

Thriving in Construction | 02 – The Power of Self-Confidence in Women of Construction with Lourdes Martin Rosa

INTRO

Today's guest in the Thriving in Construction, the Podcast, is Miami, Florida native who was born to immigrant parents. She's Lourdes Martin Rosa, President of Government Business Solutions (GBS). GBS is dedicated to providing excellent services ranging from program management solutions to supporting the government and commercial clients' project performance needs. It is interesting to know that the opportunity for Lourdes to get into the government contracting came about because she was hired by the US Chamber of Commerce as a US Commercial rep to launch an initiative to help Hispanic businesses realize their potential in the government contracting. She traveled across the nation to speak on this; sharing the small businesses administration's programs and resources that many businesses were not aware of. Because of her success, she launched Government Business Solutions in 2003, intended to increase awareness and outreach to small businesses on the importance of growing their businesses in the federal sector. Welcome, Lourdes Martin Rosa.

Patricia Bonilla: Lourdes, thank you for being here today. Welcome to the Thriving in Construction, the Podcast. Can you tell us or allow the listeners to learn about you, where you're coming from? Tell me about Lourdes Martin Rosa, and also Government Business Solutions.

Lourdes Martin Rosa: Well, thank you so much for having me. It's delightful to be here, and your inaugural podcast. And I'm so excited and proud of you. We go back so many years, almost 15 years that we have been together, I want to tell you that I started my journey as an immigrant to this country. I came at a very young age, and my parents always had an initial focus of not really obtaining a handout that was not the focus back in the 60s. So therefore, both of my parents really went into the work field immediately with my brother and I having to kind of fend for ourselves.

You know, I remember being you know, eight or nine years old and having a tea. And when I got home from school, opening the door and having to go in and having to help my mom cook the rice and always be a team as a family. And as I grew up in inner city schools, and was challenged by many, and had many obstacles, in my growth in my teenage years, I always thought of challenges as opportunities.

So one of the most important aspects that my parents instilled in me is that if you're a good person, good things will always come to you. So regardless of the challenges and the obstacles that we had, I always remember to always be a good person and do good to people and kind of pray for those that weren't as good, because obviously, they had many problems.

So moving forward, I always had an entrepreneurship mentality. Even through high school, I was president of many clubs and associations, and then got into college, and then actually grew myself through there. I got into sales and marketing and started as working for the Miami Herald and in advertising. And they trained me on the importance of success is having the initial drive, and really seeing that you were successful at an early age.

Patricia: What age are you talking about?

Lourdes: I'm talking about 21, 22 years old.

Patricia: So back then at 21. What was success? What is that the picture of success looks like?

Lourdes: So I remember a ninth grader, the publication sending me off to a training, I was the youngest, if 20 people that were being trained, many people in the room were over the age, and they had been working with Miami greater publications, and Miami Herald, Sun Sentinel. All different types of newspapers. And I was the newbie, so I'm here to learn.

And I thought we were going to all learn about selling, you know, classified advertising selling, you're talking about the world of computers right now. So it was very different, for probably about 1986, more or less. And I will tell you that the instructor made such an impact in my life, because the front of the training was not really training us about sales, but more the power of persuasion. And the power of persuasion basically comes and stems from your leadership, your value and your character.

So if you betray yourself in a leadership role, with value in everything that you do, and you maintain a solid, strong character, you pretty much will be successful at almost everything that you do. So to this day, I still instill that. And when I started my own firm, Government Business Solutions in 2003, I started with those things, three characteristics. So leadership, value, and character.

Patricia: Now, thank you for sharing that and putting that into perspective. Because those three learnings, teachings, they actually, you took them to your business 20 years later. So but back then when you were 21, because I'm hoping some of younger generations is listening to us, when he said that leadership, character and value, how did he explain that? What did that mean? How did he... you just the word itself doesn't mean much without a background? So what did that mean when you heard that? How do you translate this three words

Lourdes: What's funny is that the training that we obtained didn't really teach us about more sales, more about the power of persuasion. So he went around with a hat and different things that we had to take out of that hat. So could be a topic of pen, it could be

eraser, it could be notebook, it could be anything could be chair, we basically had one minute, and we were being videotaped, and then we're going to pull back the video.

So here I am kind of even keeled with all the experienced folks. Although they had more salesmanship, they didn't really know how to sell red, or they didn't know how to sell erasers. So my word was eraser. So I started thinking of all the characteristics of an eraser. I mean, what could be the best thing that you could have to erase mistakes that you make? So I kind of did my presentation towards that. And everyone applauded me in the room. And even though I was the youngest one, it gave me the sense of comfort, that I could go out and sell my journey in advertising that I was doing.

Patricia: So but when you did this presentation because everything is about, you know, you have success in mind, you want to be applauded, and you wanted to be to nail, right? What was your outcome, but my word is eraser and I have to come up with everything that has to do with eraser. What was the outcome that you have? How did you come up with this idea to correlate erasers in other areas of life.

Lourdes: So one, we, everyone's a salesperson. And I always think I always talk to business owners and business owners take on a salesperson, I have a salesperson, no, you are always selling your business. So the way that I portrayed the eraser at the time was a problem solver. And the eraser was going to help solve problems that no one else could do. And I was empowered with this eraser. So I kind of took that mentality.

And then I also got to envision a great speaker called Zig Ziglar. And Zig Ziglar, always used to say, don't become sales people become farmers, because farmers seed and grow. So therefore, always become problem solvers, in everything that you do even construction. If someone is coming to you, because they want to construct a building, they want to construct their house, you are going to be the person that is going to solve their problem and give them the comfort that they need to be able to feel that they could put not only finances into this, but that you have the capabilities to fulfill the requirement. And that is the way that the character that I built for myself as a problem solver.

