



SERIES EPISODE 4

Women In Business Leadership: The Next Generation of Staffing

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: Thank you so much for joining us on this special edition of PrideStaff Strategic Insights. My name's Brad Smith, and today we are continuing our special on Women in Business Leadership. I'm joined by Ana Munoz, owner and strategic partner of the PrideStaff Chicagoland W-SW office. Ana, thank you so much for joining us today.

Ana Munoz: Brad, thank you so much for having me on. I am so honored to be a part of this series.

Brad Smith: Well, I'm excited and I'm honored to have you. Ana, I know you have a very unique and interesting story about how you ended up as a partner in the business. Can you share your journey into staffing and particularly how you became involved with PrideStaff for everyone listening today?

Ana Munoz: Yeah, of course. So, I like to think that I do have a very interesting story, super unique. I have been with PrideStaff, this past February 2024 marked 14 years of me being with a company. And I actually started with PrideStaff when I was... I got started in the industry by accident really. And I think it's funny because when you talk to a lot of recruiting professionals, it's always by accident. No one ever really says I want to be in staffing. So, it's always by accident. And that's exactly what happened with me. Taking you back 14 years ago, I was 18 and I was working for a law firm and I loved it. I was working part-time in the afternoons, 1:00 to 5:00, living my best life. And my boyfriend, who's now my husband and I ended up getting pregnant. And it just kind of put a little bit of a hold on any other plans that I had because now I was going to be a mom.

And my husband was in nursing school at the time, and I needed to figure out what am I going to do because working this part-time job just wasn't going to cut it. So, I ended up going on Career Builder and finding jobs to apply to. And I found this job, it was advertised by PrideStaff and it was for an administrative assistant role. I decided that I was going to take this interview. They called me, "Hey, can you come into our office?" Our office was in Juliana at the time. "Do

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you want to interview?" Perfect. So, I was super excited about this interview. I go and the gentleman that I met with, Jason, who's still a really good friend of mine, interviewed me and at the end of the interview he said, "Okay, well, we'll call you if we have anything for you." And I ended up leaving that interview and I was like, "What the heck was that?" I clearly did not do my research on what a staffing company was.

That was my mistake. But here I am thinking, I thought I was interviewing for this administrative assistant position. What is he talking about, we'll call you if we need something? So, I ended up forgetting about that and I ended up moving on and a couple of days later he calls me back and says, "Hey, so we currently have an intern who's working in our office and they're working in the afternoons from 1:00 to 5:00. We want to offer you a position in the morning from eight to noon." And I was like, this is perfect because I can still keep my job. So of course, they weren't looking to hire anybody in their office and I was looking for an administrative assistant, but the stars just kind of aligned. And I took the job as a recruiting assistant. And I always joke that whenever you hire somebody in PrideStaff, you always get hired as a recruiting assistant.

And with this particular job, they're like, "We're going to put you as an office assistant, as a receptionist." So, I was joking that they didn't trust me enough to start recruiting right away. So, I was an office assistant, and I did that probably for about three months where I was working these two jobs. And then finally Angelo comes to me who's now my business partner, and he says, "Hey, we want to offer you a full-time position. Are you interested?" Well, I'm loyal to a fault sometimes, and I was so loyal to this law firm who was just always so good to me that I just wasn't sure. But again, I couldn't afford to not take the opportunity to invest in myself and grow because now at this point, I had a one-year-old. So, I ended up doing that. I took on the job and I think by the end of that year I was promoted to a staffing consultant. So, I moved pretty quickly within that.

Brad Smith: So, talk to me a little bit about that. So, your story is similar, and you mentioned it earlier that a lot of people that get into staffing never thought they would go into staffing. But once they're in, they absolutely love it. So, you transition from a receptionist, quickly went to recruiting assistant, and then you worked your way up. How did you eventually become a partner?

