

Thriving in Construction | 04 – Making a Career Leap into the Construction Space with Purisima Gonzales

INTRO

Have you ever wondered what it is like to be the Accounting Manager of a construction company? Well, our guest in today's episode of the Thriving in Construction, the Podcast is Lunacon Construction Group Accounting Manager, Miss Purisima Gonzales. She's responsible for overseeing teams of accountants working towards Lunacon's financial goals. And in addition, she oversees the financial performance of all construction projects. Well, I guess it is time to hear the story. So let's all of us welcome Purisima Gonzales, we are so happy to have you in our show today. Thank you for being here.

Patricia Bonilla: Purisima Gonzales, welcome to the Thriving in Construction, the Podcast. Puri, tell us... can I call you Puri?

Purisima Gonzales: Of course.

Patricia: Puri, what brings you to construction? Tell people about you, your background, you know, what happened in your life before you got into construction? You know, what gets you to this industry? And what makes you stay?

Purisima: Okay, in my case, it is so very unique, I would say, because I come from the banking industry, banking, I used to handle a portfolio from Brazil. I was required because of that to speak Portuguese. And the reason why I ended up in West [inaudible] with the First Union, back in the early 90s, I would say when the banking industry collapse, Southeast Bank, which was the institution where I used to work, and therefore, the First Union, at the same time took over international department. It happens to be that there was a Portuguese construction company that was looking for a person that would have banking experience, but at the same time, they would be able to speak their language. And it happens to be a in this case, you know, I said the position, and this is how I end up with in construction. In my life, I would have never thought that I was going to be a change, like from day to night. But it happened.

Patricia: And we'll be talking about adapting to change. And you know, when some industries collapse, it opens opportunities in somewhere else. Because what you develop in one industry, the expertise, and the skills that you develop, they are transferable. So you're saying that what is the skill that the banking industry gave you, and you're grateful for, that allow you in times of crisis to divert into construction, what's the main skill?

Purisima: The main skill that they we're looking for it was because in my position since I was in the international division, my position was to bring big business to United States. It was also including loans, including personal banking itself, it was privatized so

therefore, the since the industry adopted at that time the construction industry It was like a booming to the contrary to the banking industry. They were looking for someone that has loan experience and at the same time, like I said, they speak the language. So for them that was like a plus or a must. And that's how I ended in the construction industry.

Patricia: And what happened later what happened later after did you change jobs?

Purísima: When I started with, I should say the name of the company, but anyways it [inaudible] and when I started, I started like from scratch. So I started on site. And for me, being an international private banker and to become a just like a regular employee in the construction industry for me was the change, a challenge but at the same time, I wouldn't change because a broad challenges, a broad goals are prompt for me to change in a positive way. So it was great. That you said the construction industry is a completely different as the banking industry, but at the same time for me being a woman, which by the way, at that time I was the only one in the whole company.

Patricia: The only woman in the whole company? And how many employees just to give perspective?

Purísima: It was 100 and something.

Patricia: 100 and something employees and you were only woman? What was that about? What was that like?

Purísima: It was at the beginning, it was, it was a challenge, because I guess, since there was a men per se work, to see a woman with a hat and boots in the middle of the site, it was kind of odd. But again...

Patricia: Wait, let me ask you something. What kind of personality, qualities in you that you need to bring out in order to, you know, making in that world in the field, because it's important to note that this is she's come from the banking industry, but she didn't go to accounting, right? She went to the field with a hardhat, and boots, to work with men, you know, in the site. So I want to understand your role. But I also want to understand when you see a.. you're in this in this space, and there's men, who you need to become? How did the process transforming?

Purísima: It gives you an opportunity to prove yourself, It gives you an opportunity to be optimistic, to be disciplined with what you're doing, they expect you to because you're a woman. They expect more out of you.

Patricia: Really? And I they expect more out of you.

Purísima: Yes, I would say so. Being the first woman in that in that group. It gives me an opportunity to grow myself.

Patricia: A woman can do anything, every CEO, I see it brings you emotions.

Purissima: This even though being a woman in that men industry, it gives you the opportunity to prove like I said that a woman can do anything.

Patricia: Tell me, when you think about that time, what are you thinking? What was the challenge? What was that moment where you saw that? You could do anything? And maybe before you didn't weren't so sure. But you saw, you know, what I can do is... Can you give an example?

