

**Maureen Borzacchiello**  
**Creative Display Solutions**

Lorin: First, tell us a bit about you and your success story.

Maureen: I actually was recruited by a headhunter to work in the trade show display industry for a company called Nomadic Display. I started in sales, climbed the corporate ladder with them, and ultimately ran the multi-facility company as General Manager for several years. I left there in Dec of 2000 and started my company in early 2001 at the encouraging of one of my dear friends who was a key vendor.

Lorin: How do you set goals for your business, or do you?

Maureen: I absolutely do set goals! Usually, I will sit down for business purposes in the fourth quarter and start looking strategically at what I want to accomplish for the following year. I actually have an annual goal: I bump it three years out and then I have five years out and I usually have an organizational chart that supports that from a staff standpoint. So that's how I start the process, and I just write it down: I commit it to paper. I don't necessarily develop a robust multi-page plan around that but I declare my intention of what my goal is going to be and put it in writing.

Lorin: How would you describe the difference between an intention and a goal?

Maureen: I think that setting a goal is formulating where you want to go and what you want to achieve, while declaring your intention is articulating it and committing to it.

Lorin: How do you go about achieving your goals?

Maureen: I've learned to break them into digestible chunks because I tend to set pretty lofty goals, which can paralyze you! And so I've learned in life to then dissect each goal. For example, I might have a revenue goal for the business. Whether I am a sales person or running a company, I then just break that down monthly. I may even break it down to what needs to be done or achieved weekly so that even if the monthly nut is a big nut it is more palatable.

I'm in the process right now of getting healthy so I look at my overall goal and objectives regarding that and analyze that once a week. Part of it is weight loss and part of it is a commitment to exercise and working out. Part of it is a lifestyle shift to eating and cooking healthier. So once a week I look at my statistics of weight loss and, instead of looking at the monumental number of what I have to lose, I just look at what I should be targeting per week. I usually hit that and but even if I don't I am looking at the small picture and not the huge chunks. I know that's what I want to achieve but from an analysis standpoint, to keep myself rolling and motivated, I break it down.

Lorin: What was the most challenging goal you have ever accomplished?

Maureen: I would have to say one of the most challenging was breaking our first million in sales. We had done \$350,000 dollars in gross sales in 2005 and at the end of October 2006 we were still only pushing about \$680,000. I decided I really wanted to achieve a million dollars in sales that year. We pretty much had two solid months to do this and we had a tiny team and I just rallied them together and I said you know we have some really interesting things in the pipeline and I don't know whether they will happen or not. We can't count on that so we really need to roll up our sleeves and dedicate as much of our business day to hitting this goal. You

know what, if we don't make it, fine, but I want to hit a million this year. I want to accomplish this and put it behind us and say, yes, we did it! We're so close; I think we can execute it.

And I'll never forget it, my husband just looked at me, shook his head, took this really big breath, and said "Amen." I *knew* we could do it and on December 22<sup>nd</sup>, in dribs and drabs, little orders were coming through while all the big chunky ones we were waiting on had not come in yet, but that was the day we hit a million! And on December 23<sup>rd</sup>, we had \$50,000 worth of sales come in. Two deals, 25 grand each, rolled in the day after those that had trickled in! So, I think this was one of the toughest goals that we achieved because we really had to push and hunker down to hit it.

Lorin: What has been most rewarding goal you have ever accomplished?

Maureen: I would say *that* was definitely a rewarding goal, and the other rewarding goal I accomplished was buying my home. I was a salesperson selling trade show displays and we were renting an apartment in Queens, NY, just outside Manhattan, and I just had a bug in my bonnet that I wanted to buy a house. I set that goal and I started researching what we could afford to do financially. We weren't making a tremendous amount of money but it just kind of irked me that we were paying this kind of money in rent. And I set the goal that I wanted to have a house and I wanted to have it within a certain period of time. To achieve it, I brown-bagged it and I had my staple outfit that went to the dry cleaner every weekend. I wasn't buying clothes; I wasn't buying shoes. We had hunkered down to save enough money to put down, so I definitely feel like that was very rewarding because everyone told us, you know, "don't do it, it's too soon, why can't you just rent for a

couple more years” and on and on. But we ended up buying at a perfect time. Our house is worth triple what we paid for it.

