



SERIES EPISODE 1

Women In Business Leadership: Breaking Barriers

Intro: Welcome to Strategic Insights, brought to you by PrideStaff. On each episode, we bring you interviews with leading management and employment experts from across the country. Your host for Strategic Insights is Brad Smith. And now, here's Brad.

Brad Smith: Hello and welcome to another episode of Strategic Insights from PrideStaff. I'm your host, Brad Smith.

This is part one of our three-part series on Women in Business. Today we are going to talk about breaking down barriers in business leadership. Joining me on today's episode is Amy Linn, owner and strategic partner of PrideStaff North Dallas. Amy, thank you so much for joining us.

Amy Linn: Oh, I'm excited to be here, Brad.

Brad Smith: We're excited to have you. So, thank you again. Amy, I'd love to start off by talking a little bit about your current leadership role for all of those listening and watching. Give us a little bit of background about your current role and what you do day to day.

Amy Linn: Currently, I have owned my PrideStaff franchise for 23 years. We've grown this franchise to include several PrideStaff family brands. I have PrideStaff Financial for the last 15. Most recently we've added G.A. Rogers & Associates where we focus on direct hire placements in leadership roles. And we've also expanded recently with another location in downtown Dallas.

Brad Smith: Congratulations on 23 years of success and your recent growth. That's amazing.

Amy Linn: Thank you. It really seems like yesterday when we moved to Dallas to open it.

Brad Smith: I'm sure. Time flies. Looking back 23 years ago, maybe a little bit more, talk to us about how you first got started with PrideStaff. I think you have a really interesting story there.

Amy Linn: Oh my gosh. When I think back on it in retrospect, how fortunate I was to apply to PrideStaff, literally for a temporary role while I was preparing to go on to graduate school. And I had interviewed with the franchise office in Phoenix. And after several interviews, they had convinced me that a full-time role internally was the best fit for me, and they were so right. I've never looked back. I never went on to grad school. I worked in that franchise office and really staffing got in my blood.

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We worked on expanding that original flagship franchise for the PrideStaff system in the time that I was there, and we expanded from one location to two, to three. And it really was influential for me in seeing not only the inner workings of what it takes to build a business, but also on how you can really connect within a community and escalate that growth.

Brad Smith: What's so interesting to me is I hear a similar story from a lot of people who start a staffing business, whether it's a franchise or on their own, in that they didn't know or realize that they wanted to own a staffing company. They didn't even know that they wanted to get into staffing. But once they got into it and realized that they were making an impact on people's lives, they were helping people put food on the table, helping them advance their careers, helping them grow. It is an amazing job that the staffing industry does. And I commend you on helping people reach their potential.

Now, let's talk about your potential because you started as a temporary associate or coming in for a temporary interview with a staffing company. You grew by leaps and bounds over that time. So how did you transition from just working at PrideStaff to making that leap to a branch manager and then finally owning your own franchise? Could you walk us through that?

Amy Linn: Absolutely. I think that being a part of a growth company, you have access to opportunity. And PrideStaff was at the time that I joined and still is a growth company. The entrepreneurial spirit that is a part of this organization is contagious. So having not only worked for the original franchise of PrideStaff, but having had the opportunity to get to know and work with, and be mentored by the founder, the path that I took was one that isn't singular within our system.

We absolutely, I think because of that culture that has created entrepreneurial spirit as well as the growth that I had mentioned, provides a vision for what's possible. Within that framework, I did move very quickly from coming in the door, as I mentioned, seeking temporary work to a recruiting assistant to a business development person, branch manager, and then finally the opportunity to discuss opening the first franchise in the Dallas market.

And all of that happened, I have to say, not only because I expressed interest and had stated goals of following really in the footsteps of the franchise owner that I worked with, but also because there is a strong sense of mentorship within our organization as well. And I really credit those two things with the advancement that I've been able to experience.

Brad Smith: That's amazing. Now I know that you started your business in your mid-20s, I believe. Right?

Amy Linn: I was 27, yes.

Brad Smith: 27. Oh my gosh. That's amazing. So even though you had the opportunity to open a franchise, and you mentioned those mentors played a big role in that, I can imagine

there were still a lot of hurdles to overcome. Can you walk us through or describe some of the biggest challenges you faced when launching your business at just 27?

Amy Linn: Well, I think the biggest hurdle, the biggest challenge we had was funding. And at that age and the resources that were available to me, and the SBA funding, and franchising is also a challenge. So, we had to lean into our family and the resources that we had there. And I'm so grateful for the support that I had through my family, and frankly through PrideStaff Corporate in recognizing that there was an opportunity to grow a franchise in the Dallas market. But the resources needed to be simple things that many might not consider, a lease on equipment for the office, or a lease for the office, and not having the financial background to be able to qualify for those types of things at the age of 27. So really it took a village, but I'm very thankful that we were able to be provided those opportunities.

Brad Smith: Can imagine that being part of a franchise system helped there as well?

