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Interview no. 1499

Rosa Santana

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Name of Interviewee: Rosa Santana
Date of Interview: October 13, 2011
Name of Interviewer: Arlina Palacios

AP: Today is October 13, 2011. The interviewer's name is Arlina Palacios. This interview is part of the Paso del Norte Entrepreneur oral history project. This interview is being conducted in El Paso, Texas. Good morning.

RS: Good morning.

AP: Will you state your full name and the name of your company?

RS: Yes, the name of – my name is Rosa Santana, and the name of my company is Integrated Human Capital.

AP: Good morning, Ms. Santana, how are you?

RS: Good morning. Great, how are you?

AP: Great. Thanks for meeting with us today.

RS: You're welcome.

AP: We're gonna start off with some background information,

RS: Okay.

AP: and let's just start off with, where and when were you born?

RS: Okay, I was born in 1958 in Ciudad Juarez, Chihuahua, Mexico. And I came to El Paso when I was about five years old. Actually, I'm the daughter of a woman that came here and cleaned houses in El Paso for a living. And my father was a bracero at the time that I was born.

AP: What was your mother's name?

RS: My mother's name is Josefina Leal De Naranjo. My father's name's Simon Santana.

AP: And where were they both from?

RS: My father was from Santa Barbara, Chihuahua, Mexico, and my mother from San Francisco San Francisco, Chihuahua, Mexico.

AP: Do you know how they met?
RS: I don't know exactly how they met. I just know that they both loved to dance, and I believe that they met dancing. The towns that they were from were probably 30 minutes away from each other, and then, they married, and moved to Ciudad Juarez.

AP: Okay, and you mentioned he was a bracero.

RS: He was a bracero. I don't know a lot of history about his days as a bracer, but, yes, my father was a bracer at one time.

AP: Okay. So, they moved to

[Crosstalk]

RS: Yes. I'm the youngest of five children. A daughter was the first born, three males, my three brothers, and then, I'm the baby of the five. And so, unfortunately at this time, my sister has passed, my older sister passed. Both my parents have passed. So, I only have my three brothers.

AP: And do they live here in El Paso?

RS: Two of my brothers live here. One of them is also an entrepreneur, as a matter of fact. Yes, he owns a tile and carpet store, and my other brother also lives here, and he has a regular job. Uh-huh, yes.

AP: So, where did you go to school?

RS: I actually went to school – well, when we moved here from **[Speaking Spanish]** I went to school at Douglas School, Douglas Elementary. We lived in the housing project on Olive Street in Eucalyptus. And then, from there, I went on to Jefferson High School. Graduated from Jeff. Got married at a very young age. Unfortunately did not continue my studies. Instead, I got married and had a daughter. Moved away from El Paso with the father of my daughter's who was stationed in the Air Force outside of here.

A couple of years later, we returned to El Paso, and I went back to school to – or I started school at El Paso Community College, but fortunately or unfortunately, I chose to make a career out of what I was doing at that time, which was working, and ended up not finishing school and not really continuing my education. But fortunately for me, I was able to do very well in corporate

America. I had positions where – I started in the staffing industry in 1981, and I was recruited from the company that I worked for, by Kelly Services, and Kelly Services provided a great, great opportunity for me to grow professionally. And so, it was a very natural thing for me.

I've always loved sales, and I took a market that had one little office, and eventually, grew it to be five branch offices. And I had five on-site programs, which were like five other offices on-site with my clients. Had a phenomenal, phenomenal career with Kelly, and after 17 years, I decided to leave Kelly and go work for a smaller national company, and I was recruited by them, and went to work for Westaff, and unfortunately for me, but fortunately in many ways, after three years, I was downsized. So, imagine, I go from 17 years with one company, I get recruited by another company, and I'm there three years, and then, I got downsized. And it was kind of an interesting situation.

The CEO at Westaff had been my boss at Kelly. So, he recruited me and several other senior level executives because we were all senior vice presidents. We basically ran the country for Westaff. And they decided – the CEO tried to do a management buyout of Westaff and it didn't work. And so, the deal was that he would leave if it didn't work, and we all kind of knew that if Mike left, we would all be gone at some point in time. So, that's exactly what happened. We all got downsized.

AP: What did you do?

RS: Well, interestingly, I had a choice, right? And always in my mind, I had this entrepreneurial spirit. I always ran those companies as if they were mine. I made those companies a lot of money. I took a lot of pride in what I did. I mentored some great people, and just had a phenomenal business there. And so, I had two choices, I could either go work for another large company in a similar role and make a lot of money, because I was doing very well financially, or I could take the other road and try to do something for myself. And ironically, like a couple of days after I got downsized, I received a call from one of my clients saying, "I just called you at that office, and they told me you're no longer here.

I need some engineers, can you help me?" And that's how I started my business. I said, "Of course, I can." And immediately, I did what I do best, and it's really connect people with other people. Right? I started making some phone calls. I started – I pulled up some engineers. I made placements, and my business

was born. So, I never really had time to feel sorry for myself, first of all, right? I really didn't have time to think about it much because that customer basically said to me, "I need your help." And to me it wasn't like they were calling either of those companies for help. They were calling me. And so, this is what I have to do. And that's how my company was born.

AP: And this all happened in the span of how much time?

RS: From then to now?

AP: Well, from being downsized to starting.

RS: One week. One week. Actually, and when I got the orders, it was one week. It took me a little bit longer to start the company, and to really think about what the company was going to be. So, I did these placements. And I was working out of my home. And I've always been the kind of person, I like to get up in the morning, get dressed, and put makeup on, and I couldn't do that at home because my phone was ringing at 6:00 in the morning, and I was still on my computer and on my fax machine faxing resumes back and forth, back and forth at 10:00 at night. So, I knew I had to do something different. And I just didn't like the feel of not being able to get ready and go out.

So, I decided I needed to look for an office because it looked like I was gonna be busy. So, I thought, "You know, I may as well go look for an office." So, I rented a small office, and when I was buying the furniture for my office, I called a woman that I had placed probably 18 years before in a job, and I placed her in a company that sold office furniture. And her and her husband were very, very good friends of mine. Her husband was also my client. So, I called Midge, and I said, "Midge, you know, I need some furniture for an office." She said, "Where are you? Ron's been looking for you." And Ron was her husband. So, she said, "You know, you need to call Ron right away.

He needs to talk to you." And I said, "Okay." So, I said, "Well, when can we meet so I can buy some furniture from you?" She says, "Oh, well, I'll be there, you know." Next thing I know, I'm calling Ron, and Ron's telling me, "Oh, I worked for this company, this Canadian company, and we use a lot of temporary help all over the US, and we're expanding into Mexico. And I told the owners of the company about you. And lo and behold, I called your office at Westaff, and they told me you're no longer there. So, I'm thinking, are you interested in working for and maybe

helping these guys set up a staffing company?” And I said, “Well, why would you guys wanna go into staffing?”

You do automotive work? Why would you want to do staffing?” He said, “Well, because we use so much staffing, and we spend a lot of money on staffing. So, when I told him about you, they said, ‘Hmm, maybe we could do something with her and she could run it for us, and make good money, and all of that.’” So, I said, “You know, I’ve already started this little company. I mean, I’m gonna be okay doing small stuff right now. Eventually I wanna get there, you know.” Well, he was very persistent, and he said, “The owners are coming,” he called me back a couple days, and he said, “The owners are coming in. They’d like to meet you.” So, I said, “Okay. I’ll meet them, but I’m not gonna compromise myself.