Lorin: What was the turning point in your career? Was it intentional or not?

Maureen: I think the true turning point in my career was that I had transitioned from the cosmetic industry to the trade show display industry. I was really successful in the cosmetic industry and grew into a senior level position at a very young age, in my early and mid twenties. Some days I wonder if anyone had any clue as to my age because I am so tall and have always been mature for my age. Did anyone have any idea how old I was when I was running the northeast corridor for these companies at the age of 24? I doubt it! So I think the biggest challenge for me was when I transitioned to the trade show displays. A headhunter had recruited me and it was good timing. I had just gotten married and this and that. To make a very long story short, I was terrible at the consultant Business-to-Business sales. I was great at schmoozing for a living; I was great at inspiring and motivating people to spritz you with perfume, to sell you perfume and cosmetics. It was never a question of whether Saks Fifth Avenue would buy this fragrance or buy this cosmetic line. They are already committed to it. It was how much could we sell and turn in the store?

So then I came to the trade show display industry and I was terrible at it. I couldn't get my arms around how to do this and do it well, and I was really struggling. My boss came to me and said, “Look, Maureen, on a personal note, I love you, but you're just not getting it done. If you don't hit your quota this month, I'm going to have to fire you.” And I was like, “Pardon me? Are you kidding me?” So there I was, thinking, “You're not going to tell me that I'm

failing at anything! If I'm leaving, it's because I quit!" I told myself, "I can do this. I can do anything that I set my mind out to do." So, I reached out to a different person in the company and I said, "Look, you know that I am struggling. What do I need to do to turn this around?" And I'll never forget it. He spent a couple of hours with me and kind of mapped out some suggestions. I was reading this book called *Psycho Cybernetics* and I made this index card of all these affirmations. I started putting sales numbers all around my cubicle and so I was thinking, "OK, I'm getting it done. I had some decent stuff in the pipeline anyway, but, sure enough, I hit and exceeded my goal! I went on within that year to become the top sales person in the company and ultimately went on to run that company.

It was so funny that the guy that had almost fired me had gone back down to corporate, and someone else had come in during my hey day as top sales person. But years later, when I was promoted and running that whole New York and New Jersey company, I'd go to corporate meetings and I'd elbow him, because we had become good friends, and I'd say, "Mike, do you remember when you almost fired me and now I'm the general manager running the entire company?" Pretty funny wouldn't you say? If you tell me I can't do something, something clicks inside me that just says I'm going to prove you wrong.

Lorin: I get a sense it's more about you and what's possible for yourself. It sounds like it's an internal trait that motivates you to be the best you can be. It motivates you to say, "I'm in charge."

Maureen: Correct, you can't tell me I *can't* do something. I guess I was always brought up in an environment with my parents that you could really accomplish anything you wanted to whether it was to

be the greatest landscaper, or waitress, or doctor, or whatever. No one ever put preconceived ideas of what I had to be in my mind. It was always just set your mind to it, and do whatever it takes to accomplish it, and you can pretty much be or do whatever you want to be. But I'm also really stubborn and independent and I think that fundamentally is just woven in my fiber so it is important to me, if I say I'm going to something that I'm going to do it, or if I'm challenged to do something that I want to do it for the personal satisfaction.

Lorin: What two or three things would you say were most critical to your success?

Maureen: I think determination is one – being willing to do whatever it takes to do to achieve success, meaning becoming a student, rolling up your sleeves, working hard and being smart at it. The reality is that if you want to accomplish something great you do have to work at it, and I've always been willing to pay my dues from a time standpoint. I think that at the end of the day the most important thing is having confidence in yourself. If you don't believe in yourself, why should anyone else?

Lorin: What do you think separates men and woman as they achieve goals?