Amy Linn: Absolutely. And beginning to network within Dallas and meeting a fantastic banker that I was introduced to through the lawyer as we were working on the franchise process. He was able to look at the full picture and provide us a personal loan to start the business with. So, although it was a challenge, it also taught me so much about the financial wherewithal it takes to build a business

Brad Smith: That is an amazing hurdle to get past, but I'm sure that's just the start. So, you secured funding, you launched, but then you had to make sure that things were successful. So, talk to us a little bit about those challenges you faced in the first few years. Because I know most business failures are happening within the first five years. How did you make sure that you were successful and move the business forward?

Amy Linn: One of the things that everybody that came, it was my community as I said, that the confidence they had not only in me, but the confidence they had in a franchise model and looking at the processes that were in place that had been successful time and time again. And so, the early years, I knew all I had to do was work the model. And if I could approach every day with the knowledge and the confidence that being able to execute on the plan with all that I had to do, I think it's changing your perspective.

Instead of looking at the three year or the five-year goals it's looking at, what do I have to accomplish this quarter? And then breaking that down into daily activities. And once you're focused on the work in the moment and not the concern about three years, or five years, or 10-year goals, that's where the magic happens, I think.

Brad Smith: I love that. Now, I can imagine launching in Dallas would be a challenge today for a strong leader. But when you think about the tight-knit boys club in Dallas 20 some years ago, how did you overcome the challenge as a younger woman launching in an industry and in an area that was dominated by men at the time?

Amy Linn: I'm not going to lie; it was very intimidating. But I think there was just as many female leaders in the market as there were men. And so again, just finding an area where I

joined organizations. NAWBO, National Organization of Women Business Owners, and there I found more community and I found alike interests and there's so many more people that are willing to help than you realize.

And again, it's a shift in perspective when you're looking at the potential hurdles as opposed to the potential supporters. And I found so many of those through organizations like NAWBO, through local chambers, and then again going out into the business community and getting involved and meeting again. And it wasn't strictly females and business that were supporters. I have a number of mentors that have also been men. However, I think that leaning into that community of like-minded women in business, you're able not only to learn from them, but also to network, which is extremely important.

Brad Smith: So, for those that are listening that might be interested in launching their own business, talk to us a little bit about the importance of things like self-advocacy, of building the networks that you just mentioned, of negotiation skills. Are those the cornerstones with which you built your success?

Amy Linn: I think that in addition to the confidence. That the preparedness leads to confidence. And I think that the more that you know going into any situation, the more confident you'll be in the outcome. And so, I think anybody interested in looking at a franchise, or starting their own business, I believe strongly in doing that research upfront and connecting with people that have already walked down that path and learning from them. Connecting, as I said, with consultants that you'll need in your corner, whether that's legal, accounting, banking, you really need to have that team that can help you navigate.

And even now, I mean 23 years later, I still have some of them are the exact same team that's what I started with. But then you have that group of consultants that specialize in areas that is not your expertise, and you can utilize their experience and their network as well. So, I think it starts with being very clear on your goals and having that direction, and proceeding with a team that can help you reach them.

Brad Smith: Yeah, and surrounding yourself by the right people.

Amy Linn: Absolutely.

Brad Smith: You mentioned earlier that you surrounded yourself by several strong female leaders, several mentors. How do you support your team's growth and development?

Amy Linn: That has actually been one of my biggest surprises. In being a small business owner, I take such pleasure in developing our internal team members and working with them on their personal goals, finding out what it is that drives them so that we can tie those goals in to our business goals. The average tenure on my team right now is 10 years, and the longest tenured person on my team has been with me for 22.

I feel that in having that interest in someone else's personal goals and helping them to realize them through the vehicle of your business, creates this incredible bond. My goal and I share this with team members as they join, is helping them reach their personal goals whether it's in my business or outside of it. And so, I have great connections with people that have spent a couple of years working with us and moved on into human resource roles, into small business ownership themselves. And it's the most gratifying aspect of this entire journey.

Brad Smith: So, you're paying it forward.

Amy Linn: I'd like to think about it like that. Yes.

Brad Smith: That's amazing. Amy, this has been such a great and inspiring discussion. For those that are listening that want to embark on a similar journey, they want to get into leadership, they want to be entrepreneurs themselves, what parting words do you have? What would you recommend?

Amy Linn: I think, and I can't underscore it enough, get clear on your goals, know where you want to go. And then make sure that you have armed yourself with enough knowledge that you can have the confidence to proceed. And then surround yourself with a great team, not only the obvious team, the employees that you're going to work with every day, but also you need mentors, and you need advisors, and consultants that are going to help you along the way. You don't have to do it alone. And I think that was one of my early learns is to ask for help and ask for information.

Brad Smith: I think that's a great point. You don't have to do it alone. And if you are out there thinking that staffing or recruiting might be an opportunity that you'd like to explore, I would encourage those that are listening or watching to reach out to the PrideStaff team, talk about the franchise support that they have. And the ability to surround yourself with a proven system and people that can really help you along the way as you transition into entrepreneurship yourself.

Amy, thank you again for sharing your story. We greatly appreciate it.

Amy Linn: Thank you, Brad.

Brad Smith: Take care.

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