

The Beauty of Small

This founder knows that small businesses do big things for their customers, their employees, and their communities.

MIND YOUR BUSINESS

#3385

2018 INC. 5000 RANKING

31

NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES

114 PERCENT

THREE-YEAR GROWTH

51 PERCENT

OF EEO OFFICES IN THE COUNTRY ARE CLIENTS

“EMPOWERMENT” IS AN important word for Karen Caruso, founder and CEO of Mind Your Business, a pre-employment background and equal employment opportunity (EEO) investigative services company headquarter in Hendersonville, North Carolina. Caruso’s mission is to empower clients to make better hiring decisions. Not only is she concerned about the choices her clients make, but Caruso wants to empower her employees and her community by creating career opportunities for people who need them the most.

Today, Mind Your Business is a leading provider of background investigations, EEO investigations, and drug-screening services. But 22 years ago, Caruso would not dare dream that she would build one of the nation’s fastest-growing private companies. She was a new mother and worked part-time at a dental office. No one in her family had every pursued an entrepreneurial vision. She was taught to value stability. Caruso recalls rocking her 10-month-old baby as she watched *The Oprah Winfrey Show*. “Oprah’s guest was talking about how we are all drivers of our own trains and capable of making our own success. I had never heard that message before, or if I had, I had never thought it applied to me.”

Two days later, Oprah’s guest was a mother grieving for her 10-month-old son who had been murdered by his nanny. The mother had tried to run a background check, but it was not easy in the pre-internet days. Caruso knew she could help families avoid horror stories like the one she was watching, because she had experience conducting background checks from working in retail. With little money, but plenty of drive, she launched Mind Your Business from her basement.

Mind Your Business still offers nanny screening, but it primarily works with federal, commercial, and nonprofit clients of all sizes. Enterprises value the flexibility, speed, and white-glove service Caruso and her team offer—benefits that distinguish them from larger players in their field. The company’s exponential growth in the federal space has been particularly critical to its success.



The SBA works with federal agencies to set small business contract goals, which helps to give business owners like Caruso a chance to compete. Then, by consistently delivering, she established herself as a leader in the field.

Caruso is passionate about finding and creating jobs for “groups in our society who are pushed into minimum paying jobs because of life circumstances and who have no real hope for finding a sustainable career that could support a family.” To do so, she partnered with the state of North Carolina to secure a workforce development grant to develop a program for recruiting and training qualifying individuals to become EEO investigators. So far, 10 people have graduated from the program. “Helping these people achieve goals that once felt out of reach has been incredibly gratifying,” she says.

This year, the baby Caruso she was rocking, when she had her business epiphany more than two decades ago is a college graduate. Her daughter recently decided to join her mom and work for the family business. Caruso hopes her story shows entrepreneurs, especially women, that anything is possible if you are passionate enough and willing to put in the hard work. She also hopes it reminds companies that when you work with a small business like hers, you are not just empowering business owners—you are empowering their employees, and the communities they support. ■