Maureen: I think there *are* differences. I think women – and I don't mean it in a bad way – I think women are naturally more emotional. We're wired differently, and we take things much more personally. I think sometimes guys play the game hard and they don't personalize it and they just get there, they hit it. Yeah, victory! And they move on. Whereas I think women take it so personally that we bust our ass to get to a certain point and there's a lot of

emotion tied to it. But men are different. I see that they *do* play the game a little bit differently and it works for them.

Lorin: What do you think is unique to *you* as you set and achieve goals?

Maureen: I can't say that I think it's unique; I think it's just my style and how I do things. I keep it simple and when I over-complicate it, that's when I overwhelm myself. I go into overdrive and I frustrate myself, and it took me a long time to learn that actually. I was one of those people that every New Year's Eve would sit and write out three pages of what I wanted to do in the new year. I would make so many promises to myself, or "resolutions," that I would overwhelm myself, so I learned to step back and pick maybe three or four key things that I wanted to accomplish and, literally, just write them down and commit to them.

I read an article about a Harvard study that said they had taken a graduating class one year and about 3% wrote down their goals and actually achieved them. I kind of feel cool about the fact that I don't stress myself out anymore. For me, simplicity works. For other people it might not be so. I don't know if it's unique – it's what works for me.

Lorin: What is balance to you? Do you have it?

Maureen: Let me laugh loudly, for the record. Absolutely not! I do not have balance and it is something that I am working really hard to do. This is my year to develop balance. I decided that I put everyone else first. I know a lot of women do. I was just doing it to the point where I was unhealthy, overweight, exhausted, and I had nothing left to give, or at least close to nothing. As I looked at the tank light flashing, I felt I was running on empty. I do some things really well, but one thing I have not done is taken time for myself,

and so I made a commitment and goal. I've hired a nutritionist and a personal trainer so that I can accomplish this. That was my birthday gift in January from my husband, who is so supportive. "Babe," he said, "If this is what you want to do let's find the people to support you and find a trainer that can come to the home and get you trained and worked out in the morning or on the weekends so that it's not one more thing that you have to add to your schedule, like going to the gym. He's a really awesome husband. We have very different personalities but he's always been totally supportive of my career and what I've wanted to do. He also respects the fact that we *are* different and that I like to be the one out on the forefront. He likes to be the one holding down the fort, keeping structured systems in place. I'm more impulsive and really enjoying being out with people. So yeah, it's a good Ying and Yang.

Lorin: What do you value most? When did you realize this was such a high value?

Maureen: I guess it comes back to what I've been working on – having that balance. What I've come to realize is, both personally or professionally, I love to create amazing experiences for people, whether it's buying a thoughtful gift or remembering that someone told me that their child was starting preschool and following up and saying, "How did your daughter do in preschool?" I really pay attention to details like that for other people and my "aha moment" was that if I invested in myself I would have so much more to give. I'd have so many more amazing experiences and that I needed to start creating some for myself. The realization for me was to put myself and take care of myself like I was taking care of others. If I did that, I would actually have even more to give back because I was starting to feel like I didn't have it in me some days. That was

shocking to me, to actually see that I was becoming that kind of deep down exhausted. You know, I'd work all day, come home, cook, spend a little time with my son, get him to bed, and then I would work again four or five hours on the computer. So I started to burn out. But I'm on my way back!

Lorin: What does abundance mean to you? How important is money to you?

Maureen: It's about the ability to create those amazing experiences for everyone without worrying where it is coming from. Abundance is having more than enough. It's about financial independence for me.

Lorin: What makes a millionaire mom different from a mother who is not?

