

Joan Kleinberg

Founder of Elements at Home, Long Island, NY



HOW DID YOU ENTER THE BUSINESS?

My first career was as a first grade teacher on Long Island, but I left teaching when I became pregnant. I enjoyed raising four children as a stay-at-home mom, but when my last child entered first grade I became a little restless. Coincidentally, at this time my husband, Abe Kleinberg (founder of the lighting manufacturing company Crystorama) asked if I could assist in his office while his assistant was out [for some time] with an illness. Upon her return, I asked if I could have a small retail space in his showroom to sell his merchandise — and the rest is history!

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE BIGGEST CHANGES YOU'VE SEEN?

Our industry has witnessed several big changes during the 42 years I have been privileged to participate in the lighting business. The biggest personal challenge I have faced is the computer. If the future of my business relied on my computer skills, I would have been in trouble! Fortunately my son Brian, and many of our employees, brought Elements into the computer era.

The second challenge has been the invention of the Internet. When I entered the business, if you worked very hard and surrounded yourself with competent associates, you had an excellent chance of becoming successful. Today we are competing with the "electronic ghost" and it seems to infiltrate our daily lives. We have trained our staff to be very aware of our clients' needs and we strive to make their Elements at Home experience a happy one that encourages future visits.

The final change is the recognition of women in our industry as well as on the world scene. We

have worked very hard to gain recognition in our fields and the men have become better about acknowledging us as equals.

WHAT DO YOU THINK HAS BEEN THE KEY TO YOUR SUCCESS?

My key to success has been my family. We have been a "lighting" family since the day I married Abe. We have four children, three of them in the lighting industry. Brian, my second son, has taken my business to a higher level. We have an extremely large showroom, and when he entered the business we expanded from lighting to a "lifestyle" showroom.

I also had a very good teacher, my husband Abe. He taught me that having the best work ethic and doing hard work pays off. My children Brad and Nancy have joined him at Crystorama, while my oldest son, Steven, chose the music industry; it gives our family a little variety.

Brian and I have had the huge honor of being nominated five times for the ARTS Awards for best Lighting Fixture Manufacturer, and we won the award three times. That really was a pinnacle of success for Elements at Home.

WHAT DO YOU KNOW NOW THAT YOU WISH YOU KNEW WHEN YOU STARTED?

When I started Elements at Home, it was an unknown. I wasn't a "business" person and everything was new. What I truly recognize now, however, is that I chose wisely to enter the home furnishings field. I've had the opportunity to interact with so many wonderful and exciting people. It has been a wonderful experience.

WHAT DO YOU THINK THE FUTURE HOLDS FOR YOU AND FOR ELEMENTS?

Now that my son Brian is running the majority of the company, I have had the pleasure of directing my efforts to the parts of the business I enjoy the most — buying. I continue to visit the major markets four times a year and I am as excited today as when I first visited many years ago. Due to the wonderful organization we have surrounding us, I have taken more time off to participate in the lives of my 12 grandchildren. I must say, that's the best. We wonder if there will be future Kleinbergs and Lonoffs (my daughter's family) in our industry!