In my opportunities as a public speaker, I always talk to business owners and say, you know, what? Value proposition are you bringing to the table? And if you can't answer that question, then you need to go back and re-evaluate your business and then go into a presentation as I'm presenting a value. And this is what I am doing for this client to be able to get them from point A to point B and be better.

Patricia: Of course. So value proposition, what problem are you solving? What's the problem I knew was a company are solving right there. Obviously, many people as you said, don't know this, the answer to this question when they started the business. They don't really understand they just want to be an entrepreneur, but they haven't really thought deeply as to what is the problem that I'm solving for the client. And in your case, fast forward now from that eraser experience so beautifully expressed, you decide to go into business for yourself. What was the problem that you saw in that you said, you know what I can solve that problem for the client?

Lourdes: In many cases, and I had the opportunity to work in different industries, I worked in the travel industry, I worked in advertising and marketing, but always in sales, and also worked as architectural representative for a large title company. In every aspect, I always said, let's go back to our previous clients reevaluating the service that we did. And always use that either get if they don't need any more of your service or product, you could always get a referral from them. And many of the companies that I worked for, didn't see that as an added value. They just saw as go get new business, go get new business. And that's one of the things that propelled me to also become an entrepreneur, because I felt that I could do it better to create that client base.

That when you create that client base, now, it's like becoming the farm, you're planting the seeds, and you're watching them grow. So the client base will now not only that if they need your product or service, but they will also refer you. And if you come back to them, and you know, even if it's a Christmas card, even if it's to say hello, or how are you doing or to get together for lunch, or whatever it may be even just a phone call, it's just that they show that you care, because people want to buy from people that they trust, and people that they know that show a little bit of gratitude that because they always say no one wants to be sold.

So if you're a salesperson, you're just going there, and you're just selling a product and goodbye and going to the next one and selling the product and goodbye. And, and I remember Zig Ziglar used to always say that you have to become a farmer, and you have to plant the seeds. And then you have to grow. And I believe that then the branches of the tree that was planted is become is what helps you grow as a business.

Because as a business owner, I don't advertise at all. But luckily, they got I've been very successful by word of mouth. And I think that by word of mouth is the branches that are stemming from the seeds that we plant as we begin to grow. So as an entrepreneur, I think that many of us need to establish resources and relationships that are going to help us become successful farmers as business owners.

Patricia: So I love this, you've had [inaudible], obviously, as a mentor for forever. You've seen as a good influencer in your life, right? But I'm still not clear as to what's the problem? I know you said that I you could do it better, I can serve the client better, with my help we can farm in grow more. What is the problem that you said my business, my competitive advantage is this. And this is exactly... how did you articulate that when you were at the beginning of your journey in your business? How would you articulate this is the problem I saw. How would you say that?

Lourdes: I would say that as women, we have an advantage, because we're nurturers by nature. So therefore, whenever we have a client, I view it as a problem that I'm trying to solve, and for the nurture that client. So I view the requirements of my client and the needs of my clients. And then when I always sit down with them, I say, in a perfect world, what would you like to see? What would you like to see the outcome of this project that we're going to do to get? Chosen to envision yourself as you're going into it

already now that you're going to be selected? They will usually tell you, what's the objective? What do you want to get out of this? So I would put that objective into the solution that I'm going to provide to the client.

Patricia: So are you someone that basically worked in multiple industries and multiple... What was your expertise then?

Lourdes: So in my expertise has always been sales, marketing.

Patricia: So Government Business Solutions, goes sales and marketing for clients?

Lourdes: I didn't [inaudible] sales and marketing and also helped prepare the foundation for businesses to be able to propel their business and government contracts. So it was nice of me to see the fruits of my labor, because businesses will come back to me after a year of training, that they will hire my services and say thank you so much with what I learned, I was able to land a \$10 million contract or a \$2 million contract or \$300,000.

And then I would always say remember what you're going to do with that plan. You're going to continue to find that client and you're going to have that client that refer you other business or see where you grow within that agency or see where you grow within that large corporation.

And that actually helped me become successful because when my daughter's graduated from high school both open to college I said, Okay, now it is my turn to obtain a certification that I will be able to grow in the government sector myself, and basically happen with all hands and feet and do this at 150%. Because as you know, as a government contractor, you literally don't be there, from the beginning to be able to grow your business.

Patricia: So you have clients that you help grow their business, right millions of dollars, but you didn't do that with its federal alone, right? You You're not in a federal government grow their business. So what was your contribution, and the problem that you solve for federal agency?

Lourdes: So the agencies, a lot of people don't know that the federal government, they don't make manufacturer or service, anything, all they print is money. But every agency needs businesses in order to function. In other words, we used to have a going funny thing that said, every person that you saw in the government agency wearing a suit with a professional tie, as a contractor, everyone that you saw pretty much wearing a polo and nice, comfortable pants, and khakis was a federal worker.

It was so and that's actually the way that it is many of the there's over \$600 billion that the federal government spends is the largest procure of contracts in the world, and 23% of that must go to small business. So keeping that in mind, I said, they must go small business, its mandates congressional mandate. So therefore, I'm going to help

government agencies meet that goal. But also I'm going to teach small businesses how to prepare the foundation for their for their company to have a leadership role, and helping the agencies fulfill the requirements.

Because when you're helping an agency, even if it's just staff, let's say something as simple, which is not very simple, but just staffing, those staffers are basically performing a mission for that agency, just as, for example, a construction. If you are building an immigration customs enforcement office, you are fulfilling something that is going to have a mission for the public.

