much business as the entire year of 2014. Each month we have increased at least 20 to 100% in growth. We have had to get new machines for printing (which led me to realize how expensive power is and how much weight an old building can hold), we have overloaded the PO [post office] in our town and have no idea

what to do there, we have hired 30 plus people to help us . . . and the list goes on and on.

So in 2016 we were featured by *Inc.* magazine and then shortly after I was contacted by several publishers about having a book. That contract is now signed and my writer (who is helping me a ton) shows up tonight to stay for a month. Let me tell ya writing a book is NOT at all how I thought it was. We are getting contacted constantly about TV shows, reality TV, movies and all kinds of stuff. They just can't believe that we have this business in such a small town and that it's grown the way that it has.

I still love all the designing aspects; the manufacturing is my all-time favorite. I LOVE to help other women and am working on a consulting/mentoring program now with a few gals. And it's what I really want to do. I am hoping my book will do that for women on a budget, women who just have questions and hope it moves them. I have let a handful of women in this group read the first book proposal and it seems to be headed down the right path.

Okay, all that being said . . . I am in a bit of a whirlwind. I still am so involved in everything down to the tissue paper we use. I am kinda overwhelmed by all this attention. I prefer to be behind the scenes . . . I love typing but not being live or on TV. It's scary to be so vulnerable and exposed. Living up to the perception people have is hard. I am not fashionably dressed, I don't do a lot of makeup, I am in a bun most days . . . I am overweight. I don't have loans or a line of credit, I cry like

once a week (half good tears, half the time sad) . . . this voting finals thing [for boutique of the year] has me thrown for a loop. I am sooo proud of all the girls on there and sooo many of them carry our line which makes me even more proud. So I guess my question is: how do we stay sane, stay private, how do we give our opinions without sounding like a bully or arrogant? These are the thoughts I have everyday . . . please tell me I am not alone.

SS: First of all can I say that you hardly wearing makeup, having your hair in a bun, and being overweight is 100% relatable and what all of us women REALLY want to see . . .

KWB: I want to hug you . . .

GB: I am proud of what you have accomplished and especially from a small town . . .

VCW: Omgah Jessica Dawn Roberts . . . such a freaking amazing and inspirational story. YOU are who so many of us strive to be . . .

LM: I don't have any advice really but I just want you to know how happy I am to have found Cheekys . . .

VS: You are so not alone!!

You know what, girls? It's been more than a year since I wrote that post, and I'm still terrified to put myself out in the world. There are things in this book I really don't want to talk about and things I am terrified for you to know. But it's support like

this that makes me feel like I can—and that sharing my life and advice can do some good in the world. So to everyone who bought from Cheekys, wrote to Cheekys, and posted on Facebook asking for support. To all the boutique owners and the moms-in-business and the small town girls working for it every day . . . thank you. I love you. This book is for you.

INTRODUCTION

IS THIS A BUSINESS BOOK?

That's the first question my publisher asked, after they said they wanted to work with me (celebration time!): "Is this a business book?"

Understand, I hadn't written it yet. They had read a twenty-page proposal that grew out of a small article about me in *Inc.* magazine titled "How This Former Outback Steakhouse Waitress Built a \$2.8 Million Retail Brand." So obviously, business was important.

But is this a business book? No. Not really.

Don't get me wrong. If you are looking for business tips, you will find them here, especially if you own, manage, or work at a small business. After all, I went from a tiny store in an even tinier town to owning and running a multi-million-dollar national brand. So I have tips, and lots of them. I have "life experience," as they say. Everything I know about selling I learned in the car business. Everything I know about running a boutique I learned by trial and (so, so many) errors. I've had to learn how to find products for nothing and make an extra

twenty dollars a day to put food on the table for my kids. I've also had to learn how to design and manufacture on an international scale, wholesale to three thousand boutiques, and manage thirty employees. In other words, I've learned a lot.

But this isn't one of those "ten things that will make your business explode" books. I don't have a set of principles to unlock the secret of success, right now, in all your life's ventures. I don't want to shift paradigms or scramble business logic. I've never been invited to a TED Talk. They don't want someone like me. I never went to business school. In fact, I dropped out of Robert E. Lee High School in Midland, Texas, two months before graduating. My business advice works, because it's had to work. I didn't have the luxury of failure.

