

Georgia's Business #410

Guest: Mary Parker President and Chief Executive Officer, All(n)1

Richard Warner

Am Richard Warner welcome. This week on Georgia's Business an award winning entrepreneur who's fast growing company provides security personel and technology to schools, malls, hospitals, even concert venues and sporting events. The company is Atlanta based All(n)1 security and the president and CEO is Mary Parker who joins us this week. How's your business doing?

Mary Parker

It is doing excellent we are very very excited about the growth pattern that we currently are in.

Richard Warner

And yet you said something I have never heard an entrepreneur say in the years we've done this show and that is I took a break and as we were growing our company we stopped trying to grow it and started trying to operate it right. You never hear that.

Mary Parker

That is something that we as business owners really should look at and I strongly recommend that for small companies who have a vision because as long as we are there everyday working in the business we actually don't see whets wrong and if we don't know what's wrong we don't know how to go about fixing those problems. So what we did in All(n)1 is that basically just backed up and said this is as far as I can go with our company operating the way that we are operating I want to learn the best best practices and processes that we can put in place now build our infrastructure and then go back and begin to look at the growth of our company.

Richard Warner

Critical processes that's what a company is all about, that is their pride and no matter what you do with your processes is who you are. What led you to do this, were there warning signs?

Mary Parker

Absolutely. The warning signs were the people turn over was just enormous my staff was beginning to get happy I'm happy. I was burned out and it's because we kept doing not repeating the same thing each time we had a concert or a start up we did it differently and instead we needed to have a model and that is what we developed those models they are in place now and now we have something to build on instead of each time we get a new client we have to go back to the drawing board and create something new and different.

Richard Warner

So relevant. How did you create that model that process what did you go through to make your business scalable?

Mary Parker

Well I went to several things. First of all I entered the GA I was selected to the GA Governors mentor protégé program of which I was assigned to the wonderful Turner Broadcasting with Rosemary Jones and that organization actually gave me a person assigned an individual to work directly with me. Pam Bruce had inside knowledge of different departments and people and processes at Turner and what we did we actually went in to all of their various departments. We went to legal went to risk management, Human resources, we even spent some time with security and so in looking at how an operation was run at an organization such as Turner Broadcasting we brought many of those practices and processes back into All(n)1 security. And from there I also realized I needed additional executive leadership training thus I went to Tuck Business School at Dartmouth I did two sessions there I eventually joined a CEO organization Vintage International where CEO's come together we learn from each other and we are taught how to actually be CEO's how to run our companies lead instead of being there hands on day to day being a part of every decision. After learning all of those things, what I did was then I began to look for the people I wanted the best people on my team, and of course I hear people say all the time we are not making enough money we don't have enough contracts to bring an executive level manger on. Well I beat the bullet. It was either I continued on as we were going and were gonna drive the company straight in to bankrupt and into failure or we begin to build our infrastructure and we could continue on because we had a great reputation and so I brought in one of Harvard's MBA's and brought him on as my chief operating officer and we now have a Vice President finance for our company, we have a directive HR, and we have a field Operations Manager. Year and a half ago we had non on these people in place.

Richard Warner

I wanna get granule. You just covered the whole ground of how to do this. When you were at Turner and your going through, your in the weeds of your company we all are, your going to Turner which went through it's own stage in the 1969 and 70 what you went through. What did you take away, what did you immediately notice as you were going through this different departments that have processes, what did you notice that they were doing?

Mary Parker

The first thing I noticed was they were building teams. Their departments were, everything was departmentalized. People had their own areas of responsibilities. Within those areas of responsibilities thy had people for example financial department they didn't have a person who knew how to go out to a security site of investigate a case or conduct Human Resources running the division. They had people with expertise in those areas.

Richard Warner

And of course it's a bigger company.

Mary Parker

It is a bigger company but smaller companies can do the same thing even if it's with one individual compile the areas of responsibilities to make it a full time responsibility. I.E one can do accounting and benefits and perhaps even payroll as one individual but if you've got that same individual doing payroll, scheduling, orientation, and Accounts receivable, accounts payables and going out to do COX client visits then they are not mastering the area of responsibilities, too spread out. In small businesses, that's what we do we do many things too long.