I don’t want, you know, I don’t really want to do anything, Ron, but I’ll do it for you.” So, I met with these guys and it was very interesting because they were sitting there trying interview me, and these guys are entrepreneurs themselves, right? And they’re sitting there trying to interview me, and I’m sitting there thinking, “What the heck am I doing here?” I’m not looking for a job. So, I finally told the guys, I said, “You know,” I said – because they were taking notes on my resume, and I said, “I’m not really interested in a job. So, this isn’t what I wanna do.” And they looked at me like, “Well, what do you mean? Then, why did you agree to meet with us?” And I said, because of Ron. I think the world of Ron.

He’s been my friend and client for 20 years, and because of him. But I said, “I don’t really wanna do this,” and they were kind of upset, and I basically excused myself, and said, “Thank you very much,” and, “See you later.” Well, a week later, a guy that they hired to run their company, to be the president of their company, calls me. And tells me, “Oh, you know, the two owners of the company met with you, and they really liked you, and they were a little bit appalled that you would tell them you weren’t interested, you know, but they’ve asked me to contact you and see if you are interested in talking to me about a possible opportunity.”

And I said, “No, I’m not interested, you know, I’ve got my own company already getting started.” I said, “And I’m doing well. I wanna stay really small for a little while and try to figure out what I’m gonna do.” He said, “Oh, come on, just meet with me.” So, he comes in, and we meet, and I really liked him. He was a good person, nice guy, and I thought, “Well, you know, why not?” I’ll meet with him. So, met with him. We talked, and I said to him, I said, “You know, look, the only way I would ever consider it is if I

could have some ownership in this company.” And he says, “Well, you know, I mean, what kind of ownership?” And I said, “Oh, I don’t know. Well, what do you think they’d wanna do?”

He said, “Oh, well, maybe they’ll consider 10 percent ownership.” And I said, “10 percent?” I said, “I can’t control a company with 10 percent ownership.” And said, “Well, do you have any money to invest?” And I said, “No.” I said, “But I have a lot of talent, a lot of contacts, and I can grow a business very vast.” So, he said – he called me back, and he left and he said, “Let me talk to them.” And he called me back and he said, “Yeah, they said that they’ll give you 10 percent.” And I said, “Well, you know what?” I said, “10 percent is not good enough.” He said, “Well, how much do you want?”

And I said, “Well, I know that in order for me to truly run and control the company as if it was my company, I’d have to be a 51 percent owner.” And he started laughing. He said, “You’re out of your mind,” and I said, “Well, you know, that’s okay.” I said, “I’ve already got my own company going.” I said, “You know, you asked me, so, I’m telling you.” I said, “I understand, you know, you don’t have to do this, and neither do I. Thank you and see you later.” A couple weeks later he called me back and he said, “Okay, they’re willing to do it.” And this company was born, Integrated Human Capital was born. So, very interestingly these people – and there were reasons for us to do this, right?

I convinced them that being a minority and a woman, my company – or our company could be certified as a minority and a woman owned company if I owned 51 percent of it, which meant that not only could I go grow this company tremendously by utilizing my certifications as a door opener for us, right? But it would also help them with their automotive customers because their customers have a great need for their suppliers to do business with minority and women owned companies. So, they came down, we made the deal, and we took off faster than I can even tell you.

We had phenomenal sales our first five months of business because at the same time that we were starting, I landed a huge deal in Juarez. We actually started in Mexico before we even started in the US because I landed a huge, huge deal in Juarez. And so, we landed that, and we were up and running there, and then, we started transitioning in all of the business that they had in the US, which was in Missouri, Michigan, Illinois, and El Paso, over to our company. So, it was crazy. My oldest daughter and I started the

company, and she had been in the industry for a little while, but they – both of my daughters grew up in the industry, right?

They had McDonald's and whatever every night in my office while I was still working. And so, we transitioned all of this business over, and it – we were having an incredible ride. Our first two years of business were unbelievable, but unfortunately, they began having some issues with cash flow, their company, not our company. They started having some issues with cash flow. Some of their customers started delaying payments to them, which, in turn, they used to use our company for staffing, right? So, they were – they started to delay payments to our company, which meant, we – our cash was slowing down. Our cash flow was slowing down.

So, we came to a point where I had to basically say to them, “I can't provide services to you anymore after this point because the money that I have today is to continue to support my other clients. I'm not your bank. I can't continue – this business can't continue to finance your business.” And a lot of other things had happened. We weren't really made for each other. I run my business by the book, and I'm not saying that they didn't. They just were willing to do other things that I just wasn't interested in. So, I basically said to them, “You need to pay up, or –” at this point because they basically owed me almost a million dollars, and – or owed us almost a million dollars, right?

They owned part of this company. So, long story short, they didn't pay what they were supposed to pay when I asked them to pay. So, I actually pulled all of my people from working from them at the same time, everywhere, in Illinois, Missouri, Michigan, El Paso, Mexico. So, basically paralyzed them, but I couldn't make another payroll for them. I couldn't get financing anywhere to finance a business. So, long story short, we separated. Obviously it created a little bit of a war, and the situation basically tumbled them into bankruptcy, their company. So, they went bankrupt, and then, we were in a legal mess because I couldn't do anything.

I couldn't get financing because my partners that owned part of my company were in bankruptcy and I had to keep this company running. And it was very, very, very stressful and very, very difficult, as you can imagine. I was making deals with my other clients to pay me sooner for a discount, and mind you, I'd never done this. I worked for big companies that had all the money in the world. I never had to worry about this. I just kinda learned as we went. So, and the banks said, “No, we can't lend you money.

Your partner's in bankruptcy. How can we do that?" So, I basically poured my retirement savings into the company even though I only owned 51 percent. I just couldn't see it go down.

I was doing all the right things, and I was never telling customers what was going on. I just kinda kept the company going, kept smiling, kept selling, and then, we got to the bankruptcy situation, and the bankruptcy court offered me a deal for the 49 percent that they owned, which I still had to buy their shares, but not for what I would've had to buy them at a different time. So, I bought the shares, and that made me 100 percent owner, and then, I was rid of that issue, and everything changed. I was able to get financing and didn't skip a beat. Started back and started growing the company again.

AP: Where do you think you got this momentum, this drive to meet with them and say, "No, I need more than 10 percent to be – to have that ...

[Crosstalk]

RS: Having run a huge business with the other two companies, I knew that I had to be in control. They had no knowledge of our industry, right? Other than they used temporary help to run their business, but they didn't know our business, and I knew that I just could not enter into a situation where somebody else was gonna be telling me what to do when they don't know how to do it themselves. So, I think that, plus, my mom, in her own way, was an entrepreneur. She had the drive to raise five kids on her own on a minimum wage job, if you can imagine that. How she did it, I have no idea. I really don't.

So, I knew that I – that there were certain things that I could do, and I think the other thing that I learned when I left Kelly and went to Westaff, I really learned what my self-worth was because I learned that Kelly treated me well financially, but when I started talking to other companies about what I could do within their companies and I started seeing what their compensation plans were like, I felt like I hadn't been treated as well as I thought I should've been because I was so successful. So, I thought, "I can't allow that to happen to me." So, if you're in control, right, if you own – if I was gonna own 51 percent, then I would be in control.

