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Client Interview – Jennifer Armstrong, Vice President of Customer Engagement Operations, Centerstone of America

Authors: Christy T. Crider

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Interviewed by Christy Tosh Crider



Can you tell us about the leadership positions you've held and how you achieved them?

I have found myself professionally, and otherwise, in leadership positions throughout my life. I was a clinical supervisor within six months of finishing graduate school. My advancements continued until August 2017 when I was promoted to my current leadership position of Vice President of Customer Engagement Operations for Centerstone of America. The secret to advancing is finding your fit within your

passion. I've been passionate about mental health since the seventh grade. I found positions that aligned with my skill set. Don't be complacent if you're not happy.

What advice do you have for business leaders to attract, retain, and promote women in their companies?

Not specific to your industry, but for businesses in general, there are several ways to accomplish this. First, create a culture of equal opportunity – equitable pay and incentives for equal effort and skillset. Next, you HAVE to be willing to put in the time and effort to cultivate women leaders – for example, leadership academics for future leaders who are nominated by any level manager and mentorship programs to support and groom those with leadership qualities. Last, you must understand what drives or correlates with retention of women professionals. Understanding the challenges around women's work-life balance is huge. Businesses can exhibit this understanding in a number of ways, ranging from supportive maternity leave policies, to flexibility around work hours or allowing remote work.

What are the challenges of being a woman at a senior level in the mental health industry?

There is a good, large group of women in mental health. One of the reasons is likely our nurturing nature. Also, the medical field in general is concrete. Mental health is abstract; not always tangible. It takes confidence and willingness to take risk to tackle those things.

What advice would you give to an aspiring female professional?

Don't see yourself as a female. See yourself as a professional. Settle for more.

Are there any real no-nos when it comes to working your way up the corporate or professional ladder?

Prove your worth based on your work, nothing else.

Who do you admire and why?

My dad because he taught me the "failure is not an option" mentality. He has modeled that for me since I was little. He has faced incredible adversity and took it all in stride. He taught me that "everything worth doing takes hard work."

In addition to your career and spending time with your family, what brings you joy?

I hang out with Baker Donelson's Women's Initiative chair, Christy Crider, at fun places! But all joking aside, I find joy in spending time with friends. I love the outdoors and sports – anything that calls me right into the moment I am living and nowhere else. My maiden name is Jennifer Joy.

Do you have any tips for cultivating a more joyful life?

Do not take yourself too seriously – I am a work in progress. Disconnect when you can, and live in the moment. Know that your life is now, and don't live it thinking, "When I do 'X,' I will be happy."

What advice do you have for those who don't find the holidays to be such a happy time?

Accept that you feel how you feel, plain and simple. Your feelings are your own, and giving yourself permission to acknowledge them can really help. Maintain realistic expectations. Don't get caught up in what you feel you are supposed to be. Holidays are stressful even without adding the "keep up" mentality. Create your own set of expectations for the holidays that are more enjoyable for you.