And there's a form of gratitude, in that when you're done with this work as to say. Congress is speaking about something and as appropriate and more money into a topic that you have just opened up for them to realize that we have a shortage. So it's kind of making that difference and what I loved and making the difference that you and I did back in 2008 and 2009, which is when we were fighting for equal rights for women, business contractors, women did not have a seat at the table. We did not have there was procurement for women.

And it took about three or four years of freely speaking around the country and empowering other women to realize that they have a growth opportunity with the federal government. Because 5% is set aside small business \$600 billion, and then 5%, that was set aside for small business, but there wasn't a set aside program. So luckily, it was President Obama that actually enforced the program.

And in February of 2011, it was put into law. It wasn't until May or June, until they awarded the first ever woman set aside contracts. But I have to say that we had a small integral part in that in trying to empower other women throughout the United States. I think it was it was very good, because we all couldn't have done it by ourselves.

Patricia: Right. And there's obviously a lot of great women that have contributed to this process. And the women that have gone out there and started their companies and proven that they can, you know, they can lead a company and they can get the job done as a woman basis. And they are not upfront. But they are actually doing the work. They are the proof that was needed so the Congress would hear and listen. We need to set aside some work for women, because a lot of times they're left behind and not allow you're competing. You're not really competing, competing at the same level. Right? It happens a lot in construction still today.

Lourdes: Exactly. And we are at a disadvantage when it comes to almost in every field when it comes to government contracting. Because in government contracting many folks feel that Oh, it's a male dominated sector, which still is, but they got just two years ago, we met the woman on goal, you know, a 5%.

So it's taken many years for us to pave the way for other women entrepreneurs to step up and say, you know, these women work really hard and other organizations work really hard to be able to open up that path for us. Let's go ahead and become

entrepreneurs. Let's go ahead and you know, get a seat at the table. Let's go ahead and do this and demonstrate the leadership and the value that these other women did for us to be in the moment. Because I will tell you, I don't want a lot of competition. But 5% of \$600 billion is a lot of money.

Patricia: Oh, yeah, we only need a few. Now, let me ask you something, because you're talking about a very controversial, my opinion topic. And I don't know, you know, this is going to be maybe they're going to cut it and cut it. But when I started the company, back then, you know, we had a recession, and the government decided to ignore the economy and focus on small businesses, because it's true small business, I felt that you know, that small businesses empower the economy.

In my experience, we in 2010, we all of a sudden, all these marketing efforts that we have done paid off, and I have to hire 26 people in one month, because all the work happened at the same time, you know, I had a ton of work that big, but all the multiple effort. It's just like, everything happens at one. And that was great. You know, all the money that we were flowing through us, we were hiring people we had to do couldn't do it alone. But one day, I receive a phone call around the same time about a contract that was going to be awarded to a large company. And they needed a women to fulfill that women, a percentage of women go right in...

Lourdes: The Rule of Two, at least two or more women owned businesses.

Patricia: Well, no, actually, these large company needed to award 5% to a woman that was in their contract, that was in their subcontract. So they call me and this guy that I knew from another company, he says, Listen, I, we need to award to a woman, one guy, what do you want? I'm like, how much want to be?

And I was very nice. And I said, well give me I don't know, send me the contract, send me the contract, send me the drawing, send me the specs, so that we can properly go through the process and price the job. You know, this was a big job. They wanted us to be in charge a lot for sale over a dryer, right interior finishes. And the guy says, No, we just want to know how much do you want? I'm like, What? Like, what do you mean? And so like, yeah, what percentage do you want, I'm like, I don't do that.

You know, you talk about gratitude, right? I felt so grateful. Because the government in this amazing event also, as you can, I don't have an accent. But you know, I felt so grateful the country gave me an opportunity, right? And I cannot turn back and say... to me that prostitution, I don't know another word. It's prostitution, you're defeating the purpose of the system. And if I sell, or if I just the idea of the certifications, or setting aside work for a woman or for you know, any, any entity, right? That they serve the disable, the idea comes on is not to, for you to give me a percentage, I'm going to stay home and just give me some money. That's not the point.

The point here is for you to grow your company to perform the work and to perform the work. So through that process, you're going to grow your company, hire more people,

and so on and so forth. And so what do you think about that? Have we improved on that? Because I've had some challenges myself, in competing with a large company that is a male dominated company that associated themselves with a woman, and then she's not doing anything, but they got the job.

And, you know, how do you think we can fade away from that? What do we need to tell women that are they are capable, but maybe they don't think they are? What do we need to tell women that instead of doing something like that, what do we need to tell them? How do we inspire them? How do we empower them?

Lourdes: One of the most important things that as women business owners that we need to do is that we need to understand that we are not masters of everything, but what we are masters of is running an organization and having the leadership skills needed to be able to lead a team.

So in present, I was presented with a challenge where I basically had my first \$2.5 million large million dollar contract with the federal government and I was an ad certified firm, which means your small Disadvantaged Business and I received an AA sole source award actually didn't receive I earned it because I fought really hard to obtain that contract.

I knew that I had the capabilities I knew that I could perform. It was for project management, mission support and human capital. That is nothing of what I know, as a person. So I knew that I could build a team. And I've already spoken with so many people that I would interject into my company. And I know that I could help them also have the same vision that I had, and have a growth opportunity.

So I did go after it. And then I basically hired these folks. Now, me being a control freak that I am, I grabbed my daughter's textbook from college and started studying a little bit about human capital, just to understand it. But then we felt confident enough in the people that I had hired, that had the full potential to be able to read the contract, we not only received over \$6 million in doing that contract, because we got it for five more years. But we also received an award of achievement at the end of the work.