Richard Warner

Coz we have to.

Mary Parker

Because we have to.

Richard Warner

Did you find as you went through Turner that there was a system of accountability and I don't mean accounting I mean HR or operations or anything. Did you take away anything?

Mary Parker

Absolutely and that is the one thing when we have our people doing so many things accountability is very difficult to hold them accountable for any one thing and believe me I have learned that and my team taught that to me. They say you want this done you want that done but who do you want to do with? Well of course I started as a security officer I worked every aspect of security and I thought I had people on my team who were just like me that they could multi task and they just could do everything like i do. But that was the expectation that was far too great it was far too great so in looking at the operation at Turner I was able to now come back and say ok. Cheyna, I need you to only be responsible for HR and payroll as an example. Clarence you are the fields operations manager I don't need you going to the clients sites actually working on post I need you to make sure that everything our client both internal and external clients need that you are there to support that initiative. Greg I need you to get your arms around our entire operation. Rick now we are growing the company I need you forecasting I need you sure that we have relationships with bankers and other financial institutions that when we have a need those things are already in place . That's what Turner did.

Richard Warner

How big was your company at point when you put the breaks on the growth as you were figuring it out?

Mary Parker

We had 3 people on our management team of course because we can do so many things we looked much bigger to our clients at the time and we had probably 23 24 people in the

field. The last 3 years consecutively we have grown our company 150% and this year we are projecting anywhere from 300 to 400% of growth. And it's because we've gotten those things in place and we can measure. Before we had processed in place we couldn't measure anything.

Richard Warner

Well you assume. I think entrepreneurs tend to be benevolent and they think that if they create a wonderful environment for people and they treat them well and don't beat them up that they'll want to do a good job and that's not say you can operate a sweat shop but you assume that you care or more importantly are motivated they way you are.

Mary Parker

Well absolutely and my daughter Cheyna and she joined our company and she has probably by far taught me more about myself than anyone else because you know your children often times are very blunt with you and she has been that with me and it has been. We've had some rocky roads rocky times but overall it has helped me in terms of understanding that many other people working for the company do not have the passion that I have. It is a passion that I've had since a child I never knew that I'd own my company and certainly never dreamed that we'd be where we are now with the company. But now that they are in they are beginning to get the passion they feel they see where were going because we have things in place that they can see. They can now measure and now they can see their future being far brighter with All(n)1 Security than ever before.

Richard Warner

You said you were gonna assign roles clarify roles for key people in particular. But doesn't it have to go both ways doesn't it have to be some transparency from them back to you and your management team and how do you promote that? Nature it?

Mary Parker

Actually we meet every Monday. We have team staff meeting every Monday. During our meetings we have action items we all know our goals for the week and we come back through out the week and we come back through out the week and we do status updates and so if Clarence as an example has a big convention going on, we all come together and one thing that we learned from our last big event which was the women WBENC...conference not sure if your familiar with that. WBENC is the Women's Business National Enterprise Council. We just completed our conference here in Atlanta on the 26th of June and Clarence was responsible for that so we provided security during that event and the one thing we wanted to make sure first of all we wanted to make sure that we showcase our company in a very positive role so we provided all the various levels. We provided the regular blue uniform which is our police style and we provided the blazer which is our executive look and we also brought in our executive perfection team which are men and women in black. So in order to accomplish that we all had to come together to decide what the needs were. Identify the needs and we all work collectively to ensure that by the show date we have all our people in place, the uniforms, the training the supervisors all the client contact so we get all the project management

before the day of the event and we do that for all of our special events as well as any new start ups.

Richard Warner

You said that in the industry a 300% turn over rate is pretty much expected. Turn over is hard. How do you find the people, what's your system and your process for finding the people to fill that pipe line?

Mary Parker

Well the primary thing in finding the people is ensuring as a security company security guards company is very very competitive and in many cases clients are looking for a price.

