

Kiss My Aster

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Dedicated to Dolly

Amanda Thomsen



I don't know if writing a book on business was ever on Dolly's mind, but I would have read that book immediately. She was exactly the kind of businesswoman I strive to be. Coming from absolute poverty, she often said she had nothing to lose so she was a powerhouse about trying anything and everything that she wanted to try. I saw an interview once where she said, "You know, I look like a woman, but I think like a man. And in this world of business, that has helped

me a lot because by the time they think that I don't know what's goin' on, I got the money and am gone."

Dolly showed us all how amazing she was at business, with her whole brain and her whole heart. Songwriting was just the beginning before she got into acting, authoring books, buying local businesses, allowing her face on things like cake mix and coffee. Right before she passed she opened a truck stop in Tennessee.

She did things that made sense to her brand while those businesses were simultaneously doing good for others. She bought a stake in Dollywood not just as a shrine to herself or to share her cinnamon bread, but to give the people in the area where she came up a chance of employment (that pays 100% for employees who want to further their education). Her pet accessories line, Doggy Parton, rerouted money back to shelters in Tennessee. Dolly Parton's Stampede (it's like Medieval Times, but more barn-y) donated funds to help build a local hospital. And while I've been sheepish about going all-in for capitalism, I certainly could reach to do it like Dolly did.

People wanted a little piece of Dolly, to know what it feels like to experience the world her imagination built. And on a microscopic level, my customers want that from me.

I think Dolly always was who she was, on and off the stage, but definitely used rhinestones and wigs to enhance her persona as a sort of "work uniform," and this is something that deeply resonates with me. I am who I am on and off the clock, but I definitely use things like a branded sun hat, several outfits that have proven themselves useful in the field (so they're on repeat) and a wardrobe that make me look like a deranged art teacher in the shop to help reinforce my brand, give me a persona that isn't always on the clock and help me enforce boundaries, as this is something I've struggled with since birth.

When I put on my little denim apron my brain says, "It's showtime!" And I know exactly what the next dozen tasks are that I'm going to roll through. Regular Amanda, out of uniform, couldn't decide between a cold brew or iced Americano, but persona Amanda is decisive, witty and somehow deadpan while being simultaneously a little warm. I'm sure that when that wig slid on over her custom wig cap that fit her mic pack, she knew it was showtime and her Dolly-ness conflated with the gig.

I am no chirpy Dolly, although her fun no-apologies personality certainly leached into my DNA in the '80s. On the day she died, I mentioned casually how cynical I'd be if it was not for her and Fred Rogers. Patron saints of Gen X—we'd be even more dead inside without them. Growing up believing money was the root of all evil doesn't really work with entrepreneurship. Dolly said both, "You can be rich in spirit, kindness, love and all those things that you can't put a dollar sign on," and also "It costs a lot of money to look this cheap." They have to live in harmony like the two wolves meme.

So with Dolly's blessing, and after seeing an Insta Reel about adding a photo of Dolly to an altar and asking to embody her abundance, creativity and fun brashness, I'm finally ready to drop that weird money trauma I've carried this far (because Dolly would want that for me). I have to go out there and make good so I can do good—and if Dolly could sell cake mix and truck stops without ever once losing herself, I figure I can sell a few carnivorous plants without losing me. **GP**

Amanda Thomsen is a funky, punky garden writer and author with her own store, Aster Gardens in Lemont, Illinois. Her store info is at [KissMyAster.com](https://kissmyaster.com), and you can follow her on Facebook, Twitter, Threads AND Instagram @KissMyAster. Email her at amanda@kissmyaster.com.