

trendsetters

Deborah Wainstein

Providing bilingual staffs across the nation is this Latina's No. 1 priority

By Jennifer LeClaire

Deborah Wainstein wasn't satisfied working at a temporary employment agency—so the scrappy Manhattanite decided to launch her own. In 1999 Wainstein opened the doors of Priority Staffing, Inc., a bilingual temporary employment agency headquartered in New York City, with a vision, a fold-up table and a cardboard box. Today, the company has three offices across the country and boasts more than \$2.5 million in annual revenues.

But helping people achieve their goals—not helping herself to millions—is what motivates the 27-year-old daughter of Colombian-Russian immigrants.

“There's nothing more satisfying than knowing you helped to give someone an opportunity to put food on the table,” says Wainstein. “It is an unbelievable feeling to see people happily employed.”

Besides the 18 full-time staff members that work in Priority's offices, the company temporarily employs about 500 people every day in clerical, data entry, administrative and light industrial positions. Wainstein's long-term goal is to employ thousands more by establishing Priority Staffing offices in every state of the union.

The young visionary plants seeds in major cities via networking with business leaders in organizations that bring together women and minorities. Networking is a strategy that keeps her on the go so much that she stopped counting her weekly work hours and started counting frequent flyer miles instead. But it's a strategy that is paying dividends.

“Networking within the Hispanic community has helped me tremendously,” says Wainstein, noting that it's a long-term tactic that requires persistence and patience. “It's nice not only to get advice but to give advice and help as much as you can.”

For her part, Priority's bilingual staff makes special efforts to attract the local Hispanic workforce. Hispanic workers, says Wainstein, are underserved and many lack access to education about workplace issues.

Wainstein's own challenges have less to do with the fact that she's a woman—and a Hispanic woman at that—and more to do with the nature of her business. She says she is learning how to be a chameleon.

“It can be tough to find a balance in making everybody happy,” says Wainstein. “We are trying to make the corporate client happy by giving them the kitchen sink and the kitchen

and the bathroom and the whole cottage house for next to nothing, and we are trying to give the applicants fair compensation for their skills.”

It’s a delicate balance that Wainstein strives to maintain, understanding all too well that the current and future success of her business depends on having an abundance of clients and an abundance of temporary employees to serve them. How is she walking that tight rope? Slowly and surely.

“I started Priority from a concept, an idea, a dream and it has transpired into what it is today,” she says. “Every day is a challenge. Every day is fun. Every day is exciting. Every day you learn something new.”