

Writing Samples: Long Form

Nancy Zurbuchen, <https://www.linkedin.com/in/nancyzurbuchen/>

Process: I interviewed each individual and pulled out an interesting message, experience (such as overcoming hardship), or piece of advice that would appeal to the target audience (women business owners.) The tone is personal, in a conversational style, and therefore first names were used in the narrative.

The content was used full length with photos / company logos added in the organization's website, "Featured Member" section. It was edited for use in the email newsletter, using the first paragraph and a MORE link. For social media, alerts with links were used.

Below are 2 examples of different lengths. Word counts are indicated.

271 word count

Meet Liz Lasater of Red Arrow Logistics in Issaquah, WA

"The difference of one; one person making a change can transform a life." This not only reflects the business philosophy of Red Arrow Logistics, it is also founder Liz Lasater's personal words to live by. Ten years ago, she left her boss in disgust, convinced that "surely there's a place in this world for an honest businessperson." With the founding of Red Arrow Logistics, Liz has undoubtedly proven that there is.

Red Arrow Logistics is a global freight forwarder and logistics provider, specializing in cargo that is high value, time sensitive, or has complex requirements. The company is active in 189 countries, and is focused on high tech, consumer goods, life sciences, renewable energy, public works, and aerospace clients. In 2013, Arrow Logistics achieved a milestone when it became a TSA-approved Indirect Air Carrier, which required the company to undergo extensive auditing for security compliance measures. "This enables us to work directly with the airlines to move air freight more efficiently and at better rates than before," Liz says. Customers include many of the largest corporations on the Fortune 500 list, the Department of Defense, and multiple other government entities.

Company growth was organic and steady for 6 years, and then Liz acquired 3 companies to gain geographic competitiveness. At each level of growth, Liz observes that having WBE Certification was an important factor. "The company got WBE certified early on, and I found it would open doors for me. I don't lead with it, but it is the icing on the cake for any purchasing agent with diversity spend goals. I find their reactions to be very positive," she says.

577 word count

Meet Elizabeth (Liz) Pecha-Poelker of PrintFlex Graphics, Inc. in St. Louis, MO

Growing up in a family where entrepreneurship was a normal way of life was the backdrop for Liz Pecha-Poelker's leap into business ownership: she started PrintFlex Graphics, Inc. with her father and another owner in 1995. She had previously worked for a different company her father also owned, and some years earlier Dad had wisely suggested that she gain experience outside the family business, which she did. "I thought I wanted to be a social worker, but Dad said, 'you're personable, you should try sales,'" Liz recalls. "So, I did, and it really clicked for me." Then she returned as managing partner and worked with her father for 10 years until his death.

In 2003, Liz closed the offset printing side of the company due to market forces making it less profitable. She and the original partner reorganized PrintFlex and she became the majority owner and CEO. A re-focused PrintFlex now served a segment of the printing industry that had less competition and a growing base: printing specialized labels for the food industry. Examples include tear-off, Save Now stickers on orange juice, mini recipe booklets stuck to the side of a liqueur bottle, and cross-branding coupons like Buy Lay's Chips and Get a Kraft Dip. "We decided to focus on this segment of labels because the printing is quite difficult to do, so there weren't a lot of printers at that time willing to take on the headaches," Lis says, "For instance, we can't use the same adhesives on a pizza box and on a cold beer." The paper stock for the label, the type of inks used, the choice of adhesive, the material the label is sticking to, and the environment it will be in (such as frozen temperatures) – all combine to make every project variable. Obviously, the company nailed it early on, and has been in a growth mode ever since.

Under Liz's leadership, the growth has been dramatic: from \$3.8M and 19 employees in 2005, to \$8M and 32 employees in 2014. PrintFlex Graphics, Inc. won the INC. 5000 fastest growth award for 6 straight years (2006-2011), a feat quite difficult for manufacturers to achieve. The SBA also recognized PrintFlex Graphics as the Regional SBA Team of the Year Award for financial stability during the recession, strength of employee benefit plans, and growth in sales. When asked how growth of this level is achieved, Liz says that among the many contributing factors like quality and customer service, she has never lost sight of how important it is to continually develop the sales force.

More important than the growth data, though, is profitability. "In 2012 we were able to retire old debt, which allowed us to invest in purchasing a large building next door. It was far cheaper than moving," she says, "and we were able to expand what we offer our clients into turn-key label solutions." The company now offers machine rental and servicing for machines that apply the label in-plant at their client's locations.