Plus, I knew what these certifications would do for us because I lived in the corporate world where companies would tell me, "Oh, no, we went with a minority owned company," or, "We went with

a woman-owned company.” And I used to think to myself, “Well, I’m a minority. I’m a woman. But I don’t own this company, I guess, right?” So, I knew that this was something that could be very good and very big for us. So, I think that’s probably where that drive came from, from all of those.

AP: And you mentioned your mother

RS: Yes.

AP: raised you as a single mom?

RS: My mom was a single mom and raised five kids on a minimum wage job. When she first came to El Paso, she used to come here to clean houses, every day, go back and forth, back and forth every day. And then, she got her papers fixed, and got our papers fixed, and then, she got a job at a hospital, in housekeeping, and when she retired, she was still doing the same job. Of course, not in the same hospital, but in a nursing home. She only had two jobs, the hospital and the nursing home for 40 something years that she gave them, same boss all of those years. Same boss. Yeah, so, my mother was very loyal, a very, very dedicated hard-worker, and a very well-respected and liked person. She taught us a lot.

AP: What else do you think that she taught you?

RS: She taught us to do the right thing all the time. She taught us that no matter what, doing the right thing and being ethical about what you do, in the long run, at the end of the day, the right thing will happen because you do the right thing. So, she taught us that no matter what, we could make it in this world. I had this, “It can be done,” up there. That’s what she taught us. She taught us that – don’t let anybody put you down. Don’t let anybody tell you that you can’t do something because you can. Yeah. So ...

AP: So, being the baby,

RS: Uh-huh.

AP: the young one in the family, did your siblings help a lot at the house or

RS: Oh, we all did. We all worked. My first job, I was 13 or 14 years old, yes. And I worked at the A&W, it was a drive-in, like Sonic is today, there was an A&W at – root beer place – at Alameda and Delta, and I worked there when I was, I think, 13 or 14 years old.

That was my first job, and then, I worked at the Popular, but my brothers – we all worked. My brothers used to sell ice cream. They used to go rent the little ice cream carts, and go around the neighborhoods, and sell ice cream at the same ages, 13, 14 years old. We all worked. My other brother worked in a grocery store since he was like 14 years old. So, we all helped in a lot of ways.

We all – because she worked all the time, we all helped to keep the house clean, to – but she was amazing. She used to – I still remember when we were in elementary school, she would fix us, before she went to work in the morning or the night before, she would fix us breakfast and dinner, just in case she wouldn't come home in time to make dinner. When we got home from school, we always had our dinner already fixed. All we had to do was heat it up. And of course, we didn't have microwaves then. So, it was heating up on the stove, but it was – it's amazing. We were very poor, but we never knew we were poor.

We were actually – people from Juarez used to come begging for food, and they used to knock on the doors, and a lot of times, we were alone. My youngest brother and I spent a lot of time – because my other brothers were working, but my youngest brother and I spent a lot of time by ourselves. He's the one that's two years older than me, and people would knock on the door asking for us to give them something, and we'd give our food away, not knowing that my poor mother worked so hard, but we used to see the pantry was – “There's five cans of green beans, two of corn, why don't we give them one of each?” Not knowing – because we never knew we were poor.

My mother never made us – we never had to feel like we were poor. And I guess we didn't know a lot of people who had more than we did. So, that's why we never felt like we were poor, I guess.

AP: Your mother never asked you, “Where's the food going?”

RS: Oh no, we would tell her. “And she finally told us, you know how hard I worked for those cans in the pantry?” And of course, we stopped giving it away, but yeah, she did. She would always say, “I thought I had five cans.” We'd tell her. It was pretty interesting.

AP: And how did you find out about the job at the A&W?

RS: I don't remember. Somebody was asking me the same question the other day. I don't remember how I found out, but I'll tell you a real interesting story is that, when I got that job, I started working there, and I was making a lot of money in tips because basically, you would serve the food, and you'd take it outside. And so, I was making a lot of money on tips, I think because of my customer service, right? I've just been very customer oriented all of my life. So, the owner of the place was not happy about that, and he started saying, "Well, you know, you have to turn in your tips," and I remember going home one day and telling my mother about that, and she says, "No, uh-uh."

And my mother didn't speak any English. She was telling, "Uh-uh, no. I'm gonna go talk to him." **[Speaking Spanish]** "This is not right." So, she did. One day, she went over there and she basically told him, "Don't you try to cheat my daughter out of her money. You know, she's making those tips and that's her money." But, I had to leave that job after a few months because we didn't have a car, and I lived probably three miles, three and a half miles from where I worked, and I had to walk to work. And one of my brothers always had to take me to work, and then, when I got off at 11:00 at night, they had to go pick me up, walking. So, finally, I think it got a little bit stressful and old for everybody.

And it was too much to do. At night, especially, when I – sometimes I had to wait there by myself for one of them to show up to pick me up, but walking. So ...

AP: And what was your job after that?

RS: My – so, I was going to school, right? And then, I got into the DECA program at Jefferson High School, and I was working at the Popular half a day, in the afternoon. So, I'd go to school in the mornings, and work in the afternoons. And I did that for my junior and my senior year. And then, I got married, when I was 17 years old. Very young. I had a daughter when I was 18 years old. I married someone who was in the military, and we left El Paso. We went to Las Vegas. And I had my daughter, and then, I worked in Las Vegas. I actually got a job at the Las Vegas Hotel in security.

And I was able to negotiate with my boss to let me take my daughter to work with me because I was behind the scenes, and I could do the work, and still take care of my daughter. So, I did that. And then, when he was out of the military, we moved back to El Paso.

AP: And so, did you meet him here?

RS: Yes, he actually lived on the same street that I did. Uh-huh, yes.

AP: And how was that like taking your daughter to work?

RS: Oh, she was a baby. I took her in her carrier. She was really no trouble. I wasn't really where anybody could see me or – so, it wasn't bad. It was pretty good.

AP: How many years did you stay there?

RS: We stayed there a couple of years. So, I probably took her to work with me since she was born until about eight or nine months, which is when we moved back.

AP: So, when you moved back?

RS: When we moved back, I went to work at El Paso National Bank, which is now Chase, right? And I got a job there, and the only thing that I paid with what I made, believe it or not, was for my parking and my clothes. So, really, it was – I needed to work, but I don't know how banks pay now, but they didn't pay very much then, and I didn't make a lot of money. And all I could afford was my parking downtown and dressing because you had to be nicely dressed to work at a bank. So, I worked there. I'm trying to think maybe a couple years, maybe a year and a half. And then, I left the bank and went to work for a company, a manufacturing company out on Lockheed and Montana.

It was called Gus Manufacturing. And they needed somebody to answer phones, be a receptionist, and also do travel arrangements for all of the people within the company that travelled. So, I was there a couple of years and did really well. I got promoted a couple times there. And then, I got into this industry. From there, I was recruited by a woman who I consider a great mentor of mine. She was running Kelly Services at the time, and I used to use a lot of Kelly temporary employees. So, she came to visit me one day. Actually, a sales rep came to visit with me one day, and said, "We're looking for somebody for our company." And I said, "Really? To do what?"