And not only that, but we strengthened the agency, we helped the agency fulfill its human capital Mission Support requirements, which allows their employees to now work better as people on the agency's mission, which really helps America, Because we need Department of Homeland Security, basically there to help secure the homeland. And if we could help the employees do their job better, then guess what? It's going to make America a better place.

Patricia: Yeah, that's one of the things that I really loved about doing federal work. And I do. When the first time I entered a base, an army corps, actually was a cape Canaveral. The first time I went to do work, because we had already obtained a contract. And actually, no, I take it back. We were marketing that 80s, and we go there for our presentation. And I and I think this is a power of claiming things, right?

I remember telling my partner I said, Wow, it'd be amazing to work here. I am not in the military, more grateful for what they do. But they would this would be my way to contribute my way because they need facilities. And that's what we know how to do it in construction. And you don't know this, but we got the presentation left.

And two hours later, as we were driving back to Miami, they call, and they say you got the contract. Oh, that's wonderful. Yeah, that's what happened. But you're right. They there's an amazing team in supporting the mission that a client has. And that can happen in all areas.

Lourdes: You know, we lose sight as government contractors, when you go and you see all of these contracts that are coming out whether they be \$10,000 to \$10 million. All of them are performing a function for the agency, whether it be the smallest to the largest, and we lose sight of that we lose sight of the fact that we are helping this agency fulfill its mission and its requirements.

But not only that, is that we also have to understand that we, as business owners have to adapt to change, there is not a bigger change that what all businesses have encounter in 2020. And adapting to change just doesn't mean just Coronavirus. But it also means when you contract has ended. When you've lost that contract, due to budgeting, or when you have a \$5 million client outside of the budget is supposed. Or an employee that all of a sudden is taken to a large corporation or that pretty much stolen from you.

So, you know, then you know, of course, but then they realize that that employee wasn't really performing all of the work. It was the team members of the corporation that actually made it successful, not the one person but is a challenging time. And I remember against Zig Ziglar said one thing that says, "it's not the strongest that succeed, but it's the ones that are adaptable." So we all have to learn to adapt to change. Because if there's one thing that we could count on is change. And it is the way that we adapt to it.

So when I lost my \$5 million contracts, I basically went in sat with all the employees and said, Okay, this is happening. You all have families, you all have mortgages to pay, car payments to pay, student loans to pay. I have again, as a woman business owner, that need nurturing mentality, I have an obligation to keep you on here. I do not want to let you all go I had to adjust some hours, but did not they all kept all of their benefits, health benefits, and they all just adjusted hours until we were able to adapt to the change and obtain another client to be able to fulfill on that other client that we lost.

And that is important because as a business owner, you are the driving force of the company. Anyone could easily go ahead, you know, get a salary and obtain that salary. And each time as a business owner, I would be watching people speak. And I would say any politician. And I would say, yes, you could say that very easily because you have a

nice, hefty calm, progression salary. I'm here trying to build the foundation of a business and entrepreneur, I need to get something in order to attain this.

But as I said, when you start to portray yourself as a leader, and you build your character, and value and everything that you present, in every single contract that we have done, we always would do a presentation at the end of the contract. And we would show especially with government agency, the value of the taxpayer dollar, because at the end of the day, we are all paying for this.

So we had to say this was the value that was brought back to the agency, and how well the agency is going to be functioning as a result of it. And your case is in construction, your value that you're presenting to the agency is the military base, and the facilities of our heroes that are now going to be sleeping in a more comfortable facility that is going to be much better for them.

So everything that we do in life at least because I would say 80% of my businesses is in the government contracting. It is a fulfillment. And I think that is the way that I've always portrayed my business.

Patricia: So what was what is fulfilling for you?

Lourdes: I think fulfillment for me is basically knowing that I am solving a problem for either my clients, or also when I do consulting, that small business is grasping and learning and moving forward in the learnings that I'm doing and the trainings that I am doing. And knowing that someone else is excelling as a result of my work, or my team's work is extremely important.

One of the nicest things that I did, as a former American Express advisor in government contracting was when I was speaking across the nation, I would bump into women from Chicago, from Utah, from North Carolina everywhere. And they would say I heard you speak, and I never could get because the government would explain it not in layman's terms. In other words, in government terms, the way that they were trained to explain it, but when you're a mover and a shaker and actually a talker and a doer, because not only was I doing business in the federal government, but I was also helping women understand that I could do it and immigrate to this country just the same way you are, you could do it too. And you could grow in the government contract.

Patricia: Absolutely. And let me ask you say how can someone grow in government contracting?

Lourdes: Well, the important thing is, is that government contracting is not for everyone.

Patricia: What are the three things people need to consider to grow in government contracting?

Lourdes: Number one thing that they need to consider is that can't be their only field of revenue. Because as a business owner, the life cycle of when you start doing business with the federal government for the first time, and you land, that first government contract is about 18 months.

So you obviously will need a client in order to help pay for all the expenses before. So what I did was, I did a lot of trainings to small businesses and also had some large corporations that asked me to train their sales reps into going into the field of government contracting. And also had the opportunity to be a speaker for American Express in a very long and helped them launch this government contracting program.

So that was my side thing while I was basically growing my business in the federal sector. But you have to understand that the federal government is a phenomenal client, because they pay every 15 days. But it is a client that requires a lot of reports of background and background checks.

And it is a client that you will be able to grow in. But you only have that one chance to make it work to make it well or make it wrong if you fail, which we all have failed as a government contractor is very difficult to overcome that. And it can be that they can be done. And there are so many agencies Jesus, there's over 63,000 agencies and sub agencies in the entire nation.

Patricia: So before you go there, because everything you're saying is so valuable for a lot of people. Before you go there. I'd like people to really understand three things they want to consider before going into, you know, to growing in the government contracting, you said and this is beautiful. You talked about 18-month cell cycle. So they have to have another source of revenue, right? So then the second thing that you will think.

