

BUSINESS

MENDELL: New book uses stories, recipes to impart business lessons

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develop a set of How Tos, if they fire someone or someone leaves, the new employee will have a set of instructions."

Mendell started her catering company from scratch in the 1980s after a divorce left her with three sons to raise, \$200 a month in child support and just \$1,000 in the bank, she said. She quickly realized that cooking was only a small part of running the business.

The majority of her time was spent dealing with the problems that cropped up, including melting wedding cake frosting and nonfunctioning stoves in clients' kitchens. The disasters taught her a lot—and made for good stories.

But it took a comment about the one on carrot

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—MARILYNN MENDELL

cake—in which an employee accidentally used salt instead of sugar for her youngest son's class—to make Mendell realize she had all the ingredients needed to whip up a business book.

"One of the biggest lessons I learned was that stories sell anything," she writes in the introduction to her book. "It's because they're the glue that make concepts stick."

"Elbow Grease + Chicken Fat," which was published last summer, features dozens of stories covering business lessons on topics such as time management, willingness to change and keeping your sense of humor. They're based on her catering experience, and each comes with a recipe—including the one for Killer Brownies.

Mendell pitched the book to agents and publishers, but they all turned her down.

"The problem they had was it's not a business book and it's not a cookbook, so where do they put it?" she said during a recent interview. "They asked me to divide it in half and just do the business book or the cookbook. The point is I'm always doing stories about cooking, so it made sense to include the recipes."

Undeterred, Mendell hired editors and designers and had the book published herself. It's available on Amazon.com and winspincic.com, as well as at The Kitchen at Whittingham in downtown Fredericksburg, Politics and Prose in Washington and a Buffalo, N.Y., bookstore. It sells for \$35.95.

"I'm on the speaking circuit. You have to have videos today; you have to have a book. The [audience] doesn't care if it's self published," said Mendell, who plans to use it to market herself. "It's also in the university system. U.Va. could use it as a text. Those are all the side benefits."