She says, "Well, you know, we start in the office, and then, after that, it would be in sales." And I thought, "Oh, I'd love to." Because I was in an office job, and I liked being around people and all of that. So, I said, "I might be interested." So, no sooner did I

tell her that, she was calling her boss, who said, “Can she come in this afternoon after work?” By the time I’d left their office, I had a job offer. And from that point on, that was in December of 1981, I’ve been in this industry since then.

AP: Tell me about that mentorship relationship.

RS: This woman had just been transferred here. Her name was Trish Hart. Her name is Trish Hart. And Trish had just been transferred here to run this office for Kelly. And it was when the staffing industry was still kind of new here. And there were only three companies that did this. And so, she liked me a lot, and she told me, “I think that this could be a really great career for you.” And so, I said, “I want a career. You know, I want something where I can grow. I’d love to have your job sometime.” And she said, “Well, you know, maybe we work together,” and we do that. And so, a lot of the mentoring that she did, first of all, she taught me the industry, right?

She taught me about what the staffing business is all about, and that – and then, she taught me how to sell this industry. And really, it’s about building relationships. That’s really all it’s about. If you’re not afraid to be assertive, and to build relationships, that’s what sales is in our industry. It still is the same thing today. And you have to be a little strategic. You’ve gotta know what you’re talking about and all that, but it’s about getting people to wanna buy from you because they like you, they believe in you, they understand what you’re telling them. They don’t think they’re being B.S.ed by you. And so – so, she taught me those things.

And then, she left El Paso, probably a year and a half, she got promoted to another job. And another woman by the name of Pam Edwards came in, and neither one of them was Latina. So, it was a little hard for them in El Paso because there’s a lot of Latinos here. So, Pam Edwards came in, and she also became my mentor. And she was – she said, “I’m here to groom you to take my job.” And I think she was here a year, and she groomed me, and when she left, they promoted her into her job. And we still had one office then, and then, we opened a second office. We opened a second office when she was here. And they made me the resident branch manager for that office, still reporting into her.

And then, when she left, and I took over the city, and then, we grew exponentially. We just grew like crazy. It was a good time for the industry, it was a good time for employment, and it was a great time for me. And we just grew dramatically, and I broke

every record Kelly had. I had every award they could ever give. I opened up Las Cruces. I opened up all of these on-sites. I made them so much money. It was amazing.

AP: Tell me about the services your business ...

RS: So, staffing services basically what it is, is we provide temporary employees to replace somebody going on vacation or back then, it was more of that, right? If you had a secretary going on vacation, then, we would send you one to replace her. If you had a little project going on, we would send you the project – the people to do the little project. But the industry has transformed dramatically in all those years. Today, people use temporary help normally as a part of their strategy. So, a lot of companies say, “80 percent of our employees will be regular, full-time employees, and 20 percent will be contingent workers. They will be temporary employees.”

So, they hire us to do that, to give them those temporary employees. So, as an example, in one company in San Antonio, because we have an office in San Antonio, in one company in San Antonio, our customer has 700 full-time employees and they have 300 temporary employees from my company. 300. So, the numbers can be huge. But we still do the onesies, twosies, but we do the big ones two. Like here, there’s a call center in El Paso that uses 150 temporary employees from my company all the time. So, aside from that, we also do direct placement. So, if somebody calls us and says, “I need an accountant on a regular, full-time basis.” We hire them or we find the people.

We present them to the client. The client selects them, then, we charge them a fee for finding them that person. We don’t charge any of the candidates a fee for anything. We charge the companies the fee. So, we’ve transformed from being Kelly girls, because that’s how Kelly was started, by people calling and saying, “I need a Kelly girl to replace my secretary that’s going on vacation.” To now, we have engineers, we have plant managers, we have CFO’s on our payroll as temporary employees. Very interesting. The change is dramatic.

AP: You mentioned that you had hired, at first, that you were hiring temps from Kelly, and that’s where you met Ms. Hart?

RS: Yes. When I worked for Gus Manufacturing, in my company, my department used temporary employees. And so, Trish used to come in and call on me. Basically, I was kind of her customer, right? That’s how I met her, yes.

AP: And so, when you started,

RS: Uh-huh.

AP: How did you finance your company? How did you get the funding to start Human Capital.

RS: That's the story I just told you. The partners brought the funding. They brought all of the funding.

AP: Okay. So, when you got rid of ...

[Crosstalk]

AP: You got a really excellent – you were in the midst of or you were already involved with the Juarez?

RS: Yeah, no, we already had Juarez running. So, when we – when these guys came to me and said, "Let's do this," right? I actually took Kelly Services into Mexico, too. So, I grew all of this business with Kelly, and then, Kelly – I wanted to do more, but Kelly didn't want me to leave this area because I was doing so well for them, but it was like, "I need more." I need more growth and all that, and I had a lot of customers from here asking me to send them people to the **[Speaking Spanish]**, right? So, I put together a plan, and I presented it to the CEO of Kelly, and I said, "Look, you need to look at this market. You need to look this. This is what I'm learning. This is where we should be."

He said, "Go for it. Open up in Mexico." So, I opened up in Juarez. And then, Kelly now is huge throughout Mexico, but I took them into Mexico. I take a lot of pride in saying that because I put together a very small business plan that convinced Terry Adderley, who was the CEO – who is the CEO of Kelly, that we should be in Mexico. So, I built a lot of relationships there, right? Having taken the company there, I actually had to sell the concept a lot because a lot of Mexican people running the **[Speaking Spanish]** didn't understand the concept of temporary help because it wasn't anything that was done very much in Mexico.

The US managers that were managing the plants over there loved it because they were used to the temp help availability over here. So, "Oh, now you're gonna be able to give us this over here." But it took a few years for the concept to really sink in. I handle business in Mexico now, and it's phenomenal. The concept, everybody

knows what temporary help in Mexico is now. But it's amazing. That's what's happened since '89 is when I took Kelly into Mexico, in 1989. So, it was eight years after I had started with Kelly. So, when I started this company, some of the contacts that I had, because when I left Kelly, I also took Westaff into Mexico, okay?

And then, Westaff, when I left Westaff, Westaff decided to pull out of Mexico. They didn't have anybody that really understood and knew what they – how to do what they wanted to do. So, what I did was, I told them to sell us the furniture. We took over the branch and all that, and we bought it for nothing, practically. So, we had to start a company, right? Because they didn't sell us the Westaff name. So, we started a company, but they sold us the assets of the company.

So, one of the people that we had been prospecting, one of the companies we had been prospecting for business, called us and said, "We're gonna need a lot of people, and I understand you've just started a new company," and that's how we landed – we eventually had 3,000 people with that one client, if you can imagine, in Juarez.

AP: 3,000 people?

RS: 3,000 people with one company. 3,000 people.

AP: So, how do you go from selling the concept

RS: Uh-huh.

AP: to having 3,000. Tell me how you sold the concept.

RS: Well, selling the concept was not easy because the – you have to think about labor laws, right? So, in Mexico, these people that were running the [**Speaking Spanish**] would say, "Temporary help? Oh yeah, I've heard about it on the US, but it won't fly here because of our labor laws." And at that time, honestly, I didn't know much about the labor laws in Mexico, right? But I figured, there's gotta be a way around it. There's gotta be a way to do it and still do it within the labor laws. Well, to make a long story short, we figured out a way to do it, and then, the companies became a little bit more comfortable, and more comfortable, and more comfortable.

