

Taking the initiative

BETSY KENT moved to New York from Ohio to work in the fashion industry, and spent 10 years working on Seventh Avenue. But when the travel started getting to her, she shifted gears, taking what would become the first of many jobs in advertising sales.

She worked for a community newspaper, a publishing group, and eventually became a sales executive for an firm selling Yellow Pages ads. Unhappy there for a variety of reasons, she decided it was time to look for another sales job. Then she came to a realization: She didn't want another sales job.

"I was overworked, and tired of going in and out of businesses all day long," she says. "I wanted to use my skill set to do something different, but I had no idea what that might be."

That's what brought her to the office of Bettina Seidman, who became a career coach 18 years ago

after two decades of working in human resources. As she typically does with new clients, Seidman — the president of the Career Counselors Consortium, whose members include some 50 NYC-area coaches — asked Kent to talk freely about what she cared about and what her goals were.

"It was almost like going to a psychotherapist in that she just let me sit and talk about what I liked, what I didn't like, who I was and where my strengths were," says Kent, who lives in Riverdale.

Seidman also had her do a "values exercise," answering 34 questions about what elements she thought were important to have in her next job. Autonomy and freedom from meddling managers came up high on the list, and, says Seidman, "I began to get great clarity around this idea of independence and decision making."

As Kent tells it, she and Seidman reached the same



ON HER OWN: After years in ad sales, Betsy Kent started a consulting business.

conclusion almost simultaneously: Kent should start her own business. And selling phone-book ads to small businesses had revealed a possible niche.

"When I'd go visit a business, I often realized they needed help with their marketing," she says. "I often had some great ideas for them, but I wasn't really able to help them, working for a company that only offered one solution."

Having "an innate level

of comfort and understanding with the Internet, which I wanted to use along with my advertising experience," she and Seidman put together over several sessions an idea for a Web marketing company that would be a "one-stop shop for any business that wants to have visibility on the Internet."

She launched Be Visible Associates two year ago, and has found running a business to be a perfect fit.

"It's funny," she says, "I probably work more than I ever have, but it doesn't feel like working."

And she gives Seidman credit not only for helping her come up with a business plan, but for helping her muster the faith that she could pull it off.

"I think the most important thing I got out of it was the confidence I needed to make what could have been a very scary step," she says. "It was great to have someone who believed in me and also had the knowledge and experience to make me realize it wasn't a dumb idea." — C.E.