Maureen: Gosh, that's an interesting question. I think that a millionaire mom or a mom who has built a business past a million is simply following her personal calling. For example, I enjoy my career and I knew that having some form of a career was important. I just decided to create my own path by becoming an entrepreneur because it was important to me to be a mom also. I think that millionaire moms kind of have a double goal or a double major at the same time. They want to get their degree in motherhood but they also want to have that degree in business. So they do whatever it takes to multi-task and struggle. Stay-at-home moms or those that don't build big businesses still juggle different things, it's just that *we* are choosing to juggle risk and perhaps this imbalance is the result, where we're sacrificing some things but we're trying to create a situation to have it all. I guess we want to be in the "have our cake and eat it, too" group. When you think you can, *you can*, and you figure out how you can do it. You

know, your kid's up sick in the middle of the night and you have a meeting at 7 a.m. Somewhere inside, you know you are still going to deal with your child and figure it out and love them and take care of them. But you also think, if you can hustle, you can still make your meeting, unless, of course, there is something urgent or seriously wrong.

Lorin: What role does spirituality play in your business life?

Maureen: It plays a really big role. I think that you're always in a position to learn and when you're open to that it can only help. I had an opportunity to work with a woman who has become a friend but I'll call her a mentor. She taught me to ask myself something when things are happening and the first thing is, "What can I learn from this situation?" "What can I be grateful for?" When I hit a wall or when I have just had a crappy day I'll drive home and say, "You know, today really sucked but what can I be grateful about? What have I learned or what can I learn from today that will just make tomorrow a better day?" It's being reflective. Doing that gives me a way to really process things, and then I do try on a spiritual level to have at least five minutes a day to just be grateful for all the blessings that are in my life. I've read the book *The Secret* and also have an audio copy of it on my iPod. I listen to it a lot, particularly when I fly. I like to listen for several hours at a time, when it's not chopped up.

At other times, I just kind of meditate with the book in my hand, with eyes closed for a few minutes, and I take a deep breath say, "Show me what I need to learn today. What is it that I need to learn and I stick my finger on a page and open the book. It's really funny how I keep getting the same message (laughing) in different places of the book: in the front, the back, it's just so funny! But it is

something that I have been trying to do for myself – just to have a moment of reflection and a little time to regroup.

Lorin: What has been the biggest struggle along your journey?

Maureen: I think the initial struggle was admitting that I could use some help but I didn't have all the answers. I have talked to a lot of women who are entrepreneurs and so I know I'm not the only one who has felt this way. For me, it showed weakness if I verbalized I didn't know everything! You know... I *ran* a company! How did I not know that I had to be digging into my financials every week, and that I needed to look at cash flow and numbers in detail? Hadn't I had just had a quarterly review with my accountant? But I had obviously gone through a challenging time because we were growing so fast, so I had to recognize that I needed help in certain areas or even just support. That was a tough thing to admit, but once I admitted it, it was kind of "Whew!" and "Wow! There are actually people that will help me that understand me and are able to talk my language." So yeah, I think that was probably the toughest thing.

Lorin: What has been your biggest mistake and how do you view it now?

Maureen: Oh, the biggest mistake I made was when we moved the business from my home into our first facility. We had built the facility, paid cash for the build, then took out a loan to furnish it and really got in a little over our heads. We hired a bunch of salespeople who weren't selling. Frank and I were the only two people actively selling and because we had all these other things going on, we took our eye off the ball. We hit a wall from a cash flow standpoint and we had to make some really fast and really difficult decisions. But what I learned and I'm actually now vigilant about teaching other

women entrepreneurs who are maybe one or two steps behind me is that entrepreneurs typically do not like numbers. They like to look at the “nice numbers,” as in, “We are looking good!” but they are not really the numbers-crunching group.

What I learned is that we’re visionaries. I’ve learned it is critical to growing my business to keep up with the numbers and it is the pass or fail system. If you can’t learn your numbers in a way that makes sense to you, fire your accountant and hire another one, someone that is going to explain it to you until you know it and that you can look at the numbers on a daily, weekly, and monthly basis, especially when you are going through growth spurts, and understand the game. You can only play the game as long as you have cash. So I almost drove the company into the ground because we ran out of cash! Not because we weren’t successful, but because we ran out of cash.