Ana Munoz: I don't know, it's kind of weird. I don't know, I ended up working as a staffing consultant probably about, at this time it would've been 2011 to 2014, 2015. And then I was promoted into a branch manager role and I did that for about two years. And then along comes the end of 2016 and Angelo and his wife had approached me, his wife Sue had approached me and said, "Hey, we're thinking of retiring. We're either going to sell or our option is to hopefully partner with somebody that's already in the business." And I had to make that decision on, okay, do I want... Mind you, I've been here since I'm 18, at this point now I'm 26. And I had to decide, okay, well, what am I going to do? Do I want to work for someone else? Should I take this leap of faith? And really with the help of my

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parents, and now at this point fiance, really said, "Hey, I think you should do it. Most people don't get this kind of opportunity."

And I did. I ended up becoming a partner in February of 2017, so seven years after I had joined as my new Justice office assistant. Now I was 50% owner of this company and Angelo and his wife Sue, that's something that they really counted on me and they really saw something in me that I didn't really see in myself to be quite honest with you. But they thought that I would be great, I would be a great partner, and we've been partners ever since.

Brad Smith: That's terrific. I can imagine that you were shocked when he first approached you with that.

Ana Munoz: I was, yeah, because I'm looking at myself like, are you sure? Me, out of all people, because he could have taken the business and he could have sold it. He could have made a lot more money. And here I have this man who really sees something and really wants to look out for me. Both him and his wife have really looked out for me, and we've gone through the trenches together. And for them to take that kind of leap of faith on me really says something about themselves, about both of them. And it's something that I don't think in this lifetime I'll ever be able to repay them for doing that.

Brad Smith: Well, I'm sure they wouldn't have taken that leap of faith unless they noticed something. So, I know that you mentioned you didn't notice that in yourself, but what do you think were some of the significant achievements or the accomplishments that led or contributed to them gaining trust and thinking about you in that perspective and inviting you to become a partner in the business?

Ana Munoz: As I mentioned earlier, I'm loyal to a fault. So, I've always been super loyal to anybody who looks out for me. I am loyal to them. And I think that was something that happened here with Angela and Sue. They've always looked out for me and my family, so it was something that I trusted them and they trusted me. When you ask that question, what do they see? I am not sure. I do suffer from imposter syndrome. I don't know what they saw, but it's clearly worked out. So, I've been very lucky.

Brad Smith: It's funny that you mentioned imposter syndrome because I have the opportunity to get on and speak with a lot of business owners, with a lot of extremely successful people. And I hear that over and over and over that at some point they fall victim to imposter syndrome, and they wonder how they were so successful or they equate it to lucky. I think it's the complete opposite. So, I think what really happens is your hard work, your dedication, make you successful. When you're faced with a challenge, you're going to overcome that. You're not looking for excuses. You're going to address that head on. You started as an owner at the young age of 26. You are a minority woman. You are a mom. Talk to us a little bit about how you actually overcame those challenges.

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Ana Munoz:

Being a first-generation Latina without a college education and a young mom, I kind of just fit all of those statistics. And I think by fitting all of those boxes that I'm supposed to be categorized in, that kind of fueled my own determination to succeed. I knew that I had to work hard and prove myself in a world where there's not a lot of opportunities like this, they're not going to come knocking at my door. So, I knew that if I had this opportunity, I was going to have to take it and make something of it. And I feel like that's exactly what I did. The pandemic brought a lot of pressure, and I think that was really the first time that I was faced with a huge challenge. So, kind of taking you back to 2008 to 2009, I wasn't around for that. The recession in '07 and '08, that wasn't something that was even on my radar. So, while I was around for, it didn't really impact me.

But then we had COVID and now as an owner, now I think at this point, 2020, I would've had three, four years in as an owner. Everything was great. And then when we got hit by COVID, I feel like that was the first time that I really had to look and say, "Oh, crap." And now I'm really looking at myself as an owner because now it's not just me. I have an entire team to lead, and their livelihoods depend on the success of my office. So, I think that was the first time that I really struggled and I was faced with a lot of challenges. We lost a lot of longstanding clients and all of 2021, 2022, those were hard, hard years. And at some point, I was really looking like, am I even going to make it out of this? I shouldn't have done this. I shouldn't have taken on the responsibility of being an owner, because again, it just goes back to it's not just me. It's not just my family.

