

# An Idea That Stuck

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**WENDY STEELE, OWNER / CEO AT  
STEXLEY-BRAKE, LLC DBA TAPE  
WRANGLER, TRAVERSE CITY**

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**THE JOB:** Stexley-Brake, LLC is a Certified Women's Business Enterprise that designs and creates a family of consumer and industrial products under the Tape Wrangler brand. We concentrate on creating specialty products (such as the Tape Wrangler™ heavy duty tape dispenser) that add value to both consumer households and professional/industrial applications.

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**THE \$:** Salary? Who needs a salary when you're running your own show?!



Photography by Sisker

**THE START:** Back in early 2006, my husband Rick and I were working on a project together. An invention, actually, designed for the building industry (we are both licensed builders). We were working with duct tape and were having difficulty peeling it off the roll and tearing it — repeatedly — for this project. We commented to each other that we needed to pick up a duct tape dispenser, noting that working with it by hand was tedious and frustrating. After searching all of the likely places, we

realized that no such dispenser existed and then started thinking about how a “good” duct tape dispenser would function. The result was our Tape Wrangler 700 Heavy Duty Tape Dispenser. It was the start of a family of tape dispensers under the Tape Wrangler brand. Soon, the second generation duct tape dispenser, known as the Tape Wrangler 700S (“S” for “safety”) made it to market. By late 2007, the Tape Wrangler ProSeal 200D, a new approach to shipping tape dispensers, was in prototype. By the end of 2008, we had all three of these dispensers in production and final, working prototypes for half a dozen more products in the Tape Wrangler name ready for production.

**BEFORE IT ALL STARTED:** I enjoyed a 20-plus-year career in banking that culminated with a position of senior vice president and regional manager of the Private Financial Group for Huntington National Bank. I was also the founder and past president of Impact 100, Inc., Cincinnati, Ohio, which has raised more than \$1.4 million for the greater Cincinnati community. The foundation received national recognition through *People* magazine and the CBS Evening News with Katie Couric. The Impact model is being replicated in several cities throughout the country, bringing more than \$7 million to people in need.

**THE CAREER SWITCH:** I became a business owner when the “Big Idea” seemed to really solve a problem and fill a niche in the marketplace. I left the job in banking when the momentum in the Tape Wrangler business really started to build. I needed to devote all of my energies — not just part-time hours — to this growing enterprise.

**THE BEST PART:** I enjoy working with my husband every day! We like that we are controlling our own destiny and not at the mercy of a large corporation and decisions made elsewhere. We love that we are building a legacy and teaching our children the many aspects of product development and business ownership. The networking with other business owners/inventors has been fabulous! We have met so many entrepreneurs who have guided us and brainstormed along the way. Those connections are so beneficial and fun.

**THE HARDEST PART:** Not having a large staff with “experts” in IT, administration, etc., means we wear a lot of hats every day to get the work done. On some days that’s a problem...on other days, that’s what makes it fun!

**THE PERKS:** I love what I do! I am motivated to succeed. I enjoy the high energy and pace of working.

**A DAY ON THE JOB:** We have two employees, so we do it all! Every day is different but most days include a great deal of selling, customer service, bookkeeping, logistics, designing, networking and administration.

**EDUCATION/EXPERIENCE:** My background in banking was a wonderful education for entrepreneurship. Rick also has vital experience starting and running a business. He’s been a serial-entrepreneur since 1991, starting, growing and then selling a number of businesses along the way.