

Tracey Johnston-Aldworth

For more than twenty years, Tracey Johnston-Aldworth has led a small Waterloo textile printing firm while balancing profits with environmental protection and hard work with fun.



Johnston-Aldworth is known as a savvy businesswoman who makes money while making the environment a priority. When she opened Traces Screen Printing Ltd. in 1985 Johnston-Aldworth committed to using chemicals that don't cause cancer. Since then, her employees have learned to recycle, have minimized water and electricity use, and buy from enlightened suppliers.

After establishing herself in business, it was only a matter of time before the dynamic Johnston-Aldworth integrated fun into the corporate culture. It wasn't a new concept for the woman who once rode a unicycle in a circus and has volunteered countless hours to the Waterloo Busker Festival.

In 2007, Johnston-Aldworth was featured in a magazine article for her latest passion - traditional Egyptian belly dancing. "I think learning something new, especially as you get older, is really important," she said. "And I get to dance around with veils – I can embrace my inner six-year-old."

To bring fun into the workplace, Johnston-Aldworth takes employees on an annual vacation if they meet the year's business targets. Since instituting the programme, the employees have been to Halifax, San Francisco, Mexico and New Orleans.

"People want things that are hard to save for. Trips are hard to save for; they want a little adventure. They want to be able to brag to their friends that they went on a trip supplied by their company. It's a little unique, especially for a company this size, this small. It's awesome," she said once.

Initially, Johnston-Aldworth was wooed back to Waterloo from Toronto in 1985 by her father, an entrepreneurial engineer who wanted to purchase a screen printing business. Johnston-Aldworth had been working in Toronto at the time, a recent graduate of the Ontario College of Art.

Like most small businesses, things weren't always rosy and Aldworth-Johnston has proven herself through several lean periods. Business took a major downturn when Penman's in Cambridge went bankrupt and Traces lost a major client.

With no budget for marketing, Johnston-Aldworth threw herself into volunteer work with the intention of getting her business' name out there. Ironically, she found she loved being involved in community events and went on to win a Woman of the Year award for entrepreneurship, an Ontario Volunteer Service Award, and a K-W Arts Award.

In 1999, she found herself losing her business focus and decided to hire a coach from the United States to help her restructure, delegate and renew her passion.

In 2006, she was quoted as saying:

“The employees are happy, the customers are happy and I’m happy . . . Basically, every day is a good day. And it took a long time to achieve that.”

Aldworth-Johnston, who has won several environmental awards from the Region of Waterloo and the Kitchener-Waterloo Chamber of Commerce, also offers free public speaking to community groups and schools. She shares her expertise with other small businesses who want to know how they can cut costs while being environmentally responsible.

Photo courtesy of the Waterloo Chronicle.