It's Angelo and Sue who put their trust in me, but also my team depends on their jobs and what am I going to say to them if I have to close the shop? And 2021, 2022, I was really faced with those hard challenges on having to decide how I was going to proceed.

Brad Smith:

So PrideStaff is part of a franchise organization, so as being a franchise owner you get some additional support. So, while ultimately, you're in charge of your office and the success, there are some resources there. Did PrideStaff play any role in helping you to overcome of those challenges or to support you during those tough times?

Ana Munoz:

Yes, actually. And if there's one thing that I can say about PrideStaff, is they want you to succeed. They're not in the business of just opening up franchises and then just, "Hey, you're on to fend for yourself." That was something that I can look back on and say they were truly there for me. So, taking you back to 2022 was probably the worst year that I've ever had here. Just bouncing back from the pandemic, trying to find new business, it was super rough. And PrideStaff offered me the opportunity to join in their mentorship program that they had just started. And I decided, hey, this is going to be great. I am going to do it. Because I did not want to look my team in the face and say, "I did everything I could. We have to close up shop." I wasn't ready to do that.

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But if I'm being honest with you, at the end of 2022, I really thought I'm probably not going to be around by the end of 2023. But at that point, I still had a lot of go at me. So, January of 2023, they presented the opportunity to be involved in the mentorship program and I said, yes. And lucky for me, I was paired up with Amy Lynn, who I know she's been on your podcast before. And Amy Lynn is just a true success for PrideStaff. She's one of our top dogs in the industry, and I absolutely adore her. So, I knew that if I was going to take on this one-year commitment of having her as my mentor, I knew that I didn't want to disappoint her. And I really needed to take the time to listen to her and kind of bounce ideas off of her.

And honestly, that really changed the way that I saw my business. And just some of the little things that maybe I wasn't doing completely wrong but I wasn't doing all the way right, or maybe the little things that sometimes you forget to do. She was there, and I fully committed to that for a full year. And I'd like to say that because of her, and of course my team as well because my team's just amazing, I was able to take my office and we grew it by 56%, 2022 to 2023. So, I'm so proud of my team and everyone that was involved in our success last year. We still have a lot of work to do, but mind you, going from December of 2022 where I'm like, I'm not going to be around for December 2023. And then finally seeing Amy Lynn at PAC and saying, "Thank you so much. I did it. My team did it." Really, that was huge for me.

Brad Smith: That's amazing. So, at two different points in your career, you've really had mentors. Early on it was Angelo obviously, and mentoring and bringing you into the business. And then through challenging times it was Amy Lynn. For those that are struggling in their own businesses or struggling to take that next step in your career, would you suggest that they try to find a mentor like that and align themselves?

Ana Munoz: Yeah, I do. I think partnering up with people that have that same vision as you and like-minded people that truly want to see you succeed, I think really helped me. And not that I wasn't around that, but it's different when you're owning a business. And sometimes I like to think of it as when you're owning any business, you sometimes feel like you're on an island in the middle of the ocean with no one around. And no one knows what you're going through, it's just you. So, I think having that mentorship program that really helped me in being able to look at Amy and say, "Hey..." She actually went through some of the same struggles that I did. And here I'm thinking like, nope, it's just poor, little, old me. Nobody knows what I'm going through. But no, I feel like the mentorship program really, really helped. And it really helped change the way I look at how I do business for the better.

Brad Smith: And I think that's one of the biggest benefits of a franchise organization, is being able to be aligned with people that have been in the same business that you're in, struggled with some of the same challenges that you're faced with. And can share the good, the bad, and the ugly, and help prevent you from making some of the same mistakes that they had to struggle through.

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Ana Munoz: Right.

Brad Smith: Now, Ana, congratulations on that rebound. You said 56%, that's absolutely amazing to rebound from the pandemic and come out even stronger probably with more market share and really reinvent yourself, reinvent the business. Talk to us a little bit, if you would, about your future plans. What's the future look like for Anna and your local office?

