

Courtney Fairchild

Embrace the Challenges

For over 20 years, Courtney Fairchild has been a leading figure in federal contracting and a shining example of what small businesses can contribute to our communities. Courtney has devoted practically her whole career to the company she co-founded—Global Services. But for entrepreneurs, business and personal success are intertwined in complex ways. For Courtney, the journey to align these two halves of her life is a challenge 20 years in the making.

From the outside, Courtney's childhood in Winnetka, Illinois seemed idyllic. She grew up in a large, blended family. Her mother had been married three times previously, and to her fourth marriage, to Courtney's father, she brought three older children; respectively, 16, 14, and 7 years older than Courtney.

Courtney spent her days playing with other kids in the neighborhood, taking music lessons, and attending the all-important Brownie meetings. But inside the home, Courtney was emptying bottles of vodka in the sink and refilling them with water.

"My mother suffered in a time where you did not take medication and treat bipolar disorder effectively," said Courtney. "Alcohol was her escape." And while her mother's alcoholism was a driving force of dysfunction in the family, it was also a closely guarded secret.

Despite the turmoil of her mother's addiction, young Courtney doted on her. Many afternoons were spent listening to her mother, a concert-level pianist, play melodic tunes on their baby grand. It was from her that Courtney inherited a love for classical music. Also, puzzles. Courtney spent countless hours assembling them, learning from her mother that, if you're smart, you'll find the end pieces first.

While young Courtney spent her time assembling each piece of her cherished puzzles, it

became clear her parents were two pieces that no longer fit together. By age nine, Courtney's parents were divorced, her father was engaged to be married, and her older siblings had left the family home.

With barely any time to grapple with the changes, Courtney was faced with devastating news—her mother had passed away. In the midst of her grief, she was now to uproot her life in Winnetka and join her father and new stepmother in downtown Chicago.

Courtney tried her best to cope with all of life's changes. When she needed a lift, Courtney looked to her prized possession—her mother's metronome. "The whole idea of a metronome is fantastic, it tells you where to be on your course," said Courtney. "It was a symbolic way for me to feel like my mom has stayed on this journey with me."

After three years in Chicago, Courtney's blended family grew even more. Her father's new marriage brought two children and Courtney was finally a big sister. At

that point, Courtney had experienced life as the youngest sibling in Winnetka and an only child in Chicago. Now, with younger siblings, Courtney vowed to set the best example she could for them.

In fact, even though her parents were successful lawyers, it never occurred to young Courtney not to work. At fourteen, she requested special permission from her school to stock shelves at the local drug store. Courtney excelled in the workforce, working her way up from Shelf-stocker to Cashier, and later from Salesgirl to Assistant Manager at Gap Kids.

She also applied that drive to her school life at Saint Ignatius College Prep, taking on challenging AP classes, joining the basketball team, and serving on the student council. During her senior year of high school, Courtney was intent to finish with a high GPA and pave the way for her



college career in Economics at Georgetown University, when her family took another hard blow—her father was diagnosed with progressive Multiple Sclerosis (MS).

At the time, it was hard for Courtney to see the impact of MS on her father. He was the picture of health—an avid runner who had traveled across the country to participate in marathons. And yet, Courtney had to face the fact that the man who had instilled strength in her through all the ups and downs of her life, was now losing his. All the times she'd dismissed her father losing his balance and falling over as merely being "clumsy" looked very different now. He had a diagnosis, and his disease was here to stay. But her father was determined to persevere, encouraging his children to never let anything hold them back from their dreams.

And Courtney did just that. At Georgetown University, Courtney excelled in her classes, became an RA, and worked for the Dean of Student Affairs. As her Junior year rolled around, Courtney faced another setback. A financial disaster in her family meant that her parents could no longer fund her schooling. Unable to make ends meet, Courtney would have to drop out. She visited the Dean of Student Affairs to inform him she would not be returning next semester. Instead, the Dean got her a meeting with the Dean of Financial Aid.

"We had a conversation, and they were able to earmark some money for me, and I was able to stay," said Courtney. "I am very thankful for the relationships I had established around campus. I had a support system who championed on my behalf when I needed it the most."

She pursued her major in Economics as planned, but ultimately decided to double major in English. "Writing was my weakness and I didn't want it to be," said Courtney. "My entire life I've tried not to avoid the places I need to better myself."

A year out of college, when the GSA Schedules program debuted, Courtney saw an opportunity. She co-founded Global Services to serve this new, specialized market, working out of a basement at first. By 2004, the company had outgrown their makeshift space and had acquired offices by Logan Circle.

While things were looking up for Global Services, it was evident that her co-founder's interest in running a business was dwindling. Not

willing to lose any steam, Courtney and a business partner purchased the assets of the company together via Fairchild Consultants.

As the business continued to grow, Courtney felt she could do more to help small businesses in the government contracting sector. A friend and client turned Courtney's attention to the annual Women Impacting Public Policy (WIPP) conference. Through WIPP, Courtney saw just how crucial policy was for the success of Women-Owned Small Businesses (WOSBs), and how little policy representation they had. She resolved to change that.