But there is so much more to my story. I'm a working mom from a lower blue-collar background (and that's putting it mildly). I live in a horseshoe-shaped town in Idaho. I'm from the country, I sell clothing and accessories to women in the country, and I love being from, in, and for the country. Thanks to some book called *Hillbilly Elegy*, there's a perception in cities like New York (where my editor lives) that people in small towns should be pitied, because we're too stupid and lazy to know our lives would be better in the city. Well, I don't believe that at all. I've lived in Texas. I've lived in Boise. I live in New Plymouth, Idaho, population 1,538, because I want to live here. I want to raise my kids here. And I run a company for all the women in all the little towns like New Plymouth who feel the same way.

This book isn't for the CEOs, the Wall Streeters, or the TED Talkers. It's for the mom-and-pops fighting for the money to

open tomorrow. The business owners working fifteen hours a day, six days a week, to put food on the table. The wives running companies out of their bedrooms to keep their families afloat. The moms working double shifts and selling cosmetics on the side. The factory workers. The mail carriers. The people living on the backroads, and I don't just mean in rural areas, I mean any place that is overlooked and discounted, where the hustle is harder and each dollar means more. Most of us don't get \$10,000, and definitely not \$100,000, to get started on our dreams. Most of us don't even get emotional support. So this book is for you: the strivers, the hustlers, the never-give-uppers who never had savings, investors, or outside help, because that's my story, too.

This book is for the moms working sixty hours a week selling cars or slinging trays so their children can have a better life. I've been there. I know how it is. I know it can feel like people look down on you, no matter how successful you are. I will never look down on you, girl. You're my hero.

Being a Boss Lady isn't about money, after all. It's not about glamour—thank God, because I am the opposite of glamorous—or a big idea that changes the world. I didn't start an Internet company. I didn't even start a website, although I have a very successful one now. I founded a retail store, in a small brick building with a big plate-glass window, across the street from the Double Diamond Saloon. That seemed like such a bad idea even the local bank wouldn't give me a loan. They said, "You can't open a shop in New Plymouth, Jessi. There's so little traffic we drive lawnmowers down the main street."

“Sure,” I said, “but only during the co-op races, and that’s two days a year.”

They still said no.

I built Cheekys anyway, and to this day, despite more than \$20 million in sales, I have never been approved for a bank loan for my business. I have never been offered money by an outside investor, although my best friend (we were single moms together) has been a silent partner since day one. I still run the business out of New Plymouth, even though it has exploded worldwide. In 2012, Cheekys’ total revenue was \$43,000. *For the year.* That’s gross, not net. Six years later, our revenue is \$125,000 *every week.* Our sales are increasing by more than \$100,000 a month. By next year, at our current growth rate, we’ll hit a million dollars a month in sales.

Now let me be clear: that doesn’t make me rich. I still don’t have money in my bank account or the backyard pool I’ve been dreaming of since I was a little girl. Okay, I have a pool, but it’s the collapsible aboveground kind from Bi-Mart, which my husband says is barely better than the way we did it when we were kids: rainwater in a stock tank. (I don’t wanna spend this whole book explaining terms, so if you’re in the city and don’t know what a stock tank is, get your Google on.) My husband and I, who both work at Cheekys full time, make \$2,000 a month, and we only started paying ourselves in 2016. At one point, Justin became frustrated by that. Our Yukalade—the half Yukon, half Escalade body-shop special we’d been driving for ten years—had broken down again.

“Jessi,” he said, “everyone who works for Cheekys has a new car but us.”

“Yup,” I said. “And we provided those opportunities, Justin. We helped those families thrive. Doesn’t that make you feel good?”

Call me crazy, but I take more joy in knowing Erika can care for her four children, including two she took in after her brother died of cancer way too young, and the other Erica can buy a minivan for her growing family, than I ever would in a swimming pool.