So, what ended up happening is a lot of the US companies that came to the border eventually started going into Mexico because the cost of labor even on the border was way too high, right? So, they needed up going into Mexico. So, I lived through that whole phenomenon, right? And then, I've lived through the phenomenon of the companies leaving Mexico and going to china, okay? Because of the labor, the cost – the labor was cheaper.

So, during that time, when the companies were trying to figure out how to cut their costs so that they wouldn't have to leave to go to China, the industry grew dramatically because the companies said, "Okay, maybe the labor laws don't state that we can use temporary help, but they don't state that we can't use temporary help. So, if you, Rosa Santana, are telling me that you can make it work and still work within the laws, and it's going to reduce my cost, then, let's try to figure it out." So, the pay rates to the employees were still similar to what they were for their full-time employees. In fact, they were exactly the same.

Where there was a big difference was in all of the costs of laying off an employee. Because Mexican labor laws is very pro-employee. Not bad, but pro-employee. So, we worked out deals with these companies and it almost became a thing of, "Let me try it. Hopefully I won't get in trouble, right?" And then, it took off really well. So, that's the concept. They really had no choice. They had to try something before they had to flee to China, okay? So, what could they do? The biggest cost of doing business was the labor. So, if there was a way that they could cut the cost of labor, and we did it. We did it. And so, amazingly now, a lot of those companies are coming back, right? And guess what?

Our industry has grown even more in Mexico because now they know they can do it. And the **hacienda**, which is like the Mexico **[Speaking Spanish]** and all those companies, they're always after the staffing companies. They're always after us. It's almost like a silent harassment if you will because they think we're doing something wrong, and there may have been some companies – just like in everything, that do, that take shortcuts, and do something wrong. We haven't. And you wanna audit me? You wanna **spread** me? Go ahead. So, that's how – that's kinda how we went from selling the concept to going to 3,000 employees. And it was also building the relationships.

When people see you as an expert in something, you're the first person they're gonna think about, but when they call you, you better know what you're talking about. You better know that what

you're saying is, in fact, true. Because I can tell you that – I'd rather say to somebody, "I don't know, but I will find out," than, "Oh, absolutely. This is the way it is." And then, you're proven wrong, and that's not a good thing. So ...

AP: Yeah. And you mentioned your daughter worked with you?

RS: I have two daughters and both of my daughters work with me. So, my oldest daughter, when I was with Westaff, my oldest daughter worked for Westaff as well, in San Antonio. And I was here, I was based here, but I had five states and offices in all of those five states that reported into me. So, one of the managers was – that reported into me, was in San Antonio. My daughter was a student, was a college student in San Antonio. And she hired her to be a temporary employee inside the office, eventually loved her because of her work ethic and all that, hired her full-time, and, think about this, my daughters grew up in the business.

So, she already kind of knew, and she's very, very financially savvy. Very, very sharp young lady, and so, when I left Westaff and said – when these guys convinced me and all that, I called my daughter, and I said, "You're gonna have to leave Westaff," because she was still working there after they downsized me. "I'm gonna start a company and you need to move back to El Paso." And she was like, "Mom," and she – she just – she'd just gotten married and she was – she'd just had a baby. And I said, "We've gotta do this, Lisa. There's no two ways about it." If I was telling her that today, I don't think she'd do it, right?

I don't think I'd convince her as easily, but it was like – that was the thing that she had to do. So, they moved here, and we started the company together. So, she's been here with me from day one. Today, she's our vice president of operations and finance, and she's based in San Antonio. She's the mother of two boys now. So, I have two grandsons. And then, my youngest daughter was in college then, and when – right out of college, she went to work for somebody else for a little while to get some experience, and then, she came and asked me for a job. And it's really wonderful having your children work for you or work with you, but it's also very tough because you never stop working.

We never stop working. And a lot of times, when we should be spending great family time together, something happens in the business that's not good, and we all either are totally stressed, all of us at the same time, or we're arguing. And so, we have tried very hard to keep our work life separate from our personal life, but

it's very difficult to do that sometimes, but we've tried very hard, and we're doing better each day, and now my youngest daughter is – they're both in San Antonio. She is the director of client relations. So, she takes care of our relationships with our clients, which is something that I do as well. So, we've got – really, I'm hoping that eventually they will take over this business.

So, I'll tell you now what the other thing that I've done is having worked for some very big companies, it is – it's kinda hard to go back to being a real small company, right? And so, when we were very big as a small company because we did so well the first two years, it was okay. But after the partnership went back and we came back to being a real small company, it was very difficult for me to get used to running a little company when I'd just known how to run big companies. And so, I've always run this company like a big company, number one, but I think one of the things that I always missed was having that support, that – those resources that we always had in the corporate world.

So, I missed the tremendously. So, as – when I separated from my partners, I started working with other staffing companies. This world – in this world of staffing, and I think in any world these days, it's all about partnerships now. You partner with your competitors. And so, there were big companies calling me and trying to partner with me because their customers were telling them that they needed to use a minority or a woman-owned company. So, one of those companies was Randstad, and Randstad is the second largest staffing company in the world.

So, Randstad called me, and we partnered for an opportunity in San Antonio, and I had worked in these types of partnerships before, but I was always on the other side, the corporate side. And it was always so difficult of the minority or the woman-owned company, because the legal departments in these big companies make it very difficult to – they make these agreements very difficult to enter into, and I always remember sitting with people and them telling me, “Well, I can't agree to this insurance. I can't afford this insurance. I can't agree to this.” And I used to feel so bad, but there was nothing I could do. I didn't own the company, right?

So, many times we wouldn't make deals with them because of that. So, it was so easy to do a contract with Randstad that I was like, “Wow. This is way too easy.” So, I thought, “Maybe I should just partner with them in a lot more places,” and – so, I started really liking them, and started getting to know them, and then, I had a big

client, a global company that said to me, “We’d love to use you in Milwaukee, and in Detroit, and in California, and even in Europe.” And they said, “You really oughta look for – to partner with a large company to do that.”

And they, that company, took me in and mentored me, and then, a couple of other companies have mentored me at the same time to – on how to approach a large company to partner with me. So, I approached, about four years ago, I approached Randstad about partnering with me for a lot more business. And I told them, I said, “You guys treat me really well. You treat me like a partner. You pay me well. You pay me on time, you know. So, would you be interested – ” and they knew nothing about this minority world because they’re a Dutch company. And they hadn’t been here – they had only been here since the mid-’90s.

And so, I did a lot of education with them about how much more business they could have if they had a partnership with somebody like me. And I told them, I said, “Look, at the companies that are sending me to do this with somebody like you.” I said, “I could go to Kelly because I came from there, right? I could go to Manpower. I could go to Adecco, but I chose you because I have a great partnership with you already. You’re subbing to me and you’re taking good care of me, you know?” So, it took a long time. So, I say that we dated, right, for three and a half years. And we changed the concept of the partnership through the three and a half years.

We changed how we were going to do it, and we ended up forming a company, an separate company called Diversa, and Diversa is a joint venture company. It’s not a partnership. It’s not a strategic alliance. It’s a joint venture company that my daughters and I own 51 percent of. And the second largest staffing company in the world owns 49 percent of. And I must tell you that it’s something that nobody has ever done in the past. Nobody has ever done it in our industry, and I don’t know anybody who’s done this kind of a partnership with such a huge company. They’re an \$18 billion company.

