

Family Business

'Park the trucks:' Don't talk business outside the office

An interview with Deborah Riha, vice president of sales at Priority and daughter of owners William and Barbara Norton.

Q: Describe your business.

A: Priority is an asset based trucking company providing less-than-truckload, truckload and pool distribution services to manufacturers, suppliers and retailers throughout the country.

Q: What has been the most difficult part of running a family business?

A: This economy has been very difficult. Every business is trying to save every penny, including us. Trucking in general has huge overhead expenses and is especially affected by the price of oil. For example, our fuel expenses are outrageous, but we have to have it to move the trucks. The larger trucking companies are volume driven, so they make less of a margin per transaction, but process a lot more freight than a small business. It's a challenge to stay competitive while pursuing growth on smaller margins.

Q: If you could give one tip to another family business, what would it be?

A: Most importantly, learn to separate business from personal. Do not talk business outside of the office. We say "Park the Trucks" if anyone talks about work at family gatherings. My family is very close and we truly enjoy each other's company outside of the

Priority Services, Inc.

1000 N Villa Avenue
in Villa Park, IL 60181

Number of employees: 50 - 75

Owners: William and Barbara Norton

Year business started: 1973

Web address: www.PriorityServices.com and www.PSI-Logistix.com

Who is answering the questions:

Deborah Riha, Vice President of Sales and daughter of owners William and Barbara Norton

office because of this rule. Also, have a very clear succession plan on paper. For your own sake, do not enter the business if you are not fully supportive of said plan and goals.

Q: How will the possible ending of the Bush tax cuts affect your business?

A: It depends on where the money goes. I'm in support of any tax increase that will lift the country and the economy. The best example of a negative effect that allowing the Bush Tax cuts to expire is if the government utilizes the funds for unemployment extensions enabling many to not work while I advertise numerous job openings that aren't being entertained.

Q: Do you have succession plan?

A: My parents unexpectedly retired over a decade ago due to illness. My husband and I have been running the business ever since. My girls are still little and still want to become ballerinas or have their own show on the Disney channel. If they show interest in working with us after college and if their performance deems worthy, we would be proud to be a third generation owned and operated family business.

Q: Describe a good day.

A: A good day is when every team member is on the same page and committed to a certain goal. When we reach that goal, it is a great day for all.

Q: Is this what you envisioned doing when you were young?

A: Yes. Since I was a little girl, I took every opportunity to join my dad in a truck, or on sales calls, etc. I loved working with my dad and emulated him in every way. On another note, I have known most of my co-workers, their families, and many of our customers since I was young and have always cared very much about their continued success.

Q: What was your first job?

A: When I was 14, I worked at the Ponderosa restaurant in Palos Heights for \$3.35 an hour. I kept the salad bar orderly.

— Anna Marie Kukec