I learned that lesson and I was grateful that I was able to learn it. We had a great team but, basically, we had to put everyone on part-time effective immediately when I discovered this situation. Frank and I didn’t take salaries for a month or so until we could get it up and running. We just shifted and juggled, but it was embarrassing, frustrating, and it was probably one of the biggest lessons that I’ve ever learned. From that point on I made my accountants come in and sit with me for hours in front of our QuickBooks screens, running reports and explaining what I needed to know, why I needed to know it, and why I might run a report on a cash versus accrual basis. Two years ago, Charlie Brown syndrome would have kicked in. It just would not have equated to me – accrual or cash – I would have had no idea what the difference is or why.

Lorin: I really appreciate the honesty in that answer because I think it's just a vulnerable place to be, and the more vulnerable we choose to be and share it, the bigger lessons come from it.

Maureen: Absolutely. And that's really the reason I took on the role of Chairperson for Programming and Education for my local NAWBO group, so that I could put relevant content in. I had accountants, insurance people, and lawyers come in and talk about things that we need to know. The majority of the women-owned businesses in this country are sole proprietors. Out of the 10.4 million women that own businesses I think that it's something like at least 60% of them are sole proprietors. So, you're not necessarily sitting there doing financial reviews or hiring a bookkeeper or comptroller, because you can't afford it.

Lorin: OK, Maureen, we're changing gears again. What is the greatest gift your child has taught you?

Maureen: Hmm. The greatest gift that my son has taught me that life is precious. I think the best way I can say it is I knew that I've always loved children and I knew I would love my child. What shocked me was how much love I had for this person and the depth of it. And I think that, over time, he's just such a joyous kid that he reminds you that you just have to laugh and enjoy life, and I think that was a big motivation for me to get healthy. I want to be here years and years and years for him and take those little moments to seal away and have special memories.

Lorin: How do you manage being a mom while building your business?

Maureen: You just figure it out. But you know what I love? I love teaching him such great examples of such great lessons by example. I love the fact that he understands money. I love the fact that he's

exposed to our staff and our team. We were actually out on Saturday. We volunteered to go to East Harlem in New York City and plant trees and flowers through this whole initiative with New York City restoration. Jet Blue Airways was a sponsor. As soon as we heard about it, we said sign us up, and the majority of my staff went and my son went. At five years old, that kid worked his butt off! At one point, this man said to Dominick, “Boy, you’re really working very hard,” and he just stopped and said ‘thanks.’” And then he said, “This is a really important job because we’re saving the environment and we’re helping these people have a beautiful neighborhood.” I just thought these are great lessons that he’s learning and maybe he wouldn’t have been exposed had I been working in corporate America.

Lorin: How are your parenting skills similar to or different than your skills as a businesswoman?

Maureen: Actually, I think sometimes they are *too* similar in that I’m a little bit tough on him at home; I definitely set my expectations. Of course, I’ll deviate sometimes but there’s actually a joke in our office that when Dominick calls in the afternoon and asks for Daddy it’s because he wants to do something Mommy won’t let him do. But he’s very good because he knows if we discussed it, if he has gone to me and I’ve said no and then he goes to Daddy, my husband will say, “Well, what did your mother say?” He got smart, probably at four, and realized that if he just goes to Daddy and doesn’t even bother asking me, and then he’ll get what he wants. He’ll be able to bend the system a little bit, which I’m kind of proud of, because he’s thinking and he’s strategic. I think my skills are similar in that I have expectations for my team and for myself. If you don’t do what you say you’re going to do, then we need to talk about it. We’ve always had that kind of situation at

home, particularly now that he's in school. It's always an open dialogue. He's never been spoiled. Having waited until my mid-thirties to have a child, I made a real conscious decision that I wasn't going to have a kid that dictates to the parents what they're going to be doing and what they want. I think our job is to discipline them to a certain degree, not in a mean way, but in reality.

Lorin: Does your parenting persona enhance your professional persona or are they two separate entities? And if so, why?

Maureen: I guess it probably enhances it because whereas I may be more black and white, having a child has helped me see shades of gray.