And I control Diversa because we own 51 percent of it, but I convinced them that they could do so much more business because of the certifications we bring and the expertise that we bring, right? So now, I can really say that I can do business globally. So, any customer that comes to me that says, “I need people in Europe. I need people in China. I need people in Japan,” I can do it through

my relationship – through my company Diversa, that’s a joint venture with Randstad.

So, that is – if you asked me what our greatest accomplishment is, that has got to be the greatest accomplishment to date because – and so, I was in New York this week, and we – I don’t wanna name the company, but we made a presentation to a huge pharmaceutical company that spends over \$150 million a year on staffing services. Can you just imagine? So, I wouldn’t be able to be at that table without Randstad. And Randstad wouldn’t be at the table without me because they want a certain amount of that spent to be minority spent. So, it’s a win-win for them, for me, and hopefully, if we land this business, for my client as well, for our client as well. It’s a huge thing.

So, as we look at – at Integrated Human Capital, which is my main company right now and my own company that I own 100 percent of, and I look at Diversa, I’m covering all bases. IHC covers the local markets. We supply staffing in the local markets that we’re in. We’re in Austin, San Antonio, Houston, El Paso, and Juarez, and Diversa will cover the world for us. And what I’ve done strategically, is I brought in my daughters as partners in this because eventually, they will be who will continue to keep this going. So, it’s pretty exciting.

AP: It’s very exciting.

RS: Very exciting, yes.

AP: Tell me about the certification process.

RS: Okay. So, the certification process is not easy. And a lot of people aren’t willing to do it, and let me tell you why. Because you become an open book, okay? You have to show how your company’s structured, how your company was funded from day one, who funds it, who funded it, who owns the shares. You have to show the copies of the shares. You have to show that you’ve paid taxes. So, you have to show all of your financials. You have to disclose everything, and you disclose it to a certification committee. Not everybody sees that. Not everybody sees all of these financials, but you have to disclose a lot of information. And aside from it all being disclosed, it’s very tedious work.

Filling out the application and responding to all their questions, I don’t understand why people wouldn’t do it, but many people aren’t willing to do it. So, the certification really – the certification

process is – there’s all these things that you’ve gotta bring together. You turn in a packet. And then, it goes to a certification committee that’s made up of corporations that know what to look for in operating agreements and those things. And that they are the one that certify that the company is truly a woman-owned company or a minority-owned company. And not only owned, but controlled. The biggest key is – anybody can say, “Oh, I own half of Diversa.”

But if I’m never gonna go to these meetings with these clients, and I never show face, and all I do is collect a check, then, that’s kind of a bogus ownership, right? They make sure you are involved, and you are the face, and you know what you’re doing. So, they look at how much expertise do you have in that business. So, it’s like if I go and say, “I’m gonna go and open up a manufacturing company,” well, I don’t have any expertise in manufacturing. So, they’re gonna question that, why am I doing that? Is it just to be a front for somebody else or what is it? But with me, it’s pretty natural, right? This is all I’ve ever done other than work at the Popular and the A&W, no?

And the Gus Manufacturing, but to me, this is what I’ve really done. This is what I know to do. So, that’s kinda the certification process.

AP: So, would you encourage more business owners ...

RS: Oh, I encourage anybody who is an ethnic minority or a woman to seek out every possible certification that they can get despite the amount of time and the work involved in putting it **[inaudible]** because 50 percent of my business comes – is a result of my certifications. 50 percent. And I could probably attribute more to those certifications. So, one thing is to get certified, right? And then, the other thing is to know what to do with your certifications. And to work, and to build the relationships with those clients, and to look for your certifications. That’s what I know how to do really, really well.

AP: Tell me about that building relationships.

RS: Well, building relationships is – it comes really easy to a person like me. I love to be around people. I like to talk to people. I like to meet people from all walks of life. And when I go to present to somebody, I like to connect. I like to be able to see people in their eye. I like to understand why they’re in the room. What their buy-in is into this thing that I’m presenting, right? And so, building

relations to me – relationships to me is about understanding why you're interested in that person.

It could be, jeez, it's my next door neighbor, and they're my new neighbor, and they're gonna live here, and I should get to know them really well, and that's gonna lead me to eventually – somebody that they know probably has the business of some sort. I cannot tell you how much of this I do. I'm on an airplane and somebody says, "So, what do you do?" I'll never shut up. I can talk about what I do for three hours. I walk away from an airplane with an order for staffing. I walk away with somebody I'm recruiting, or somebody that needs a job, or somebody that's interested in making a move. Every time I go on a trip, it's an adventure for me.

It really is because I'll meet somebody at an airport, I'll meet somebody on the airplane, and something will always happen. Either we put them to work, they give me business, I introduce them to somebody else, or they become friends of mine for a long time. It's interesting. And I meet a lot of other people, I talk to them for a little bit, and then, there's not that much more to go on, and that's it, right? But I think building relationships is about finding people that maybe have those same kind of interests that you have, right?

And even if they don't, is there something that I can do or they can do with me or for me, or me for them, that – having positive outcome. That's what building relationships to me is all about.

AP: Do you belong to any of the chambers?

RS: Oh yeah, to all of them. Well, here, actually, we belong to the Hispanic Chamber. I don't belong to the El Paso Chamber, but I belong to the Minority Business Council and extremely involved in the Minority Business Council. And I'm an investor in RedGo. I'm a firm believer in spending my time where I'm going to get the most benefit, right? And for me, today, where I get the most benefit is from the Minority Business Council because the executives from the companies that I wanna do business with are involved in that council. So, I fly all over.

I'm going to Miami next week for five days to the national conference for the National Minority Council, where I'm gonna meet the supplier diversity executives of every major company that you can think of that has a diversity initiative. And the nice thing is that, when I first went seven years ago, I knew nobody. I

showed up, and I was like, “Oh my God, this show is huge.” Now, I go, and it’s interesting because last year, I invited Randstad. We actually kicked off our company – we formed – we actually – we did our grand opening of our company at this show. Last year, it was in New Orleans.

And we had a big party, and we had a lot of people that came, and it was fabulous, but I invited those executives from Randstad to go with me to the show, to the actual show, and they were amazed. They were walking through the convention center and, “Rosa,” “Rosa,” – you get to know people, and they don’t ever forget you. And the most important thing is that people wanna do business with people that they like. And so, I’m not a pushy salesperson, but I make my point about my business all the time. I have IHC, Integrated Human Capital, written all over me just by the way I talk, and now I have Diversa written all over me.

So, when people see me, they’ll come to me and say, “Hey, by the way, our bids going out,” and “Hey, this is happening. This is happening.” Without me even asking. It’s almost like they wanna tell me, “Hey, there’s gonna be an opportunity here for you.” So ...

AP: So, networking is important?

RS: Oh my God. It’s everything. In our industry, and I have to believe that in every industry, it’s everything. I always tell people – people always call me and ask, “Oh, you’re part of the Minority Business Council, I need you to introduce me to Toyota.” Well, you need to come to the events so that you can introduce yourself to Toyota. I don’t mind helping people, but I don’t like to give people anything. I don’t want to take advantage of my relationship with Toyota that it took me four or five years to build to where I am today and just give something to somebody else that shows up at an event one time and thinks that they should walk away from this event with business with Toyota.

