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Dillon shows iron will in tool business

Phoenix Business Journal - by [Eillen Brill Wagner](#) The Business Journal

When Mary Dillon got passed over for an outside sales job in the male-dominated metal distribution industry, she decided to take matters into her own hands.

Seventeen years ago, she made the momentous decision to start her own business selling cutting tools, primarily to machine shops in the area.

"My previous work gave me exposure to the people who used cutting tools," she says. "But it was the men who were in charge, and I got frustrated. I decided I wanted to be my own boss."

Seven years after starting the business, her company received a patent on a super-abrasive, film-coated cutting tool. In order to concentrate efforts on the product, she sold off the tool supply portion of the business. But Dillon was forced to confront a major challenge faced by many small businesses.

"We found that there were tons of people infringing on the patent, and we didn't have rooms of lawyers to fight them," she recalls.

The people she sold the tool supply business to had sold it again, and eventually the new owners ended up closing the business. But Dillon's old customers and vendors, loyal to Diversified Diamond Products because of its keen attention to service, convinced her to get back into the business.

"If anyone needs to hold, cut, grind or machine, we sell the tools," she says. "We don't have voice mail, we have memories. We remember the last time we talked to you, and, if you have a problem, it is taken care of right away."

Today, the patented product makes up only about 5 percent of the company's sales, but Dillon sees strong potential across the United States and beyond. The Ripcore cut-off and grinding wheel is used for routine maintenance procedures at Palo Verde nuclear power plant.

"Our wheels last much longer and get the job done faster," she says. "The operators like it because the time they spend in the irradiated areas are much shorter."

Dillon credits the APS Academy for the Advancement of Minority & Women Enterprises for helping her company get to the next level. The company grew 30 percent in each of the past three years, at a time when a number of Valley tool distributors have had to close their doors.

She says she is very particular about the employees who represent the company and doesn't like having to break the bad habits of those who have learned to be just order-takers at other firms.

"I'm kind of a control freak, and I really don't want customers to have to suffer if someone here makes a mistake," says Dillon. "Now we have procedures in place, and I have gotten much better at delegating."

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