Lourdes: The second thing is don't do what I did, I did the shotgun approach to kill a mosquito. I said, Okay, I'm an expert salesperson and marketer, I am basically just going to market myself to every single agency, and I'm going to sit back, and I am going to watch it grow. Well, that's it at work, I basically got crickets, after sending 1000s of emails, nothing.

So you have to target your audience. For example, I like to target agencies that I know aren't going to have their budgets cut, Department of Defense, Department of Homeland Security, no congressional your likes to cut the Homeland Security's budget. So these are agencies that you know, and that also know how to work with small business, every agency has a small business office. And I would say the third thing is also understanding who you need to meet with at that agency, because every agency has a small business specialists or a small business office at every level.

So from the top level in DC down to the federal agency that's locally in your office in your in your state, and understanding that those are the gatekeepers, those are the ones that are going to help you understand that maybe this agency is the one you want to go to. For example, we were talking earlier about the infrastructure bill, how it was

just passed, and it's in the billions of dollars, where you have an agency like Department of Transportation, that is probably going to be a good place for you to channel a lot of your work, Department of Homeland Security. So it's knowing where to go. Also a lot of people don't know this, but usually around the month of between October and December, depending on the year, Congress puts out the budget.

And it's not something you want to read because it's 3000 pages. But you put out the... you download this budget, and you know how we all do Command F for find. And you basically try and find your field construction, find out everywhere that more money has been appropriated to an agency in construction, or whether if it's IT services, or if it's human capital services, or whatever it may be advertising and marketing, try to do Command F and try find everywhere that goes.

Now that may be a nice job done for you to do. But maybe for an intern or somebody that's an assistant, you're off suit is going to be very time consuming, but at least they could channel and create that target as to those top three agencies that are going to be appropriated the most money to fulfill that requirement. Because remember, even if it's a \$3 billion project, let's say like infrastructure, really, they stuffed 23% that must go to small business. So if you're there in the forefront, and you know, you've built a solid foundation, as a trusted small business, they're going to want to do business with you.

Patricia: Of course, and what do you say? What's your experience with women in construction? I know, you know, several successful women in this industry. And I know you've helped some of them, like me, navigating in the boardroom. I mean, you and I have had a lot of fun doing this. It's nice to go back in life. I remember, you know how you were 18, 20 years old trying to get something done. And you saw it, you thought it was so impossible. How am I going to do this? And we're here today, but how you've seen women in construction? What would you say? First? I want to know, do you think this is a hard industry for women? The second thing I want to know is do you think we need more women in this industry?

Lourdes: We definitely do. And women in construction need to reach out to the resources that they have, the resources that you're building, the resources that have already been established for women in construction. And as women we need to work together to strengthen because there's strength in numbers, as always there is. So as women I mean, the strength and numbers are what helps the woman's procurement for program people learn and to strengthen the program throughout the years and establish the resources and establish relationships with each other.

We don't know how to work well with each other as our male counterparts do. My husband being a retired firefighter and we say there are 16 men in a fire station, and they all work well together. Well you put two women in a fire station of the week killing each other. So it's we need to work together and learn how to build on each other's resources.

For example, you may have the expertise in horizontal construction, civil engineering, but then another construction firm is an expert in vertical construction and Mechanical Engineering. Well learn to work together because a design build contract has all of those components. And by teaming and working together, you fulfill the requirement of the agency, and you get to win that work, and start building performance for you. I think that we need to work more together, and we need to also come together by utilizing resources.

Patricia: So what do you think about women in construction, the once you know they have been successful. What has made them successful?

Lourdes: Nothing is scary to speak up. Because when you're in a room, and of course, there is 90 million room and there is one or two women in construction. They end to not ask questions and just basically listen to the questions asked around them. Excuse me, you are referring to let say site-ism.

In construction, you're going to go to see a site where they are going to show you, "Oh, this is what we are going to do." Many of them prefer not to speak up. Whereas women may have more knowledge, because we have to work harder, we have to be brighter, and we have to be better prepared for the main than our male counterpart. Because our male counterpart is pretty comfortable that they were going to see that content.

Patricia: So, why is that? If you are more prepared and qualified, why wouldn't you speak up? Why would that happen?

Lourdes: I think lack of confidence.

Patricia: What is confidence?

Lourdes: I think women need to feel more comfortable and gain the confidence that they need because... I remember I was once in a site visit. And this is in [inaudible] airport. I was just there as a consultant for the construction prime that I was on. She basically understands the agency, knew the purpose of the agency, the mission, [inaudible], and everything.

But the program manager is not with her. We're just, "We're just going to do this." Where she spoke up and basically said, "If I provide a sustainable product that will going to help the environment, and that is going to also be conducive to air quality, would that be better opportunity? And it also, is going to say [inaudible] dollars." Well she spoke on at and she got the contract. Because she had the confidence to change the normal. It's not just putting up dry wall, it was doing something different.

Patricia: Very well said. Now, she's a rare breed. What do you think allow her to have the confidence to speak up? Because you said women don't speak up when they have to sometimes. What is the ingredient this woman has in her that she speaks her mind, she knows. She has a confidence. What made this woman confident?

Lourdes: I think would be the confidence that she did her homework. That she understood the agency. [inaudible] that is at that time the president has spoken and put up an Executive Order to all government agencies that they work to the U.S. sustainable products over any other products. And that they should choose that sustainable product if given the opportunities to do over any other product that is not going to prove for the environment. So she was the only one that knew that information. So you're talking about knowledge, you're talking about working with Congress and trying to understand the things that they are putting out on the news that they point up.