It takes time to develop those relationships. A lot time. I knew, because I learned that in the corporate world. I knew when I started this company that it was gonna take me a long time to be where I am today. Never did I think that I would be in the position that I am today with Diversa and Randstad, right? But I knew it was gonna take me a long time to have those relationships, but today, I can tell you, I have some awesome relationships with some major corporations like Toyota, like Johnson Controls, like

Dell, that believe in my company, that believe in us and have contracts with us because we deliver very well.

AP: So, what advice would you give to a student or a person who's deciding to start their own business?

RS: Well, first of all, I think it's important that people know what they're doing to do. And when I say that they know what they're going to do, that they do something that they've either done before, that they've researched very well – I know a student, it's gonna be difficult, right? Because they may come out of school and become an entrepreneur. So, do what you're really good at. I can't see myself being good at anything other than what I'm doing today, but if I had to, I'm sure that there would be something that I could be very good at, but – and research the heck out of whatever you're gonna do. Understand the industry.

I can't tell you how many times people come to me and say, "I wanna get into the staffing business because if you're that successful, then, I wanna be that successful." And they have no idea what the staffing industry does, or how we work, or anything. And so, if you're not willing to do that homework, you're not gonna succeed. Nobody's gonna give you a handout, and I can assure you that every industry, there's somebody out there really good that is doing what you wanna do. So, unless you know your competition, unless you know and research your industry, don't get into the business.

So, really know what you're gonna do and be very good at it. Know your competition well. I tell you, this is kind of a sore subject with me and my management team, the people that manage my offices, is any time I go in and wanna know more about a market, I'll say, "So, who are your top three competitors in the market?" And they better – , "Well, let me look it up." No, you need to know it right now. You should be telling me, "It's this, this, and this." You need to tell me how many people you have working today. You need a – all of these things are the things that you need to know right when I ask you. You can't look it up. You can't go back and look at your reports.

You need to know these things. So, to a new entrepreneur, somebody trying to understand what they're gonna get into, your competitors are probably the best teachers. I can't tell me how many times I've walked – well, not me personally, but I've had somebody walk into a competitor office and they spill their guts about who their clients are, what they're charging them, and

everything. You know how easy it is for me to go into that clients office and try to get their business? I already know who they're using, what they're paying, and all that. And what the pain points are.

So, I do what I do best, and I take that client away. It's real easy to do that. So, know your competition really well. I guess those are – that's my advice.

AP: You've been back to Jefferson.

RS: Yes, I have.

AP: How has that been ...

RS: It's been really interesting. Haven't been in so many years, but a lot has changed. Going there last week was a real eye opener. They have a new band room. They have a new orchestra room. They have a guitar room. They have a piano room. I was like, "Wow," and the students look really young. I was looking at some of the seniors thinking of myself as a senior, and thinking, "Oh my God, I was that age when I got married the first time." I can't imagine. They're kids. They're kids. I was a child having a child at 18 years old. And I see these kids and it's amazing.

I – one thing that I take a lot of pride in is that I'm establishing a scholarship for a Jefferson student that I'm gonna do yearly, that just came about when I was there, and seeing, and hearing, and understanding how difficult it is for some of these kids to go to school. To – I've been very blessed and very lucky, but this doesn't happen to a lot of people. I think a lot of what has happened to me is because of my drive and maybe I was at the right place at the right time, but without an education, you can't accomplish these things. You just can't. I always told my girls that. That was critical for my daughters.

So, thank goodness that they went to school, but I want to make sure that – when I got up there to talk, they had their pep rally going on and all that, and the last thing they wanted to hear about was from me, right? But they listened, and I talked a lot about staying in school. These days, with the dropout rate being so high, and I'm in that world every day. We turn people away if they don't have a high school diploma because all of our clients require that. And does it make me feel good to do that? Absolutely not. I have people who're begging me, and, "Oh, I have two kids. I'm sorry, Miss. Can –"

And there's nothing I can do other than advocate for education. Other than try to convince them that they need to stay in school. So, that's what did last week.

AP: How was it that you ended up there just so we'll ...

RS: Well, I was nominated and actually selected to be the outstanding ex-student for Jefferson, which was a great honor for me, of course, and a real surprise. I was actually nominated by **Francis Caralona**, who's a school nurse at Jefferson. And there's kind of an interesting story with her. She was actually the school nurse at my elementary school also at one time. And then, she ended up being the school nurse at Jeff. She was like our second mom. Because my mother worked all of the time, whenever I got sick, or needed to go home because I was not feeling good, or needed to go to the doctor, and mom was always working, she'd actually take us to the doctor.

She'd actually do things for us that – I don't know why. She just loved my mom and wanted to help her and help us. And so, she became like a second mom to all of us. And it was a really neat relationship. So, interestingly, she – when we were in the high school at Jefferson, she was – I wanted to be – and this is kind of a sad story, it's probably gonna make me cry, but I wanted to be a majorette in high school, and my mother couldn't afford to buy me a baton. Can you imagine that? And she bought me a baton so that I could try out to be a majorette. And unfortunately, I was never able to try out because I had to work. I had to work to help the family. So, I couldn't be a majorette.

But I still have my baton, believe it or not. And after all of these years, we've been – we've remained very close, my brothers and I have remained very close with her, and her son-in-law is the attorney that helped me start my company that – he's my corporate attorney. Her daughter ended up working with me for a little while. So, it's amazing how things happen in life. And then, because she's always kept up with what we've done and stuff, she nominated me for this award. And then, I got a call one day, and I was told, "You've been nominated." And I was like, "Oh, how great." I was so surprised, but I was so excited.

And I said, "Okay, well, when is the voting gonna be," and all of that, and the guy says, "No, you were already selected." And I'm like, "Oh my –" I was like really excited. And so, last week, at the assembly, it was just fabulous. And at the game, my brothers came

with me. It was really nice to go back. And you know what? Now that I'm able to help in a little – in a small way, I said, “Oh, God. I've gotta do something for somebody at Jeff.” So, I'm doing the scholarship.

AP: Fantastic.

RS: Yes, it really is. It's great.

AP: Anything that you'd like to add before we conclude this?

RS: No, not really. I appreciate you all coming here. I think what you're doing is wonderful. I'm certain that I'm going to enjoy – and hope that my children, and my grandchildren, and their children really look this up at some point in time, and that they're able to see and hear me talk about what my life has been about. So ...

AP: This is the continuation of the interview with Rosa Santana. Tell me about some of the awards you've received.

RS: Okay. So, I received several awards. One of them was businesswoman of the year for region three for the US Hispanic Chamber of Commerce. And that's a – businesswoman of the year, wow, for the whole region. It's a great award. I was nominated by the San Antonio Hispanic Chamber of Commerce. Right when we opened our operation in San Antonio, I got to meet a lot of the people there, again, networking, right? And they were so impressed with the story.

So, I go to Puerto Rico, and I receive this award, and I hear some of the other women getting the awards, and I hear their stories, and I think, “Man, I thought I had a great story,” and these women have some amazing stories of survival, of ... and so, I still believe what we've done is really great, but God, there are so many wonderful people out there that have done some interesting things with – and amazing things with their lives, and – but anyway, some of the other awards, a Latina businesswoman of the year, that's an award from, it's now BBVA, Compass Bank. I was awarded that in San Antonio, also.

I've been inducted into the El Paso Women's Hall of Fame. I was minority business enterprise of the year last year through the minority business council. My gosh, there's so many, and I used to remember them. And now ...

