

WOMEN ON THE MOVE— 'EVERY DAY I LEARN SOMETHING NEW'

This is the latest in our series of profiles on women in the linen, uniform and facility services industry. For June, we profile Rosa Vasquez, general manager for Prudential Overall Supply, Milpitas, CA. This series was organized in cooperation with TRSA's Women in Textile Services Committee.

How and when did you get into this industry?

I started my career in this industry 26 years ago with Aramark Cleanroom Services. I was hired temporarily to fill the position of a family member who needed to take some time off for a family emergency. My sister-in-law had already been working for Aramark for approximately four years at the time. The production manager who hired me became a great mentor and after two weeks on the job I was promoted to the front office where I started to learn the ins and outs of the cleanroom industry. I spent 16 years with Aramark and held various positions. I left the industry for about four years to spend more time with my kids. In 2008 I joined Prudential Cleanroom Services as an account executive (sales) and after five years I was promoted to assistant general manager. In 2015 I decided to transfer to our industrial division in order to continue learning all that this industry has to offer. In June of 2015, I was promoted to general manager of our Milpitas industrial facility and I have been here ever since.

What's the most rewarding aspect of your job?

Seeing how my team comes together during difficult times to make it happen. I have been in several facilities as a manager and in all facilities my teams have been ready and willing to be challenged. This makes every aspect of the job that much more rewarding, knowing that my teams will step up to the plate, learn and challenge themselves in order to make a difference.

What's the biggest challenge/opportunity you've faced in our industry and how did you overcome it?

The challenge I faced early on didn't necessarily have to do with the industry itself, but rather the management I reported to. When you have management turnover, every manager wants to come in and get rid of everyone on the team. I went through approximately 14 general managers in my career and that was always the challenge, having to prove myself. When I look back, yes it was a challenge then but the outcome was superior. I learned so much once I pushed through all of the political agendas and it only solidified my career. I worked twice as hard to prove that I was strong enough, smart enough, and that I had the grit to make it in this male-dominated industry.

What's your favorite work-related app and how does it help you?

I don't necessarily have a specific app. I usually navigate through various sites to find insight on the industry, along with magazines that are geared to the laundry industry.



ABOVE: Rosa Vasquez of Prudential Overall Supply, Milpitas, CA, joined the industry in the midst of a family emergency, but stayed on and has advanced into management at Prudential Overall Supply, where she serves as general manager for the Milpitas plant. She advises other women seeking success in textile services to learn the production side of the business, seek out mentors and focus on getting the job done.

Who has been most influential on your career development and what did that person do that made a difference?

Early on, I had many mentors who I learned a great deal from, but the one person who has been very influential in recent years has been Chris Welch, VP of industrial operations at Prudential Overall Supply. When you have someone who believes in you and challenges you to be the best you can be, you never want to disappoint that person. Chris has been instrumental in challenging my ideas as well as supporting changes that may not always be the best but you never know until you try. He always makes it a point to encourage me when the going gets tough and celebrates the wins by

EDITOR'S NOTE: If you know of a woman in textile services who would make a good profile for this publication (self-referrals included), please contact TRSA's Salita Jones at sjones@trsa.org.

acknowledging them during roundtable meetings or via e-mail.

Looking forward, what do you see as your biggest challenges?

Being in Northern California, the biggest challenge I face is staffing. I don't see it getting any better in the next 12 months. We are located in Silicon Valley, where everyone is pretty much some type of engineer and that makes it difficult to hire. I know I am not the only one with this struggle. I have spoken to some of my competitors and they are going through the same struggles as I am. The positive side to this challenge is that we cross-train our entire team so that we aren't limited to specific job functions and that allows us the freedom to move our team members around. Cross-training everyone, including the management team, has been key to our success. Everyone on my team, including my managers have a hands-on mindset that encourages our production team when we are pulling through during holiday schedules or when staffing becomes a little challenging. This is how teams win: We pull together to get the job done.

Do you see this industry as having opportunities for women?

I feel that this industry has plenty of opportunities for women. I can tell you that dealing with dirty laundry is not a glamorous job, and it can absolutely turn anyone away. If the women who enter this industry can overlook the fact that it's dirty laundry and challenge themselves to make a difference in this male-dominated industry, there is no limit to the success we can have. When I joined the industrial division, someone described different scenarios of what I would find during soil pickup and I was a little shocked. When I went on route I had two choices 1) change my mind about this industry and leave or 2) change my mindset and overlook the obvious and just get the job done. I encourage more women to join this industry and make a difference.

You're in management; how would advise other women who want to move up?

Learn the operations side as much as you can, even if that means actually trying to do the job in order to understand it. In my current position as a general manager, I was hands-on while I was learning the production floor. I needed to understand why we do things the way we do in order for me to coach and develop my team. I learned the cleanroom division and felt that if I were going to be successful in the industrial division I needed to fully understand the job functions. For all you women who shy away from operations, I'd say to you that the core of this industry is to understand the operations side in order to continue your career toward the executive level.

Any advice for young professionals?

Be patient. Give this industry a chance. It's not glamorous, but if you stay in it

you'll find that there are many career opportunities here. Many executives have moved up through ranks, where years ago they hired on as CSRs and now they're running the company. The young professionals have to come in with an open mind and explore the possibilities. This industry will challenge you and in some ways force you to get creative.

If I could do it all over again, I'd...

I don't think I'd change anything about how I started in this industry. I wasn't looking to join this industry—it found me. I'm fortunate to have worked for a great company early on, where they were very supportive of my career, while I was raising two amazing boys. I then joined Prudential Overall Supply and quickly felt that this also was a great company to work for. They absolutely make you feel like you are family, and they have given me every tool possible to succeed. Every day I learn something new and that's what makes this industry fun. **TS**



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