PrintFlex Graphics obtained WBE Certification after responding to their corporate clients who were asking them for it. “We publicize our WBE Certification on our website, and it is an element of our getting a foot-in-the-door,” Liz relates, “I’ve also found that reaching out to interact with other women in the industry is really helpful, and for me this recently happened at a national conference when I met two women from Ohio and Pennsylvania. I suspect we’ll keep in touch.”

898 word count:

Meet Carla Squatrito of Carla’s Pasta, Inc., in South Windsor, CT

Carla Squatrito recalls moving from Italy to the USA in 1968 and how marvelous it was – for the first time – to eat spaghetti and meatballs. “It was a revelation for me to come from my grandmother’s family restaurant in Italy and to experience what the Italians were doing with food here,” she says. “I had never eaten meatballs that weren’t fried, and I had never seen dried herbs.” From that Ah-Ha moment, Carla began to lay the groundwork for what would become Carla’s Pasta, Inc., a company that currently employs 160 people in manufacturing food products.

With the aid of an old 1930s pasta-making machine that could crank out one pound of pasta per minute, and a good mechanic who could make it work, Carla’s Pasta, Inc. was born in 1978. The company produced fresh pasta, red sauce, and a new taste sensation at the time: basil pesto. A bonus was Carla’s husband, who had an extensive garden that provided her with fresh herbs, radicchio, and greens with which to experiment.

Initially Carla sold her fresh pasta and sauces to restaurants and the local grocers, and soon she began to import Italian products (Italian tuna, artichokes, porcini mushrooms) that were not readily available in America but were in demand due to the large number of Italian immigrants. By 1978, Carla opened an 1800 square foot retail store and added gelato, Italian ices, minestrone, and gnocchi – all of which were fairly new to American palates.

Carla has never stopped trying new things. “One time, I told my husband we were having tortellini for dinner, and he says, ‘What’s that?’ And I said, ‘It’s what coming out of our new tortellini machine, two tortellini at a time. You’ll like it’ and he did.” Over the years, the company has developed, tested, and produced a tremendous amount of food items, but key to Carla’s success is sensing when to pull the plug on some items. At one time they produced linguine in 19 flavors, but about 4 years ago recognized that because good pasta products were now readily available from the big importers, linguine and spaghetti were no longer the mainstay items for Carla’s Pasta. The company no longer offers those items, but now produces a wide range of fresh frozen stuffed pastas, such as tortellini, manicotti, and 19 flavors of raviolis. Carla’s newest accomplishment: a microwaveable line of pastas. The distribution that started locally is now national and international.

Carla's spirited tenacity has served her well in the business world as she navigated through the challenges of growing her company. "Learning to deal with the USDA & FDA's rules and regulations really brought home to me what would be required to take the company to the next level," she recalls, "Food manufacturing is a complicated, delicate thing; there are no short-cuts. We were desperate for more space and updated equipment, but I kept wondering how we were going to pay for it." The expansion of sales was the solution!

In 2002 Carla's Pasta built 38,000 square feet of office and plant space, and in 6 months doubled the company's production. Then, over the next 12 years, continued to grow and invest yet again in new space and new equipment. Today, the company occupies 100,000 square feet, and the production is state-of-the-art. The food is made, frozen, packed, and packaged without a human hand directly touching it. "It has been a long road," Carla says, "and at this point it's all about quality control – temperatures, percentages and so on. We work around the clock." The original 1930s pasta machine is still on premises, as an antique display but also as a reminder.

The company's 160 employees represent 21 nationalities, and the flags from those countries are on display in the break room. Also on display is a wall of photos recognizing the long-term employees who have been with the company 5, 10, 20 years. "It is a very alive kind of place to work, a different style of relationships. It is impressive to see people who come and stay, buy a house, grow into a community. Without them, it's just a building," Carla proudly reports, "You cannot imagine how grateful I am to the people who have put their all into this company."

Carla considers her company's WBE Certification from NWBOC to be a significant document to present to all of their customers, most especially the national customers. "We were first certified in 2003; it was an intense process, but worth it in the end," Carla recalls. The government and many corporations have vendor programs that are meant to encourage minority and women owned business participation. In 2014, Carla received the silver Eclipse Award for Outstanding Company Culture – Manufacturing from NWBOC. This award is on prominent display in the conference room, testifying we are a woman owned and operated company.

For Carla, it is still fun. Her sons are in the business in sales and production, right after college. But she also has five young granddaughters that come together several times a year to make pasta by hand. "I'm trying to pass on the tradition," Carla laughs. "If they have an interest, it's nice to think about leaving something for them that will be challenging but fulfilling, that running a business makes you mad and happy at the same time. A complicated and happy life because you survived all the troubles."