

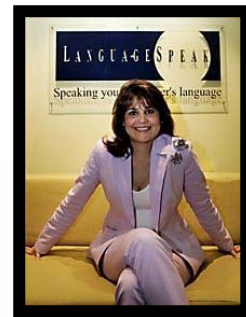


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Business Monday

5 QUESTIONS WITH ANNETTE TADDEO



Annette Taddeo becomes first Latina to lead Women's Business Enterprise forum

As the first Latina to lead the Women's Business Enterprise National Council's Leadership Forum, Annette Taddeo talks about her plans to diversify the group and the challenges women business owners face.

BY CINDY KRISCHER GOODMAN

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Annette Taddeo came to Miami 15 years ago in a motor home. Her parents had lost their home in Hurricane Andrew, and she arrived to help them. She drove the mobile home down from Alabama, parked it in their driveway and lived in it with them for six months, while their home was rebuilt.

During her stay in Miami, Taddeo started a translation business, which grew large enough for her to hire other employees three years later. Today, LanguageSpeak in Miami is one of the largest translation businesses in the country, and Taddeo oversees 395 employees and contractors.

She balances her business and work travel with a marriage and a new daughter, Sofia, age 1. Taddeo has an interest in helping other women build their businesses and recently took over as chair of the Women's Business Enterprise National Council's Leadership Forum, which advocates for the needs of women's business enterprises and helps them get supplier opportunities from big corporations. She hopes to pave a new road as the first Latina in this position.

The Miami Herald spoke with Taddeo about her plans for her new position and the challenges for women business owners.

Q: You are about to become chair of the Women's Business Enterprise National Council's Leadership Forum. What interested you in this group, and as the first Latina to head the group, what do you hope to accomplish?

A: It is the largest certifier of women-owned businesses. Any major corporation that wants to do business with women-owned businesses wants certification to make sure they really are women-owned and operated and it's not just on paper. The organization comes to visit you. They look through files and tax returns and do due diligence. If they give you certification, you are women-owned. I have been part of this organization since 2001, but moved up the ranks quickly.

My goal is to diversify and see more minority women get certified. I see Anglo women doing it, but there are not enough Hispanic, African American and Asian women taking advantage. There hasn't been outreach. As the first non-Anglo leader, I'm the first one bringing attention to it.

Q: How big is the organization now, and how diverse is it?

A: The numbers have moved drastically. We had 6,000 women certified. Now six months later, we have 7,000. I'm not sure how many of that thousand are minorities. I have made sure our leadership is diverse -- the members of the board, the leaders of committees. I think we need to grow diversity from within.

Q: You mentioned to me that you have about 395 employees all over the world, including contractors in places like China, Argentina, Peru and Chile. You also do business throughout the United States. What advice would you give to women business owners who want to become known beyond their local markets?

A: I believe in networking and getting involved in organizations locally because I love Miami, but I do know that there's tremendous business elsewhere. Florida is a small-business environment, but we are missing the boat by not educating our business owners that they should look elsewhere to big companies outside the state. They will need to go to events, trade shows. Nowadays, almost any business can be run from anywhere in the world. You have to think outside of the box to become a national player.

Q: I understand recruiting employees is difficult these days. How do you differentiate yourself?

A: You have to become resourceful to encourage employees to come work for you and stay with you. I offer a retirement plan and profit sharing at the end of the year. If they do a great job on a project, I give them a bonus, maybe a spa day. It makes a difference that I treat them like family. I'll do anything to keep good employees. This is a very family-friendly place. The most popular benefit that I offer is paying for their kids' college education through a college savings plan.

Q: What do you consider your biggest challenge as a business owner?

A: Trying to provide health insurance to my workers. Nationwide this is the No. 1 issue for women business owners. But we are doing something about it.

We joined forces with Women Impacting Public Policy. We are lobbying Congress to let them know what affects women in business. There are too many plans on the table regarding universal health insurance, but something has to be done. Everyone has to come to the table. You can't just say "let's offer universal insurance" and not have insurers and drug companies at the table. Small-business owners have been left out of the discussion, and it affects us the most.

In Florida, we should be paying attention but we shouldn't wait for something in Congress. Something should happen in the state.