That is the advantage that she had. And everyone else basically lifted her and said, "Well, I don't know other male construction firm said, "I don't know what you're talking about." She basically [inaudible] me and I said, "Well, maybe you should tag the Executive Order 13P04 which just comes out that they need to purchase all sustainable products. And that was [inaudible] accounts.

Patricia: That is the reward of being prepared. You know, I say it again and again, it's not good luck. It's not that she was lucky but she was prepared when the opportunity was presented. And a lot of times we don't be value to preparation and studying and growing and learn. I think we have to company these studying and growing and learning.

Lourdes: Always, constantly. Because the world we never going to change for right now, especially what the world has been through in 2020. We all have to adapt to different way of living. Those who have the problem of adapting are basically not going to succeed. So when you say that you are the stronger are not going to be the most successful. It's going to be the people that were able to adapt to change easier and quicker are going to be the ones that are successful.

Patricia: So going back to confidence because I believe that confidence is something that we all saw it. I don't think this is something that is only belongs to an industry because you are in a male-dominated industry. You don't have so much confidence.

I believe that confidence is priceless on different areas of our lives differently. And depending on backgrounds and some people are not confident about the way they looked or... there are times that I haven't been that confidence because, I don't know maybe my accent.

You know when I came here to this country or what else would you say this woman that spoke up and got the contract besides preparation. What else did you think, there is no right or wrong answer here, what else do you think she had in her that allow her to be confident as speak up?

Lourdes: I did also creating the right you want within your company that she had recently worked with a firm that provide the sustainability to Federal. And they knew that this was a mandate that was very new, and she knew that she could focus on this. But her confidence are they stem from the fact that she wasn't afraid.

We all failed. How many times does LeBron James basically made the possible. More failures than the times that he learns in basketball and the same thing how they work. So we all have this fear that we are going to ask are going to be a wrong question for that we are going to fail. And I think that, blowing that confidence in you, let's just say, don't be afraid to ask a question; don't be afraid. And don't be afraid to that follow up.

Also she was among one of the few companies that were there that did the follow up. A lot of people say, "Oh, I am going to follow up with an email right after this." Perfect. Probably 90% of the people will going to do that. What will you do next week? 10% of the people follow up.

And people don't understand that "Oh, I sent one email." How many emails they did get? I get 3,000 emails a day. Sure, he must get more. But at the end of the day, you are finally going through all of the ones that matter and so forth. And how many times you just have to be that person?

Patricia: How many times does somebody need to reach out to get a... let say...

Lourdes: The average that you reach out 10 times if you get one yes, you're doing good. And a lot of people don't understand that these business owners, 99% of the businesses in America are small.

But here's another one that a lot of people don't know. In 89% of businesses in America, has 6 employees or less. 89% so if you have more than 6 employees, then you are doing very good. And even if you have one employee, two employees, then you're on your way to a path of success. Because 89% of the businesses in America is season [inaudible].

Patricia: so you talk about success and failure, why do you think about 36% businesses in construction, small businesses failed after 10 years? What do you think of that? Because a large percentage of businesses disappeared in 3 years, I think it's about 70%. Then from those, there's the 50% that remain then there's a little percentage of businesses stay after 10 years. Why do you think that it's true? And it's true in construction. More is in construction but is there in general in small businesses? Why?

Lourdes: I'm not an expert in construction but I have seen many firms and construction have seen many fails in construction. And the ones that I could tell you that have failed do not have the mentality of helping their clients solve their problems. They have more the mentality of landing the sale, of making the money. When you focus on the money, a lot of the times you lose the aspect of solving the problem.

Yes, we're all in business to make money and you have to make a profit in order to succeed and forward, but that should not be the driving factor. I can tell you how many times in the beginning for the Federal Government that I did jobs just on a credit card purchase which was a limit of \$5000. Whether it would be anything from cleaning a webpage, a little webpage or anything or Twitter page whatever it may be, here is this, here is this, and we will build on that and keep building on and keep growing it.

Even my contract with American Express while I was a speaker for them, I knew they were paying astronomical a lot to large corporations to basically run the event portion when they started to go across America and opt for government contracting program.

I went in and then demonstrate to a totally different department, how my firm is an event planning firm could basically do this work and perform it well. And not only that, but for fraction of what they were paying for a large coverage. And after all, it is a small business program, it should be in the hands of a small business. So I kind of threw that little caveat at the end. And they gave me an opportunity.

But it was in Boston, Massachusetts, they're telling you nothing about Boston, Massachusetts, but I did my homework. And as soon as I knew that I was going to that was going to be my first event that I was going to launch with this large corporation, you better I was going to try to with the Chamber of Commerce, that I was going to talk to the SBA, that I was going to reach out to every single resource and guide and really educate myself on Boston's small business community to get as many people out there that I could now with this first event that I did for them, all they wanted was just 100 people there.

But I said to them, let's check for 200 because I'm Lourdes and I'm going to sell this out of the water but we had 320 people show up. They had to get tables and chairs if they've got the capacity tell them. But it's started a new way for me with a corporation that had viewed me just as a public speaker and an expert in government contracting now I'm working with a different division and growing an event planning company. So I you have to always look at different pictures and different arteries when you're working within a corporation and providing service.

Patricia: Lourdes, I have learned so much. I've been learning I've been taking notes like crazy I can't believe I've known you for so long and I still learn from you. So I thank you so much for sharing your knowledge.

Lourdes: Thank you for having me and I've heard so many things from you too, and I'm so excited for your success and your company's success. I'm really happy for you guys.