Richard Warner

You don't want to be a commodity.

Mary Parker

You don't want to be a commodity and so as we recruit our individuals we have within our organizations identified some of the things that we need to do that we must do as a company in order to retain the best people as we've gone out to recruit them because if not it's like a revolving door. They are from one Security Company to another and once we bring people and invest in training because we know that we have a very outstanding training program so training is key supervision is key but most important is making people feel as though they are a part of the team. Money is a motivator but we found through surveys that it's not always the amount of money they are making. It's the fact that is anyone coming by my polls is anyone taking care of the client? And those are the things that we find are a contributing factor to retention.

Richard Warner

You mentioned polls. They could be anonymous or not but this are polls that allow everyone in the company to rate and rank virtually everything that your company does. You do that and you get surprised.

Mary Parker

Absolutely! Sometimes the surprises don't feel so good.

Richard Warner

Which is why you need them.

M

why you need it. Because again going back to one who has a passion for the things I do as I do is so easy to get off track, it's so easy to continue to move forward in a direction that is your vision when we don't take time and we don't step back some times enough to include the whole team for the vision of the company and if we don't do that we are just operating in a tunnel.

Richard Warner

Mary, how did you afford this COO that I would imagine came with a fairly hefty price tag.

Mary Parker

Yes sir! He came with a very hefty price tag although again it was at a time that I absolutely had to bring Greg on. as I indicated earlier greg is a Harvard MBA, he is our chief operating officer. I couldn't go any further. I had reached my limits and it was either bring someone on now or I was faced with the option of closing our doors either by choice or perhaps even medical reasons. It was just that bad at the time.

Richard Warner

Medical reasons. The stress of operating a business that is on your shoulders almost entirely will kill you.

Mary Parker

Yes, and not only but not having the internal network of people that now have that could bounce things off. With the CEO membership group the Vistage group there are people that we can talk to all the time about issues we can post our issues and we get feed back from our colleagues in reference to whatever the issues are that we are talking about.

Richard Warner

Vistage is worth going to for a minute. It's an organization of CEO's that do not compete so in other words if the people I think 8 or 10 in your group you can't do business with each other you don't compete with each other and you wind up with this group of people you can just really let down your guard. And what I learned when going through it was how similar the problems were no matter what the industry was.

Mary Parker

That's exactly the truth. When I went there it took me about a year to realize that I had to fess up to where I was as business owners we don't want people to know the things that we don't know.

Richard Warner

Or the things that are going really wrong.

Mary Parker

Absolutely and that's how it was in my life, was making a decision to change. Are we gonna continue forward or am I going to stay here am I going to pretend or am I just going to take everything off. And I could do that with that team, with my coach, our chair Rita McMackeen was just an absolute jewel. My chapter my mates the members of our chapter they were phenomenal.

Richard Warner

What did they say? Did they beat you up?

Mary Parker

Actually I escaped pretty well. Because I don't know if it was because I was one of the two women in the group or what but I think they eventually learned that I was pretty tough and I really wanted that tough advice I wanted to know where they saw me as a leader. How did they see me as a leader and what advice did they have to offer. But before they could do that I had to open up and let them know where I was and the scariest thing for me by far was our financials. I didn't understand how to use our financial statements as a management tool. I hadn't taken the time to establish an operating budget so many things I didn't do because I didn't know how to do that I was now afraid to try to do because I thought it would be exposing myself I didn't want people to know. But I was comfortable within that group I was able to go in and say ok I don't know what my costs of goods are I don't know this I don't know that no I do not know what our gross margins are I don't know what our profit margins are. This are things I need to learn.

Richard Warner

Chances are many if not most around that table were in the same place.

Mary Parker

They were in the same place when they entered that group and the one thing that group wanted to focus and insure were that the members understood their financials their marketing plan their brand how they were pricing all of that and so that was crucial. And to bring that encompass all those things, the Governors Mentor Protégé, the education at Dartmouth, along with CEO membership I believe today and I can truly that I am truly a CEO.

Richard Warner

Rewinding you were in Fortune 500 America General Motors correct?