Ana Munoz: So, one of the things that... I have big dreams, but one of the things that I did learn and I actively did in 2023, I had small little goals. It started with, hey, are we just better than what we were the day before? Okay, great. Are we better than what we were the week before? And I think having those small goals for my team and myself really helped, and it pushed us to just this huge growth. When you think of 56%, sometimes I still look at it like, oh, okay, it's not that great. But when I say it out loud or say it to other people, they're like, "Oh, my God, 56% from where you were. That's incredible." So, for now I just want to be better than I was the year before. I want to be better than I was yesterday, just myself and my team, my office as a whole. And I told you that 56% growth, I just want to have another year of 56% growth.

And at least for right now, I can tell you that we are on track to do if not 56, just a little bit more than that. So, I am super, super happy with how we've started our first quarter this year.

Brad Smith: I love that. Just a little bit better. So, we're shooting for 57%.

Ana Munoz: Exactly. 56 and a half, I'll take it.

Brad Smith: I love that. And I love breaking down those big monstrous goals into bite-sized pieces and getting your team onboard and really embrace that. And I think it creates a snowball effect. Once you see some little successes, it begins to compound.

Ana Munoz: Yes. And that's exactly what happened, just taking little bites out of these huge goals that we had. And even my team sometimes when we had these goals last year they were like, "Oh, I don't know that we can do that." I'm like, "Yeah, I don't know that we can do that either." But we're just going to go with it. And we, my team and I, we worked really, really hard. So, I'm extremely proud of them. And I can't sit here and say, "I did this all by myself." Because I didn't, it was really my team that just pushed through and created all of this for us in just one year.

Brad Smith: Terrific. Switching gears just a little bit, I want to talk about business overall. Lately, diversity inclusion is a big topic, and I'm sure you're seeing that in your client base right now in the companies that you work with. What do you think organizations can do to foster an environment that really supports young minority leaders? And specifically thinking about some of the challenges or

opportunities that you went through, what can companies do to foster that inclusivity?

Ana Munoz: Yeah, of course. So, as I mentioned, I'm a double minority, I'm a woman and I'm a Latina. And when I look at PrideStaff, you have these incredible SPs with these incredible backgrounds. They've had 20 years of experience. They're all college educated. I don't fit any of that. I've got PrideStaff and that's it. That's all I know. That's probably all [inaudible 00:19:44] know, is just recruiting. But one thing I can say about PrideStaff is that they are so good at being very inclusive. So, when you look at our corporate team, we have Tammi who is co-CEO, we have Christine who's our CFO, and then we have Paula Pizarro who is director of franchising. So, you have all of these women that are in these positions of power. And I think PrideStaff does a really good job of just helping whoever. If it's something that you're passionate and something that you're dedicated to, they're going to do whatever they can to make sure that you are in a position to grow, whether you're Black, white, male, female, they don't care.

As long as you're qualified and you're dedicated, they're going to do everything they can that's in their power to help you.

Brad Smith: Terrific. And I see that all across the board, and there's so much diversity and inclusion across the entire system, and they really give you the support and tools and guidance to be successful. Ana, thank you so much for sharing your journey with us. Any closing words of wisdom for other women, minorities, young parents that want to take the next step in their career, maybe even want to launch their own business?

Ana Munoz: Yeah. One of the things is surrounding yourself with like-minded people. I think that's huge. Somebody that has the same goals as you, same goals and aspirations, that'll take you very far. Educating yourself, I think knowledge is power and it will boost your confidence in making informed decisions. And celebrating your wins no matter how big or how small, recognizing your own progress is important. And then I think the last thing that I want to share with everybody is... And this is something that my husband who I swear he quotes everything to me, something that he's always shared with me is, "Fear kills more dreams than failure ever will." And I think that has resonated with me and has helped me grow my business and really take these huge leaps of faith. So, I tell everybody, dream big and dream often.

Brad Smith: I absolutely love that. And for those that are listening that want to dream big, that want to dream often, that want to get past fear, definitely reach out to the team at PrideStaff. They can help you find an amazing opportunity or even create your own opportunity for business ownership. So, Ana, thank you so much. We really appreciate it.

Ana Munoz: Thank you so much, Brad. It was an honor. Thank you so much.

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Closing:

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