Patricia: Thank you. You've always been a champ. I mean, I've always seen how you cheer me. You cheer me all the time and you cheer the companies you work with so it really speaks to the to your heart and to how you nurture and how you really want to see your clients succeed. You really are an example of that. I thank you for that.

Coronavirus. We were talking about that. How do we need to be adaptable to change? Tell me about you in the Coronavirus environment. COVID-19 when it started that we didn't know what was going on? What happened with you? How did it transform you? What did you learn? And how can you apply this belief that we have to be adaptable to change? How did these belief that Zig Ziglar taught you 30 years ago, you were able to apply this and be successful?

Lourdes: I will tell you that let's talk about a couple of months living up to Coronavirus. We were growing as usual. You know, I have a full blown office in South Miami. And everyone has courses working full time. And we had three government agency contracts. And leading up to my great client that I had been trying to, you know, plant the seed and grow this client for about a year and a half.

And we all know the client, it was Amazon, very excited. In December I get landed this opportunity to do this event for Amazon and in a similar capacity to American Express. But Amazon wanted to basically step up and provide small businesses with an opportunity to learn how to become small business vendors as Amazon, you know, clients on their website.

I champion the relationship with the city of Miami. And the city of Miami actually hired me using Amazon funds and the city of Miami funds. And this was back in about November of 2019. So I am full gunho really excited come back that my team no we just landed a contract with Amazon. This is going to be the first of many, because viewing the success of growing with such a huge company, I basically viewed this. So we have very few months, we have basically just three months to put on an event with about 500 attendees, not even knowing where the venue was.

And I was working with a fantastic group at the procurement program with our city of Miami, sat down with them develop the project plan as I've done before with other agencies and said this is how we're going to tackle this and this is how this is going to be successful.

Based on the objectives again if my client and what they want to see in a perfect event. Sat down with them and then selected the venue move forward. Here we are, launch the registration site, base because I had so many connections I had built so many relationships. I've built so many resources in the past, as I say to people These are the strongest things that you could have in your foundation of growth. I immediately was able to get about 260 people registered within 30 days.

All they wanted was just 200 people. Here we are going into February 27, which was the date of the events at [?], which holds the capacity about 500 people. We were up to about 320 registrants, who are all going home, we're ready to go. And then all of a sudden, you know, the city starts cracking down because of Coronavirus. We were all worried. Also, the first thing that I did when I started hearing how serious Coronavirus was getting was really to reinforce the safety of my team.

That was the most important. I wanted to make sure that my team was safe, that we were doing all of the CDC recommended guidelines. So we made sure that my team would maintain safe so that their families will be safe as well. So having that already done, I know that we could conquer the next day. And here we go. In early February, Amazon and city of Miami cancel the event. I can tell you as a small business, I had so much energy and funding has gone into this event. Luckily, the city of Miami said, let us

know how much you've spent, we are going to pay you and then pay me a little bit more for the trouble of the cancellation.

But what happens to my other three federal contracts that I had that where we were doing events where we were doing meeting planning and training and everything else. These are all live events, and one of them was classified. So basically, you can't take it virtual, I now am experienced with something that is unimaginable, like everyone else. What do you do?

I basically sat back and talked to my team and talk to even my husband, which has nothing to do with business, but does know a lot about emergency management as being a firefighter paramedic, and I said, What can we do? What can we do here? Immediately went to the Small Business Administration, and said, as a woman owned small business and the government sector, what can we do? And one of the agencies said, "Continue billing us and we are going to have a salvation to this, we're going to have a solve. But give us a month or two."

Well, you could imagine I felt extremely guilty of building an agency and not performing any work. So when they finally realize we're going to take this virtual, we're going to host more webinars than events that we've held before. And we want you to champion this for us, I immediately stepped up to the plate and said yes, this is what I'm going to do. This is what I'm going to do.

And I started studying what other virtual platforms had done and those that were successful and incorporating those best practices into something that I could do now to a customer, into my two customers that were basically allowing me to stay open, because I just lost one of my largest contracts, which was Amazon and city of Miami, and now will be forwarded to these three agencies. And luckily, I didn't lose any work at all. We were able to switch everything into a webinar capacity, even the classified one, we found a format where we could continue providing this training to continue doing it virtually.

Now here we go into a whole different virtual environment. I you know, because of my young age, I did not grow with computers. So now talking into a computer every single day makes it difficult, whereas millennials have grown up with computers on the internet, which they're used to that environment. And in my age, I rather have the face to face communication, rather than have the virtual communication. So it was hard to adapt for me.

Basically turns to my crew, turn to my daughters that have performed Virtual Training and through college and through everything else and said, "How can we do this? I was more nervous on my first webinar than I was on anything else that I've done with 1000 attendees, you know, of an event. So it was a huge way of kind of a slap in the face, change, adapt, and pivot or fail. And you basically had to do that. So we pivoted the business to be more of a virtual business. Well here today, we basically I wanted to do as I have done all the time for every one of my agencies, I create a value proposition at

the end show the value that they we presented and the funding that they gave us, and that we present a problem to and met their objectives, we actually tripled the goal of the contract on two of the contracts.

So it was phenomenal that now they not only want to have a live event, but they want to have a hybrid of both. They want to have virtual event and they also want to have a hybrid event. So Coronavirus, I will tell you has definitely taught the world that we are very vulnerable. We are fragile, and we need to cherish the opportunities that we all have, be grateful and thankful which I am every day. But not only that, but learn how to pivot, and adapt and change. Because if you don't do that, you're just going to mainly just crumble and fail.