That’s why I invest almost everything Cheekys makes back into my business and my community. That hurts me financially, I suppose, but it makes me rich in the things that matter more than money. I give my four children, ages ten to eighteen, a comfortable home with plenty of love and attention. I set a good example of hard work, kindness, and entrepreneurship. I work with my husband every day (in different buildings, to keep the marriage going!). I provide a good living to thirty employees, mostly women, who make me laugh inside our anthill, as we call the warehouse and order center, even when the orders are piling to the ceiling. Soon, if things go as planned, I’ll have a new warehouse and an expanded 2,800-square-foot destination store in New Plymouth (twice as many feet as residents!) to provide a retail anchor and community gathering point and, hopefully, bring thousands of visitors to this gorgeous, struggling, frustrating, infuriating, perfect little town.

And I have my Chicks—the thousands of mostly rural and small-town women who are fiercely loyal to the Cheekys brand. I don’t advertise much, except on Facebook. I don’t pursue publicity. Every order is checked by me and processed by my staff,

even though we now have more than 50,000 individual customers and 3,000 stores carrying the Cheekys line. I've grown my business on word of mouth by offering clothing and accessories that small-town women love, but I've succeeded because I offer something they want even more: respect for their lifestyle and a personal connection. Cheekys isn't just a boutique. It's a worldwide community that celebrates small-town life and helps ordinary women see the beauty inside, the opportunities outside, and the value of who they are.

In other words, I set out seven years ago to feed my six-person family, and to help my small rural community, and I ended up building a family bigger than Boise. It has not been easy. It's been a struggle. The journey has been gritty and desperate, and at several points I almost failed. I've had my family shattered and my confidence shaken. I've been attacked so ferociously that I've had to build my love (and I have a lot of love for the people in my life) out of the pieces of my broken heart. I've made a million mistakes. I make mistakes every day. But running Cheekys has been the most rewarding "job" I've ever had. These Chicks are my family, and you know I am proud to be the Head Mother Clucker to this brood of hens (and a few roosters, too). I'm proud of what we've built. But I'm even more proud of the way we did it, with respect for one another, a ton of hard work, and love for every person, even the haters who put us down.

So, no, this isn't a business book. It's a book *about a business*. It's a book about family: the one you have and the one you create. It's a celebration of small-town life, but it's honest about the downsides, too. It isn't a guide. It's a story. My story. The

Cheekys story. I'm writing it because I want you to say to yourself, "If Jessi can do it, I can, too." The word *it* doesn't mean start a small business, although there are plenty of tips for that here. *It* means grabbing hold of your personal dream and living your Boss Lady life.

I want everyone who reads *Backroads Boss Lady* to feel the way I feel every night, when I sit in my U-line camp chairs in the backyard of my farmhouse two miles outside New Plymouth, Idaho. From there, I can look over the alfalfa fields of my neighbor, Dave, to the steep yellow cliffs that climb toward the Sawtooth Mountains. It's a gorgeous sight. I'm from West Texas, a place that pretty much defines the words *flat* and *empty*; I still can't believe I get to look at mountains every day.

But I can also see my little round collapsible swimming pool, and our print shop five feet behind it, and the cargo containers on the edge of our gravel parking pad. I can see the two Traegers smoking dinner and the new outbuilding my husband is building—he keeps calling it a "man cave" for some reason, even though it's obviously a "hen den"—and the pile of scrap lumber he left next to the six-foot-tall "chicken mansion" he built for our six layers last year, complete with plastic chandeliers.

The younger kids are swimming or running around. My eighteen-year-old, Hunter, is shambling off with his best friend, Kolby, who's basically been living with us. Friends are over drinking Coors Light with Clamato juice in it, which Justin claims is an old Idaho tradition. The mosquitos are biting, but it doesn't matter, because we're laughing about what happened at work that day, and answering Facebook requests from Cheekys

customers, and talking about what we're going to do in the ant-hill tomorrow, because most of the friends who come over at night are the people I work with every day. I'm sure there is a book that tells you not to invite your employees to your home, but I can't imagine living any other way.

This is Boss Lady, y'all—even if the pool is above ground. *This is happiness*. This is what the dream looks like for me and millions of others like me. And it's here for you. It's not impossible. Anyone can achieve it. No matter where you live, where you come from, or what you've been through, you can have your own house and your backyard barbeque and your chicken mansion, by which I mean whatever you call success. It takes hard work. It takes smart work. It takes staying true to your values and never giving in, but this is America: anything is possible.

Especially in Idaho.