



WOMEN IN BUSINESS WEDNESDAYS INTERVIEW

LORI TAUBER MARCUS
FOUNDER
COURTYARD CONNECTIONS, LLC

WF: How did you get your idea or concept for your business, Courtyard Connections, and what inspired you?

LORI: I started Courtyard Connections after 30+ years as an executive in corporate America. I'd spent my career as an executive in wonderful public companies, like PepsiCo and Keurig Green Mountain, but I came to the realization that the role that I'd prepared for my whole career (c-suite exec in a major consumer facing company) was no longer fascinating to me.

WF: What was your key driving force to become an entrepreneur?

LORI: I never thought of myself as an entrepreneur. I thought of myself as someone who wanted to continue to work full time, but I wanted to do it in a more self-propelled way. I no longer wanted a boss, and I no longer wanted to spend all my time in one company. When I decided to leave Keurig in 2015 to spend more time with my family back in CT, I knew it was time to build out the portfolio career I'd always dreamed about – corporate board service, executive coaching and keynote speaking.

WF: Did you have any guidance or mentors? If so, who were they and how crucial were they to the development of Courtyard Connections?

LORI: I've been lucky to have mentors in my corporate career, and I've always liked the notion of 360 mentoring, where you learn from your peer network and people more junior in the organization. The help that this group gave me was to reinforce that my nonprofit board experience had prepared me well for corporate board roles, and that my natural passion for developing leaders would make me a strong executive coach. Prior to leaving Keurig, I had given a very large keynote address at the Society for Women Engineers conference, and the positive reaction from my colleagues gave me the added boost I needed to believe I could also be a valued keynote speaker.

WF: How did you develop key partnerships?

LORI: The road to create this portfolio career was anything but linear. Fortunately, I'm a huge extrovert and a natural networker, so I set up hundreds of conversations to ask people's points of view on how to get started. I tapped into the PEP alumni network, and I also found great support from Wharton Women in Leadership, and peer networks like Women's Forum and C200. With all of these connections, I learned AND I stated my intentions about what I was interested in. Not surprising, my first corporate board role came via a fellow board member in the nonprofit space, and my friend and former colleague introduced me to Crenshaw, where I coach senior corporate executives. I also said "yes" to anyone who wanted my help/advice. You can't be selfish if you're building a multi-faceted chapter like I've been building.

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WF: What do you believe are the habits that helped make you successful in your professional career and with Courtyard Connections?

LORI: I've always been a hard worker, and I lean into my towering strength of leading with humility. I built my reputation working cross functionally across the enterprise. Lucky for me, I LOVE working with others, and I'm obsessed with building positive culture and leading/development talent.

WF: What were the sacrifices you had to make, if any, to develop and sustain your business?

LORI: In this chapter of my career, I'm fortunate that I can pick and choose how I want to spend my time. I decide which corporate board roles to accept, and I choose how many coaching clients I'm able to serve. This contrasts with my 30 years in corporate America where I worked long hours, traveled extensively and sometimes worked in different geographies from where our family home was. I missed some elementary school parties for my children and didn't often get to go to the school and read stories. Fortunately, my husband and I had complementary schedules, and the years that he was traveling extensively matched up with times I had more control. And when I was traveling every week to my office in Boston or New Jersey, he had more ability to be home every evening for our children.

WF: Has your business been affected by COVID-19? If so, how was it impacted and what innovative strategies did you have to implement to adapt?

LORI: I formally got certified to do executive coaching in 2019. Interestingly, the COVID quarantine has allowed me to accelerate my experience coaching. Without the time spent traveling to various clients around the country, I was able to get much more experience more quickly in all aspects of executive coaching including onboarding, board preparation, outplacement and developmental coaching. The companies on whose boards I serve all had to make major pivots during COVID, and it's been humbling to watch the CEOs and management teams embrace a new future.

WF: What was your most memorable experience within your professional career with Courtyard Connections?

LORI: I feel very grateful that I've been able to join the boards of multiple public and private company boards, and I'm also grateful that my coaching career is thriving. That said, my most memorable experience has been to form the "Band of Sisters" with five former (women) PEP executives. We're writing a book together about women in the workplace, and we've been out speaking a bit as well. It's a wonderful complement to the board service and coaching, and I look forward to getting out sharing our learning/wisdom with leaders in Corporate America.

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WF: What is some advice that you would give to young women who are beginning their paths to entrepreneurship?

LORI: Believe in yourself and don't let the nay-sayers sap you of your energy. I serve on several advisory boards, working with founders of early-stage companies. They work tirelessly, and while they are very open to advice/coaching/help, they know when to tune out negative energy. Also, knowing how hard it is for female founders to access capital, I'd tell young entrepreneurs that asking for help is not a sign of weakness. Use all available connections (local community, University alumni networks, former colleagues, etc.) to gain access to the capital and expertise needed to launch and grow a business.

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