Purissima: I am I would say like, for example, when I started, I started, like I said I was with the loan experience. So that was the report that they were looking for me. And at the same time, they were looking for operations manager per se, for that specific project. It was a \$40 million project. So it was a huge responsibility at the same time. But I do remember saying to myself, if he can do it, so can I.

Patricia: So and tell me what was that job like? What was the responsibility that you have on that \$40 million project? Yeah, you have never been into a \$40 million job.

Purissima: And by the way, other than the banking side, it was for me, it was a completely work perspective. I was doing non-project management. But it was great, because I had to deal with the closing of the payments requisition, not of the accounting point side, but of the operational side. So I was the liaison between the owners and the project managers per se. So with the company and the owners.

Patricia: When did you realized that you were good? I'm good at this. I'm good at this shit. Where do you Where do you realized?

Purissima: I have always feel confident that no matter what comes in your path, I think you can do it. I think you put yourself goals in life. And I think that they have to be realistic. I mean, I you cannot say I want to I want to go to the moon because everyone I happen to know in order for you to be known if you have millions or millions of dollars, or you are an astronaut or whatever if that is a possibility. But if I had to be young, I want to go to the moon that's not realistic. So you have to put in a you have to put past you have to put goals that you can that are reachable, and that's what...

Patricia: SMART goals, attainable, right specific measure. And what else helped you when you were in this field that it's what help you thrive because I would say that in that space, you were thriving, right? Because you grow not they inspire you? So what help you thrive in the space of construction?

Purissima: I saw myself like a good sample for women in after that, I have seen that the other women in the construction industry, they have grown incredibly, in order for me to say that I was the first woman in that specific a company. That was a huge challenge in there. After that, I see women coming more and more and more into the construction industry. Now you see, brilliant managers, you see the accounting, you see it every single field in the construction industry, there is a woman.

Patricia: How does that make you feel?

Purísima: Wonderful?

Patricia: In what sense?

Purísima: It makes you feel proud to be a woman.

Patricia: So in our practical purposes, you were a pioneer? What kind of qualities do you have as a woman that allowed you to do this? Because you know, the, the reality is that even today, there's only 10% of women in construction, only 10. So as much work as there is out there, what's preventing a ton of women to enter the space of construction. Why?

Purísima: You know that in the construction industry? In being me, a baby boomer. They call it the construction industry goes around the baby boomers, and therefore all the baby boomers are retiring. So right now is a good time for us baby boomers to rely that all new blood fresh blood in that's when it comes to be persistent. That's when it comes like you are a mentor, I will say that then how can I be persistent in what you do? Try to help others like the new generation to see that we can do it bring all your experience in, transfer those to...

Patricia: That's beautiful because in that's giving back. And you mentioned with a lot of passion, the word discipline and the word persistence. I want to know the word discipline is huge. What can you speak about discipline in construction. What has been disciplined done for you, or it could do for someone else?

Purísima: I could discipline as one of my first [inaudible]. That's because if you have discipline, you can bring that into goals. If you have discipline, if you set your goal, you will make them happen. If you don't have discipline and you don't have persistence, your goals no matter what they will not be reached. So discipline for me is imperative.

Patricia: In only in your job or also in construction or also in your personal life?

Purísima: In everything.

Patricia: Puri, tell me why can we do to bring more women into the construction space?

Purísima: To let them know that the construction industry is not for men anymore? It's like the when you prefer the construction, what do you picture? You picture a tarp, in curb wood, who is wearing it? A man. Then you will never think back 20 years ago, a woman with a hat and a pair of shoes. You say woman will be in an office with a computer. They're not in the onsite, person. So right now we have wonderful architects, engineers, accountants are related to the construction industry. And they're doing a wonderful job. Sometimes it ends up putting them down. But I feel that we should give ourselves

Patricia: What could we do in this industry better in construction to open the space for women?

I know, you know, we can let them know but what could we do? What could the industry do to open the space more for women to come?

Purissima: Like I said before, this is an industry that is being a men industry for a long time. In my case, since I am almost about to retire, I would say to those don't still know exactly where do I want to go, which profession? What if, and I'm sure that women's at that time would say computer science, but they would never say construction, not at least this. So by saying that, I would say, being a baby boomer and I see you not a baby boomer. But you are trying to be a major, you are trying to bring the best of us, and I am [inaudible]. So how can I influence this young generations [inaudible] that still at this point was not quite sure whether she fit into the construction industry and say, Yes, you can.

Patricia: Yes, you can. And yes, we will.