Lorin: What role has your husband played in your success?

Maureen: Frank's role has been significant. Something he said to me once when I was getting ready to go to the west coast on a business trip really sums up all the time we have been together. I was kind of apprehensive because it was going to be longer than usual; I think it was going to be a five-day trip. My guilt as a mother and as a wife about being gone was starting to pull on my heart a little bit. He just looked at me and he said, "Babe, just go do what you do so well." He said, "Fly, butterfly. Just go fly and spread your wings. We will be here and we will be fine when you come back." And really, that has always been his attitude.

He knew when he met me that I was a sweet, caring girl but that I was also very independent and always worked to get what I wanted. If that meant I wanted a Fendi bag, I would work to save up the money to get it. I think he has always respected that in me and recognized that we are different. He doesn't like the limelight, while I have no problem with it and thrive on it. But his strengths

balance me so beautifully that he challenges me in other areas. He also brings me down to earth sometimes when I'm too crazed and too pie-in-the-sky. He'll give me a dose of reality just to kind of bring me into balance. Frank is awesome, he really is.

Lorin: What kind of mentoring did you have along the way?

Maureen: I definitely had some mentors and they've all played different roles. Some I call my vicarious mentors that I've never met – like Richard Branson who I just admire. I flew back from San Francisco recently on Virgin America and I sat there and I was just blown away by the experience. I have always gravitated to him and admired him because he calls his own shots. He started from nothing and is really completely self-made. No one cut him any slack. It was the fruits of his labor but also his desire to create these great experiences for people. So, he's my only mentor that I haven't met, but someday I will.

And then I have real-life mentors that I interact with. They just give me different nuggets. They are just willing to share their experience and have helped me along the way. I'm really very appreciative and I really look at every person that I meet now as an opportunity to mentor. I've found you can learn from someone who is your peer, and have a peer mentor, which I do. You can also have mentors who have done great things. One of my mentors has a \$15 million company. Certainly, I look to her, although her business has nothing to do with what I do. I just appreciate that she shares some of her struggles and victories with me. I think it's important for women to mentor each other, or for people to mentor each other.

Lorin: What is your legacy for the women coming up the business ladder behind you? Do you ever think about that?

Maureen: I actually *have* started to think about that. I look at Nell Merlino, who pioneered “Take Your Daughter to Work Day,” and then started the “Make Mine a Million \$ Business” movement, where she is just trying to empower women. I believe that she is creating a legacy like a Nelson Mandela or a Martin Luther King, Jr. And so I think, in my way, the legacy that I can create is continuing to be successful and being a trailblazer; by getting involved in the community and paying it forward by giving back. So, I think that would be my legacy. By being successful, I will be able to do philanthropic things on a bigger scale and I will continue to be able to mentor other women and encourage them to grow their business. I’m really passionate about that.

I think for me it was the realization that there *is* a girl’s club. I never knew there was a girl’s club. I always thought we had to do it on our own. We just had to suck it up and get it done. But now I realize there are women out there that *want* to help other women grow their business, and that shocked me. Once I was exposed to it and realized it existed, I decided that I wanted to be part of that, both as a recipient of women who had gone before me but, more importantly, as someone who can reach her hand back and say, “Hey, come on! I’m going to take you with me.” It’s really interesting. If you had asked me two or three years ago if I thought I would be doing anything like that, I honestly would have said, “No way.” It never would have dawned on me.

Lorin: What is next for you, and how will you go about accomplishing it?

Maureen: I’m going to be starting another company that is just going to be amazing! I have come up with an idea for a product that doesn’t

exist in the marketplace today that is going to be really huge. So, right now I'm actually working with a mentor to help me figure this out, because it will involve bringing a product to market that needs to be developed. I'm really excited about it and I just know it will have international impact. It will easily be a \$250 to \$300 million-dollar company in a short period of time. I have great dreams. I have ideas, and things that I want to do for people. I have things to do to continue to grow and accelerate my company. I have the cash to do it and the financial abundance to do it. It will just be awesome!