Mary Parker

Yes, yes.

Richard Warner

And what other big company?

Mary Parker

Airborne express.

Richard Warner

You worked for the World Congress Center?

Mary Parker

I worked for the Georgia Dome, I worked for the Georgia World Congress Center and the great thing about that is that we are now security providers at the Georgia World Congress Center. We got a big show going on over there now where I've got an access of 8 men and women working today.

Richard Warner

And what was this seminal event that had Mary go OK I quit or I got fired or what was the thing that caused you to create All(n)1?

Mary Parker

Actually it was in 1991 I was Director of Security at Roger Penske Enterprise which Roger Penske bought the diesel division from General Motors where I'd grown up or my career was and I had a career path. At the time I didn't think I knew anything but security and the company began to do job sharing and there was a man working in HR that they decided to switch careers. I went to HR with absolutely no HR background. He came into security as director of security with absolutely no security experience. I took exception to that and I said to them one or two things would happen either I would be reassigned back to Director of security with that organization or I'd pursue directorship somewhere else and then finally I said or I would start my own security company. The light bulb came on why not why not and I began to talk to some of my colleagues in fact I had a very good friend who lived in Atlanta at the time and we actually started this is my second company. I started another firm in '92 with a good friend of mine and in 2000 I left my company and decided we wanted to go female owned because that placed us in a position of being the only Nationally Certified female whose providing a full line of security services which include background checks, security personnel, and security Technology where we install the security systems.

Richard Warner

Does the fact that you own the company and run the company I mean there is no glass ceiling?

Mary Parker

There is a glass ceiling. There is a glass ceiling because well no, there is not a glass ceiling. I have finally reached a point in my life where there is no glass ceiling.

Richard Warner

Ya but you can't quit because there is no one to quit to.

Mary Parker

I can't quit because there is no one to quit to however, and I retract that because now I am building a legacy. I'm building a legacy for my family. This is the first company within our family that is noted within our history and I don't want it to be like so many other small businesses start ups. They start up just to keep working until they are ready to retire. I don't want to do that. I have a daughter who is working in the organization, I have a brother who's working in the organization, and I have a 15 year old granddaughter who's already said that she will run the company during the next generation. And it was so funny because within the security industry it's not a lot of women within the security industry first of all in executive level but certainly not a lot of women who own their own security company so she's very excited to think that this company can go three generations being female owned.

Richard Warner

And that's where usually it jumps the tracks is in that 3rd generation. So if you can instill that at this age your chances of making it at a continual company are much greater. If you go to ALL (N)One security, Mary's company there is a section in there I thought it was really interesting there were pieces of advice for protecting yourself that weren't the usual run of the mills security advice that would hear. So let's go. Am traveling alone what are some of the pointers I need to remember?

Mary Parker

One of the things you definitely want to remember is in selecting your hotels you want a hotel that has a lobby not those hotels that you go in get registered now you got to come back outside and enter your room from the parking lot. Not a good thing for travelers because people know community people know whose traveling and that's one of the things your going to attack.

Richard Warner

High-rise hotel?

Mary Parker

High-rise hotels. Know where your exits are, make sure that someone else knows where you are and has your room number. Make sure that cell phones, one of the most unsafe things people do not understand this happening everywhere today is the cell phone. We are talking and giving so much information publicly people are just listening to their conversations. Getting in elevators, make sure that if your getting in a elevator especially women, if you get on an elevator and you are not comfortable if there is only one other person on the elevator, don't go to the floor where your room is. Get off on another floor, let the person who is on the elevator go on and then call the elevator back and then get on there. But if you ever get on an elevator and you are uncomfortable do not remain on that elevator with the individual. Do not use stair wells and make sure always make sure you know where the exits are.

Richard Warner

Mary Parker, President and CEO of ALL(N)1 security in Atlanta. Wonderful, I can go another hour. Thanks so much for being with us.

Mary Parker

Thank you so much this has been wonderful.

Richard Warner

And thank you for watching you can catch a reply of this show in Atlanta.