AP: I think I read that you were ranked 3 ...

RS: 339, I think is what we are this past year in the Hispanic 500, yes. We should go up dramatically in this coming year because we've had a really good year. We were very, very affected by the economy the last 18, 24 months, but this year, we have had a very good year, and we should – unless everybody else is having a really great year, which I hope they are, we should be ranked a little bit higher this year. So, there's – we've been ranked pretty nicely for the last four, five years.

And Diversa hasn't been ranked yet because we – this was our first year of business, but that will – if we land some of these really big deals that we're working on, we should be ranked very nicely for Diversa. So, that's pretty exciting.

AP: Well, tell me about – you mentioned the last 24 months

RS: yes.

AP: difficult, tell me about the business climate when you started as compared to how it is now.

RS: Well, you know, interestingly, when I started my company, I didn't even give thought to what the economy was doing. I just – survival makes you do certain things, right? It was like, "Hey, I got an order for people. I know what I do really well. So, good time or bad time, this is what I'm doing." I never really thought about it. But it was not such a good time. I started the company right after 9/11, and you remember how bad things were, how unstable things were, how uncertain things were during that time. And 9/11 was, in September, I actually formed my company October/November and actually started operations in February, full blown operations.

I was already doing these placements and stuff because those can't wait. But full blown operations, I think I started in February, the following February. I told you about our first two years in business. They were phenomenal. So, business was phenomenal for me when we first started, and then, they were not so great because of the separation from the partners. And the separation didn't just happen with the partners. That separation took a lot of the business away because they had a lot of business with the company – with this company. And then, the next two or three years were starting like to build up again, right, to get to where – because now I had financing and all of that.

And then the economy went crazy and it went bad and it was almost like you feel like, “I came out of all the bad stuff and now the economy’s bad,” it’s like and unfortunately I think some people just give up too soon. I was at that six, seven years and I kept thinking, “Man, I can’t just go down, I can’t close this business, I have to figure out how to keep going and we did, we just did it.” To ask me how specifically, I don’t know. I don’t know how we survived the mess with the partnership I don’t even know. My daughter and I were talking about it the other day and – because she lived it right with me. We don’t know how we survived it.

We don’t know but we know we survived it, that’s the good thing right? We don’t know how we made the decisions that we did every day to just keep going. We just, I guess instinct just makes you make the right decision or the decision you have to make, right, wrong, or indifferent, right? And so, once we – once the economy started going bad you think, “Oh, God can I survive this? I’ve survived the bad partnership stuff. Can I survive this now,” and I think when you have a good plan and you work your plan and you remain focused on what your good at you can, I think, overcome any – anything. One thing that I know small businesses don’t do a lot is planning.

We’re not very good at that. We just aren’t. I have done it at my company from day one because that’s all I knew how to do. I learned a long time ago from one of my bosses, plan your work and work your plan, plan your work and work your plan. So when you plan your work, I am a stickler about having a sales pipeline. Every one of my markets I have a sales pipeline for every one of my markets that those managers work on a daily basis. Because I tell them, “If we lose one account, you better have somebody else to take their place,” and you can’t grow business if you don’t have a pipeline. If you lose a million dollar account how do you replace that million dollar account if you don’t have a prospect list?

So those are the things that we’ve done. So working our pipeline through the bad times helped us be positioned to just rake it in when things started getting good and I’ll tell you what. What the other thing that I did, I couldn’t afford to do it but I did it anyway, is I hired some really good staff because I knew that the moment things got better and when you’re in communication with your client a lot, when you have these kinds of conversations with your clients they tell you, they tell you, “Look, another six months and we’re gonna be ready and we’re gonna be hiring.”

And yeah, you go the following month, "Yup another five months," so we knew when things were gonna happen for them because they were already planning it. And so, I invested in hiring some additional people and training them during the down time so that when things got crazy we would be ready. And they – and we hired several people in San Antonio. When we hired them they were bored to death and I'd say, "Why are you bored you can go out and sell you can do this, you can't be bored right? I don't pay you to get to be bored," but they were like "Is this ever gonna get better?" and when things got crazy they couldn't believe it.

I kept telling them, "Believe me, when it gets crazy you're gonna know it, you're not gonna know what to do," and sure enough, I used to go sometimes, I'd go there a lot, right? I walk into those offices and they just look at me like, "Ugh, you told us so." I've been through this many times. I've been through several recessions so – in this industry – in my company only once but it's very interesting and so I did some of the things that most – while most people were laying off people I was hiring people. And I was hiring the people that my competitors were laying off so that I could train them really well and get them ready.

I couldn't afford it but I knew that's what I had to do and if I hadn't done it wouldn't have been ready for these big orders for my clients. So it's kind of interesting, sometimes some of my managers will challenge me, "Well, the pipeline this", I said, "Has it worked?" "Yes." "Okay, so then, why are you arguing with success, right? If it works, why are you arguing with why you have to do it? Just plan your work and work your plan, believe me you'll be okay." So...

AP: So, you and your daughter were talking about how you...

RS: We talk about it all the time. Sometimes – when times are good we sit down and talk and we're very grateful that things are going better and all that and so she has **told me**, she says, "Mom, God remember the" – my partners, the name of their company was PSA, she says, "Mom remember the PSA days?" and I go, "Oh my God," she says, "I remember not being able to sleep thinking how are we gonna pay these suppliers tomorrow and how are we gonna pay the people tomorrow and all," can you imagine my young daughter and worrying about those things that if you don't borrow from Peter to pay Paul the whole thing might just crumble on you. I mean we were at stake of that.

But thank goodness we made the right moves and we didn't go there. That was what helped us.

AP: To conclude this interview,

RS: Yes.

AP: what do you think your mom would say about your success?

RS: Well, my mom got to see some of my success. She – the grand opening of our company, she was there. She was so, so proud. I'll tell you what, if she saw that I was named Outstanding **[inaudible]** Jefferson High School she would love it because she used to always, she didn't speak any English then, "Hi, la Jeff, la Jeff, la Jeff," and everything was "la Jeff" because she didn't know better we – I didn't go to college right? None of us went to college, none of my brothers and we all did okay. But to her Jeff is what made us who we became.

So, she would've been – if she saw me where I am today she would've been very proud – when I got downsized she lived with me – she was already sick and she lived with me, I cared for her, I had a full time caretaker for her and I never, never once felt bad about being downsized and I remember when I got home and told her she was like, "**[Speaking Spanish]**" and I said, "You say mom this," she used a really bad word, she said "**[Speaking Spanish]**" and I remember her telling me "**[Speaking Spanish]**" and look at us now. Yup, so, yes.

AP: Fantastic.

RS: Yeah, so, but like I say, it's – I think at times she worried because she didn't know exactly what I was gonna do. She knew that I was gonna be okay, I know she knew that, but she didn't know exactly what I was gonna do and when – and interestingly when we had our big event – our grand opening event and everything and she was there with me and everything she met the owners of partner company and she didn't like them and I didn't like them either. I got into business with them just like I told you without even really knowing them. Once I was in business it was a very interesting – I – it was not a good thing and my mother didn't like them and she told me. It's kind of interesting. So ...

AP: Well, is there anything else

RS: No, that's it.

AP: that we should add? Okay, this concludes the interview with Rosa Santana.

[End of Audio]

Duration: 88 minutes