Courtney joined WIPP's Leadership Advisory Council to mentor prospective candidates for the WIPP Board of Directors and the WIPP Education Foundation. Soon, Courtney was on the Board of Directors and served as the Chair to their Leadership Advisory Council, determined to help WOSBs who provided services to the federal government find success in their businesses and find their voices in policy. In WIPP, she found not only important connections in her industry, but trusted partners. Her life was richer with this newfound support system.

By 2014, Courtney had decided to buy out her partner and take 100% ownership of Global Services. The success of the business was now entirely in her hands.

Courtney faced entrepreneurship with confidence. Confidence she credits to her father. "He has always been my biggest supporter," said Courtney. "My dad made me believe that I could do anything."

As the years passed, Courtney's service offerings earned her high accolades and awards in the government contracting community. But client needs were changing, and with them her business.

"Life is all about challenges and how you embrace them," Courtney said. "As a business owner, you have to push forward."

Courtney faced this challenge head on, signing up for the Goldman Sachs' 2017 10k Small Business Program, where she was tasked with reenergizing and restructuring her business.

In the midst of these changes, Courtney continued to offer pro bono workshops in proposal development and the basics of the GSA Schedules Program through the Small Business Administration's (SBA) SCORE program, and travel the country offering GSA Schedule Program knowledge to underserved markets as part of

WIPP's ChallengeHER initiative. With encouragement from her WIPP partners, Courtney achieved certification with Women's Enterprise Business Council (WBENC). A certified Women's Business Enterprise (WBE) in 2018, and an SBA-certified WOSB in 2019.

Courtney threw herself into her work. And while her efforts paid off and she reaped the benefits of steady clientele and increased revenue, something had fallen by the wayside—her health. In her 20s and 30s, she'd begun to put on weight. Now, in her 40s, it was taking a toll.

"I was putting everything else ahead of myself," said Courtney. "Everything else seemed like a fire, so I didn't make my health a priority. I was young enough that I wasn't worried—but then I realized there were going to be complications."

Courtney was diagnosed with diabetes, high blood pressure, and high cholesterol. Her lifestyle of burning the candle at both ends had begun to catch up to her. Her doctor recommended that she go on insulin. It was a jolt—a wake-up call.

"I told her, 'That's further than I want to go,'" said Courtney. "And she said, 'I don't think you understand what will happen if you don't.'"

The doctor was certain Courtney would be back in six months to begin insulin treatments; instead, she did what she's done consistently throughout her career—she faced the challenge head-on. Within three months, Courtney had lost 30 pounds by cutting out all sugar and carbs. Within a year, she was down 80 pounds and no longer had Type 2 Diabetes, high blood pressure, or high cholesterol. She never did need insulin. Now, she works out six days a week and is in the best shape of her life.

"If there were days where I felt like quitting, where I didn't want to run that lap, I would tell myself that my dad would give anything to be able to go on a run today," she said. "I need to make sure I'm taking advantage of the abilities I have."

As Courtney's health flourished, so too has Global Services, growing almost 50% in less than five years, with 20% of that growth coming in the last year alone. The offices moved again, this time to a larger space near the Navy Yard. Thanks to referrals, business continues to boom.

Courtney prioritizes networks and relationships. The loyalty of her carefully chosen staff speaks to this—Global Services' top two

lieutenants have been with the business for 16 and 18 years. Although she used to hire based on skill set alone, Courtney now looks more for a cultural fit and intelligence; skills, after all, can be taught.

"I have a commitment to our employees, as much as I do to our clients," said Courtney. "It's all about mutual success. We have very little turnover, and that speaks to the community that we've built, and the idea that they need to be happy in order to do good work. We make sure we're a place people want to work."

Global Services works with clients of all sizes, from small businesses without the in-house resources to manage proposals, to mid-sized companies looking for help with overflow, to large companies with too many proposals on the table at once to manage them alone. In 22 years, Global Services has won over 2,500 contracts for its clients, for a total of over \$20 billion. The company has written proposals for pretty much every federal agency there is and for clients nationwide.

Looking back on her years in business, Courtney is careful to remember what is important in life—her connections with the people around her. She is closer than ever to her family, especially her father, who remains a driving force behind everything she does. And her circle of professional connections has become invaluable.

"The people around me in business have become a phenomenal support system," Courtney said. "We support each other in and out of the office."

To young people entering the workforce, Courtney recommends the same approach: reach out to your network.

"It's not a weakness," she said. "Being able to better yourself through and with other people gets you there far faster, and with more expertise. Success is partially relationships—I couldn't have stayed in college, built my business, or expanded my reach without my support system."

And to this day, support for Courtney continues to show: Global Services and its industry partners regularly participate in the WALK MS fundraiser in honor of her father. Her clients and WIPP partners, too, have donated to the cause. Courtney, her family, and her network have raised over \$200,000 in the last few years, including \$40,000 in the last year alone.

"In all aspects of my life, I refuse to give up. One day there will be a cure for MS," Courtney said. "And until that day comes, I will not stop

fighting.”

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