



# WOMEN IN BUSINESS WEDNESDAYS INTERVIEW

PATRICE TANAKA  
CHIEF JOY OFFICER  
JOYFUL PLANET INC.

## WF: How did you get your idea or concept for the business?

**PATRICE:** The idea for Joyful Planet is the result of being forced by my executive coach 18 years ago to “rethink” my life purpose when I came to her for help in the aftermath of 9/11. Like most New Yorkers and Americans, I was still reeling from the shock and horror of that day and I was also exhausted from building a successful PR agency with 12 partners over the previous 12 years and caring for a husband who had been battling a brain tumor for 16 years. I told Suzanne Levy, the executive coach, that I was depressed and unexcited and uninspired by my own life. Suzanne reassured me that she could help me, but said that first I’d needed to “rethink” my purpose in life. Over the next two weeks, I considered and rejected many possible life purpose statements. When I returned to Suzanne two weeks later I told her that my purpose was informed by the nearly 3,000 people who died on 9/11. I was haunted by the idea that these people ran out of time and probably did not accomplish what was most important to them in life because, like most of us, they banked on living long enough to do those things.

I said to Suzanne that my life purpose was simply “to choose joy, to be mindful of that joy and to share my joy with others.” No sooner did I share this life purpose that my life took off on an unexpected journey that continues to this day.

Actively living my purpose led me to finally take up ballroom dancing at age 50 – a dream since I was eight years old. Living my purpose led me to write a book, *Becoming Ginger Rogers...How Ballroom Dancing Made Me a Happier Woman, Better Partner and Smarter CEO*, to share what I learned. The lessons from ballroom dancing helped me to build my business by close partnering with others and co-founding two successively larger PR & Marketing agencies – the last was one of the “top 10” largest, independent PR firms in the U.S. and the largest, employee-owned agency with 240 employee-owners. Following my PR career, living my purpose led me to start Joyful Planet, a consultancy focused on helping individuals and organizations discover and live or “operationalize” their purpose. I’ve also written two best-selling books focused on life purpose and organizational purpose. And, today, part of sharing my joy is by supporting three non-profits that are near and dear to my heart.

Joyful Planet is my latest entrepreneurial venture and it is focused on helping individuals and organizations discover and actively live or operationalize their purpose to unleash greater success, fulfillment and joy in their personal lives, workplaces and communities.

#WBW #wfnYWBW #womensforumNY



# WOMEN IN BUSINESS WEDNESDAYS INTERVIEW

With the first PR agency I co-founded, I proved to myself the power of a “business purpose” – “to create great work, a great workplace and great communities that work.” This business purpose helped to focus and drive my colleagues and me to build an employee-owned start-up that was recognized within eight years as the “#1 Most Creative” and the #2 Best Workplace” among all PR agencies in the U.S.

My first-hand experience of the “power of purpose” in both my personal and professional life was the impetus for me starting Joyful Planet LLC.

## **WF: How do you define success?**

**PATRICE:** Success for me is about helping myself and 7.7 billion others actively live our life purpose and leverage our talent, expertise and passion in service of people and planet.

## **WF: What are some challenges that you felt uniquely affected you as a female entrepreneur?**

**PATRICE:** I can't say that I've been too challenged as a female entrepreneur in my current enterprise, Joyful Planet. Earlier in my PR & Marketing career, I experienced different challenges at each of the three agencies I co-founded. My first PR agency, PT&Co., was the result of leading 12 colleagues in a management buyback from the hot, creative ad agency, Chiat/Day, to start an employee-owned company. Eight of the 13 of us were women so I don't know that I experienced challenges specific to being a female entrepreneur in building PT&Co. My bigger challenges involved starting our agency during a recession, building it with 12 partners, and creating a national brand for our start-up to distinguish it from every other PR agency. In selling PT&Co. to a Richmond, VA-based PR agency, whose senior partners were four men, it was a near-constant reminder of being a female in business where men's voices were more often listened to and men made the decisions. When we sold that agency, CRT/tanaka, to a Minneapolis-based PR agency headed by a female CEO, which I was excited about, it posed a different challenge. The female CEO seemed to feel more comfortable with and deferred to the male executives on our leadership team.

## **WF: What was the hardest sacrifice (if any) you had to make for your business?**

**PATRICE:** I'm not sure I had to sacrifice anything important to start Joyful Planet LLC. If anything, my life pre-Joyful Planet was filled with sacrifice from the seemingly endless work of building a start-up with 12 partners, growing our agency through sale, acquisition and integration, and caring for a husband who battled a brain tumor for 17 years before he succumbed. Joyful Planet LLC is the chapter of my life focused on accomplishing what matters most to me – not to others, including colleagues and business partners. I am focused on doing what I'm passionate about, including equipping women, girls, people of color and young people with the “competitive advantage” of discovering and living their purpose to unleash greater success, fulfillment and joy in their personal lives, workplaces and communities. I'm also committed to working with “purpose-driven” organizations who are focused on helping employees be more purpose-driven in their

# WOMEN IN BUSINESS WEDNESDAYS INTERVIEW

personal and professional lives. I believe that the greatest performance and productivity comes from “purpose-driven organizations” fueled by “purpose-driven employees.”

**WF: What has been your most memorable experience since creating Joyful Planet?**

**PATRICE:** So many memorable experiences! One memorable experience was helping 100 emerging women leaders attending a Dress for Success Worldwide “Success Summit” discover their life and leadership purpose, share it with one another and be enthusiastically affirmed by their peers. I was able to work one-on-one with these Dress for Success clients to help them gain greater clarity about the work they were committed to doing and return to their communities better equipped and inspired by that knowing. I know that these 100 women left the “Success Summit” even stronger to be able to develop and implement their Community Action Projects to pay it forward and help other women achieve economic independence. Another memorable experience since starting Joyful Planet five years ago included helping newly minted MBA students attending the Net Impact Conference and committed to making a difference in the world to discover their life and leadership purpose. Other memorable experiences involved helping young professionals and people of color from organizations, including the Black PR Society, ColorComm, New York Women in Communications and the Public Relations Student Society of America (PRSSA), have greater clarity about the impact they seek to make in the world.

**WF: What are some tips that you would like to share with other women who are embarking upon the path of entrepreneurship?**

**PATRICE:** Build a “purpose-driven organization” that creates value for ALL stakeholders, including employees, customers, consumers, suppliers, shareholders and the community-at-large and commit to serving the greater good. If you do this you will give ALL stakeholders a “reason to believe” and to be proud and strong advocates for your company.