

WOMEN

In Business

PRESENTING SPONSOR:



Cecelia Wakefield

HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN IN YOUR LINE OF WORK AND WHAT GOT *you* STARTED?

"So we have been doing line x since 2018. I was working for Home Depot and I didn't have a lot of potential growth at Home Depot and the company was changing. So much of it was just about online retail, and keeping the shelves stocked, and turning merchandise as quickly as possible. I was definitely ready for change. At the same time, my husband was getting ready to retire from The Coast Guard, he was going to be very young, and didn't really know what he was going to do when he retired from the Coast Guard. I had owned a small business for a hot minute when I was very young, and was really dying to be an entrepreneur again. At one point my husband mentioned owning a LINE-X, and I knew that if I could get something going that he could be a part of, I needed to take advantage of it and plant that seed. So I was I was thinking in my mind, I can do this, we can make this happen. He went on patrol for a couple of months and when he came home, I said, "Hey, how do you feel about going to Alabama and meeting these Line-X people?". So we went out and met them. The next step was to write my business plan. It took me six months to write my business plan because we didn't have a lot of capital to put up ourselves. I got help from the Small Business Development Center and I wrote what I thought was a great business plan, then Jessica looked at it and said, "This is good, but it needs work". So revision, after revision, I would write on my lunch break. When we finally got the financing for it, we got everything established, and my husband at that point was a year out from retirement. We actually opened the business in 2018 while he was still active duty and I ran everything here almost solo, I had a couple of people that would come in but for the most part, it would take me all day to do a bedliner and I'd be trying to do phones and office work at the same time. Now we're to the point where, we've got a full staff, we can do a bedliner in a couple of hours instead of taking all day. We've definitely evolved from those first days, but that's kind of where it all came about. We were just looking for a change and the automotive stuff was a hobby for my husband and my hobbies have always been business and trying new things, so I think it was a good blend for us."

WHAT IS ONE THING YOU WOULD TELL OTHER women GOING INTO YOUR LINE OF WORK?

“My advice is not going to be the “oh, find a good work life balance”, because that's like giving somebody an impossible task to solve right off the bat. There's no right or wrong way to do that because everyone's path to balance is different, but it takes time to grow into. I think that the advice that I would give somebody else going into business would be to take a look at what your strengths are, and to hire for your weaknesses. Sometimes those things aren't going to be immediately what you think that they are. When I got into business, I thought that my role was going to be my ability to communicate and build relationships with customers, and be on the sales side of things, but I had a knack for spraying. Now I do all of the custom spraying and that brings us in so much business that I can't NOT be in that role. So definitely taking some time and bringing on a team that rounds out your business. That doesn't always mean hiring staff. It could be contracting a book keeper, or identifying clear roles between you and your partner. The other advice that I would give is to really dig deep on your perseverance and self discipline, because so often when things aren't going great, it's easy to want to give up and you really can't do that. You got to have the self discipline, you got to be able to do the hard stuff when it's not fun. Lastly, don't be embarrassed to ask for help when you find an area that you're struggling in. I think there are so many businesses out there that failed in their first few years because they didn't want to show anyone that they were struggling and couldn't ask for help. So in a nutshell, build a good team of support, in whatever way that looks like for you, and be prepared to work hard!”

HOW DID YOU MANAGE POWER STRUCTURES & IMPOSTER SYNDROME EARLY IN YOUR CAREER VS. LATER IN *your* CAREER?

"I think that my personality automatically makes me capable of handling challenges in power structure, I'm definitely assertive, I like to tackle issues head on. In the Line-X world, it's very male dominated, but I just have been able to just kind of hit the ground running and tackle those things, without them being much of an issue. I will say that using the term impostor syndrome, is definitely pretty spot on. My husband is not involved in the daily operations of the business any more, he comes in mainly for big jobs and training. I'm the face of the business on the front end and on the technician side. I didn't have decades of previous experience in the automotive industry and I think one of the things that women aren't really great at is putting a good value on their time and in our industry that's the equivalent of billable hours. I wouldn't say it was something that I was able to learn really quickly. I think that if I had been able to learn it in the first year or so, our business would have been so much more successful the first few years instead of just BUSY. Being able to put the value that we deserve on the job that we're charging for was a struggle, but once we were able to sit back and look at it, we were able to make changes. Even if we don't have that 20 year background in the automotive industry to stand behind, We have invested heavily in training and have the abilities to do the job well."

TELL US A PROJECT OR ACCOMPLISHMENT IN YOUR CAREER *you* ARE MOST PROUD OF?

There's so much that we've done that I'm proud of. I could definitely tell you about some of the huge projects that we've done and some of the mobile work that we've started branching out into. But to be honest, when I think about something that I'm most proud of, it's the fact that we're finally established. I'm able to step away from work, and start to give the shop the leeway and the empowerment to operate when I'm not there. This will be my third year helping out the Warrenton high school softball program.

So that's huge as a small business owner because softball takes a lot of time. I've literally cut my days in half at this point for this spring season and we're able to do that with very little impact on the daily operation. Just knowing that the team that we've built can handle that and that I don't have to be there constantly is one of the most accomplished feelings that I have.



WHAT DO *you* WANT TO ACHEIVE NEXT?

“My kids are getting older and my son wants to do something with farming and agriculture so we've just been kind of playing around with some of those things at home to see what what interests him and where the kids could fit into a family business. This season we will be playing around with cut flowers and honey bees. It's a great stress reliever and it has nothing to do with what I do here so it's been fun! It's a big step away from LINE-X, but I think the diversity will be good for our family and future ventures.”



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LUM'S
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"Advice for women? Go for it. Do your thing. Don't hold back" - Lori Lum

"Be strong, yet willing to take chances" - Julie Lum