Purissima: In reality, I mean, I could be if I could be of any help, I could make change your mind,

Patricia: Or change your mind, or I feel so, so this is a good example. If you could influence somebody like Yvette, and she's going to be here soon. So stay tuned. If you could influence somebody like her that came from another industry. She doesn't have the construction experience. She's not an engineer, or an architect yet she is in the construction space at this point.

And you're, like you said, a baby boomer, which, by the way, you don't look like many baby boomers. So you have a still a long time to go. But I really appreciate that you're thinking about giving back and fulfilling for, you know, as a fulfillment end, if you could tell me that three things that the construction industry can do for her even though her background is not in anything to do with construction.

Actually, she comes from retail, and in the Coronavirus, affected a lot the retail industry. So if retail people are listening, and what would you be able to tell her three things that you can say and you can influence to convince her to be in this space?

Purissima: Oh, that's a good one, you know, that I came from banking completely were a completely different role. And I agree. So because you were in retail, that doesn't mean that you cannot be influenced, so that you reach out to the roles in the ecosystem.

Patricia: And what can construction do for her and for her son? And for her life? How long have you been in construction?

Purissima: Almost 30 years.

Patricia: 30 years. So 30 years, fast forward? 30 years from now, what could construction do for Yvette.

Purísima: Yvette has a very strong personality and that's what we need. We need a woman with narrative with persistence.

Patricia: So character, persistence, and strong personality. So I just want to translate this into people, I don't want to assume. What is a strong personality for you?

Purísima: Strong personality is the one that set goal.

Patricia: Goals. In the end, they are persistent. If I can summarize Purísima for you, it's about being disciplined, and being setting goals, and be persistent until you get it done. That's the summary of yours. Is that true?

Purísima: 100 percent.

Patricia: Purísima, I thank you very much. I know you needed to leave, I know you have, you're taking care of your mom. And these are the things that we do as women. we do a really good job. We even though we're in a very demanding industry that wants to finish on time and on budget, and you cannot leave stuff for later on. We also go home and change the hardhat to another hat.

We become the spouse we become the grandmother, the mother we become the caretaker and I really want to close right now. Really, really going to close. Tell me about what is it like to raise a child Your son is now, and you are a grandmother? So what is it to raise your child as a single woman because you also became a single woman considering you are how you are that you're determined to get things done.

And you don't like to be mediocre. You have a project that demands work from you, and right hours of work because you are committed to a goal. You're not committed to hours, five hours, eight hours a day, you're committed to an outcome and until it's not done, she said you don't stop.

But you also have a son. And you also have a mother that is that you've taken care of, she's ill but you also want to do that work. Well. You want to be a good mother. You want to do everything good. How is it that you have been able to juggle between both worlds?

Purísima: Because as I said, it's You have to structure yourself. And if you have discipline, everything will come to this.

Patricia: How do you get disciplined, Purísima? Some people are not born with that in them.

Purissima: Discipline is something that you achieve. Discipline is something that you will put in your goal. And until you reach that goal, you need to keep persistence to open. And discipline is everything.

Patricia: Has construction done good for you financially?

Purissima: Yes, indeed.

Patricia: So do you think people can make money in this world?

Purissima: You never, you can never stop burying yourself. Just like every other profession, you need to keep on getting knowledge, keep on studying. I mean, not because you get a degree, you got to stop. You need to move on with technology to move on with level.

Patricia: And that's very commendable from you, I congratulate you because you said yourself, I'm not calling your age. But you said you're a baby boomer, and you're still keeping up with technology and forcing yourself to learn even though you know, it's, I remember, you know, we were talking about it. I love technology, and technology loves me. So I congratulate you a lot. And you are an example for me. And I really believe you know a lot about construction. So I would love to talk more about how do you make this happen? How are you successful in a project? Well, we can do that in another episode. Thank you very much.

Purissima: Thank you for giving me the opportunity.

OUTRO

Thank you for listening to Thriving in Construction, the Podcast with Patricia Bonilla. If you enjoy this episode and you would like to help support the podcast, please share it with others and leave a rating or review on Apple Podcast, Spotify, or wherever you get your podcast. If you have any suggestions or any related topic you would like us to tackle in our future episodes, feel free to reach Patricia by sending her a message through the website, anchor.fm/thrivinginconstruction or find her on LinkedIn.

Thanks again. We'll see you next week, here in Thriving in Construction, the Podcast.

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