

Paluch proves her leadership skills in male-dominated industry

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Most business owners have a difficult time admitting their weaknesses.

But for Krystyna Paluch, the ability to acknowledge that it is impossible to be an expert in everything has been the key to her success.

Paluch realized this truth after she was unexpectedly forced to take over as CEO of Phoenix Manufacturing Inc. in 2009, following the untimely death of her husband, who founded the company two decades earlier.

"I was kind of thrown into this position," Paluch said. "Very early on I knew I needed to surround myself with knowledgeable people in the industry."

Since that time Paluch has successfully led the Enfield-based aerospace components manufacturer. However, she is quick to point out her success would not be possible without the strong team standing beside her.

Glenn Ford, who was hired last year to serve as Phoenix's president, said Paluch's leadership ultimately led to the company's ability to flourish during a transition that could have resulted in its demise.

"Most people would have sold the company at that point in time and forgot about the folks who worked at the business; not Krysts," Ford said.

According to Ford, Paluch decided to reach out to a key retired business leader for advice regarding how to sustain the company. Together, the pair grew a thriving business that today is well-regarded in the aerospace industry.

"She knew who to hire, and she followed the old adage: 'Hire people who are smarter than you are,'" Ford said. "Her greatest contribution was to understand the intricacies of contracts as well as her financial acumen."

Paluch readily acknowledges that running a business is not an easy task. Therefore, it is critically important to pick and choose the tasks that one is best at, and delegate the rest, she said.

"It's okay to give some of the responsibility to someone that is more talented than you," Paluch said.

Ford praised Paluch for her flexibility and adaptability.

"She's very adaptable to the ever-changing situations that occur in a volatile market," Ford said.

Growing footprint, workforce

During her tenure, Paluch has made substantial strides in the company's growth. Under her leadership, Phoenix has built strong partnerships with companies such as United Technologies



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Corp., Parker Aerospace and Pratt & Whitney. Most recently, Phoenix was awarded a significant long-term contract with UTC Aerospace Systems.

Phoenix's annual revenue has reached as high as \$17.5 million and recently dipped to last year's low of \$13 million, according to Ford.

"We anticipate sustained annual revenue growth starting in 2018 based on customer and product portfolio adjustments," Ford said.

Paluch has also steadily increased the size of the firm, including its facility and employee base. Phoenix currently employs a workforce of 57, an increase of 18 employees since

Paluch took over in 2009. In addition, Phoenix previously operated out of a 28,000-square-foot building, but relocated in 2017 to a 114,000-square-foot, state-of-the-art facility.

Paluch said she also recognizes the importance of maintaining close communication with her team in order to ensure high production standards and quality-control measures are accomplished.

"I attend daily meetings with the managers on the production floor to listen to the challenges they have and try to address problems and resolve issues together," Paluch said.

Another important aspect of Paluch's team-building activities is her commitment to grooming several key employees for their eventual ownership of the firm.

"It is a family business," Paluch said. "I have two children and they are very much interested in taking over and keeping the business moving forward."

Paluch acknowledged that being a woman in a male-dominated field has presented its share of challenges. However, she has not allowed that to deter her from success as a business leader.

Krystyna Paluch

CEO

Phoenix Manufacturing Inc.

What legacy do you want to leave after your career is over?

In running a family business the legacy is for my children to continue running the business with the same integrity and passion their father had when he started the company 29 years ago and I have continued for the last nine years.

Staying dedicated to the industry, adhering to their personal values and having compassion and understanding for their employees is a key.

What are your keys to maintaining work/life balance?

Managing work and life doesn't come easy for business owners. All things related to the business can play on a constant loop in my head. It can be difficult to turn that off. I find occupying my mind with other activities helps control that. I literally include them in my calendar and stay true to it. Electronically disconnecting for the weekend is challenging but possible; I very seldom check my emails on weekends.

When planning longer time off I find the best practice is to buy an airplane ticket. No matter how busy I am at work, I find myself making that flight every time. There is something about that boarding time that makes it all possible.

"I've always moved forward with my head held high," she said. "Don't let them know how much you sweat. You are in the same boat; you are equal to them."

Paluch has also encountered a constant need to remain competitive in an industry that involves extremely complex and evolving technology.

Paluch explained that Phoenix uses a robotic technology system consisting of four machining centers attached to a robot that feeds and removes parts from each of the four centers.

"The machines run by themselves once they are loaded with raw material and will run 24/7 with minimal attention from the operator, but that operator needs to be qualified," Paluch said.

Paluch attributes Phoenix's success to the company's commitment to continually investing in new technology and retaining talented employees.

"We have to stay competitive, and we do that by innovation and change," she said. "All of that is in our everyday discussions; how can we build it faster but retain the quality because we can't cut corners in this industry."