But I will tell you that we live in a wonderful country, and had it not been for many of the other firms that didn't have the capabilities that I had to be able to adapt is that they got received funding, you know, small business loans, whether they be, you know, PVP loans, or whether they be PIDL loans they receive loans from the SBA to be able to stay open, because restaurants, unfortunately, and everyone in the hospitality industry was hidden away that we can match because you can't really, yeah, perform that work. So they basically shut down. Yeah, so I mean, this is, so I'm glad to see the country basically stepped up and really protected.

Patricia: So that's very good. And I believe our listeners are receiving a lot of value I have, I definitely have learned so much more. Every time I speak, I learned something, three things you have done, or in your experience with construction companies, obviously, this is Thriving in Construction, the Podcast, in your experience in helping small businesses or construction companies grow and land contracts, what are three things that you recommend they do so that they thrive in from that experience, what you've learned, what are three things construction companies or people in construction can do to thrive?

Lourdes: One of the most important things that I think construction companies could do to thrive is that if you're going to try to do business, let's say with American Airlines, Boeing or whenever the company, the transparency isn't there, you cannot see what they're going to be purchasing how they're going to be purchasing or who they're going to be purchasing it with.

With the federal government in demand and the congressional mandates of 23% going to small business, it is there. You could go right now on to Homeland Security, HUD, any agency Department of State's website, and you can see how your taxpayer dollars are being spent, how they are going to what they're going to be buying, what products and services are going to be buying, whether they're going to be setting aside women owned service disabled veteran HUBZone or ama, so the transparency is there. But don't make the mistake that I did, which is the shotgun approach, try to basically narrow down your search also build relationships and resources with those construction firms that are already successful in the government field.

Because as I said, government contracting is not for everyone, you could begin to do business as a subcontractor, and begin to grow your company in a sector that you're learning how to do business with this sector. That is totally different than the corporate sector.

So I would say, so contracting teaming, you know, and if you're the company of one, don't think that you can't get it done. I like to say the fake it till you make it. Many people would say even when I was first starting out, Lord is how many? How many employees are you will I tell someone that I'm employed one, I would begin in my mind to take Well, let's say I interviewed about 12 people, if given the opportunity to get this business that I'm talking with this corporation is all mindset, I will hire those 12 people.

So I would say we're 12 employees, we're a group of 12. I would try to expand on also my teaming partners resources and past performances, to be able to say if we work together, I could piggyback on their past performance and make it mine. Now if a government agency says Did you really perform this work? Or did you do it in conjunction with another firm? I would say I did in conjunction with.

Patricia: Yes, there's a lot of way to get started. And but you're right, we can assume that we're going to tap into the world with us, right? Oh, we have to be like a team like instead. And I love the way you summarize it, you know, focus on federal contracting, because you see there's a lot of opportunities there especially now in the after Coronavirus.

There are trillions of dollars going into construction infrastructure and narrow your focus narrow your clientele understand who your client is, what can you offer the value proposition, right? And you've said build relationships. Find a mentor, find a guide someone that has already done it well so that you can learn from them. And that's beautifully said, I have to say thank you for that. My last question has nothing to those but with construction.

But I, as I hear you talk and you know, what I know about you, I really feel that when you started in the sales industry, the sales industry has prepared you to be where you are. And I say go on in business. And I, you know, I'm an engineer master in construction management, but sales and marketing is extremely important for the success of our business, right? sales, marketing innovation, how are you seen sales prepare you to where you are?

And what will you tell people that are very good in the technical skills, especially in the construction, you know, you see people that are an electrician, and they say, I want to have my company, right, but they, they're good technicians, but they don't necessarily understand the risk of the business side. Or you see someone like, I started as a project manager in this, and I've been in the industry managing products, when you have a business, it's a different story. So why do you think you know, what would you tell people that are good technicians, and they start a business, and sometimes they don't

understand the sales, the marketing, they don't give it the importance? What would you say? What are the three advice among the number three, I love it,

Lourdes: I think for a business owner. Now, let's take Mark Zuckerberg of Facebook, we all know that he has great personality, right? So he obviously wasn't the salesperson of Facebook, or did he learn how to tell people that this was a necessity, and this was something that was going to help them with communication, with connections with building relationships. I think that as a business owner, you need to try to re evaluate the services or the products that you're going to sell and understand that what you are providing is the best service that anyone else is going to provide. When you have that mentality.

Like for example, no one else is going to be able to be a carpenter, the way that I'm going to be a carpenter because I care about your home. And it's carpentry or a trade position, like an electrician or anything like that. A lot of times, we're not going to buy from people that are the least expensive, we're going to buy from people that make us feel comfortable. And those are the people that have the greatest confidence. So I would say build confidence in what you're generating in your product or service, and then build on that to be able to sell.

Everyone sells, whether it be that you're courting, your next girlfriend or boyfriend, and you're selling the fact that you are the best person for life partner, for her him, everyone is always in the in the persuasive type of mentality. So I think that you need to understand the characteristics and build yourself as a good character, like I always said, with building value, and also then be a leader in your industry, if all you have is a hammer and a drill, and you have the mentality, that you're going to install that window the way no one else will.

And you're going to provide the best service that nobody else is going to provide me by doing XYZ, then people will trust you. And all you need is just do perform good work for one word of mouth will go will be your best advertise. I feel that when you perform good work, good work runs really fast. Same way without where you perform good work for one agency, they will say, Well, this is a small business you use that did that for you? Right? And then next thing you know, when you're growing your firm,

Patricia: I can't wait to do another episode with you diving more into a lot of details on how are you navigating the government contracting space. But I really have enjoyed time with you. I mean, we always enjoy time together even if we go shopping. And I really appreciate you taking the time to be with me and to share your knowledge with so many people. Thank you so much.

Lourdes: No thank you and thank you for doing this. There are so many people out there that need great people like you guys that can give back. Thank you so much.

OUTRO:

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

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