

What was the best business advice you ever received?

“Outperform the competition while providing the utmost in customer service and professionalism.”

Charles D. Grimley III
CEO, Grimley Financial Corp.



What was the best business advice you ever received?

“Many years ago, I was fortunate enough to receive advice from the late Rick Flaster. In a particularly trying time, Rick reinforced the ‘golden rule’ — treat others as you would want to be treated yourself. While it may seem simple, his reinforcement of that concept has served well as a compass for conducting business in an ethical manner. Over the course of the years, I have reflected back on Rick’s words to me as a 20-something entrepreneur and have used those words to help guide me through difficult decisions on many occasions.”

Brian Samelson
CEO, eMaint Enterprises



What was the best business advice you ever received?

“‘Often wrong, but never in doubt.’ While I try to limit the ‘often’ portion of this statement, this piece of advice has provided me with the realization that while all the decisions you make may not be correct, don’t be afraid to make the hard choices and take the calculated risks. Have the conviction and faith that the decisions you make are the right course of action.”



Carlos Santiago
Vice president,
Para-Plus Translations Inc.



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Para-Plus can say 'growth' in more than 100 languages

PETER VAN ALLEN
STAFF WRITER

BARRINGTON — You don't find many companies that had startup capital of \$100.

But that's the case with Para-Plus Translations Inc., which Sonia M. Santiago founded in the back of her house in 1980.

"My desk was a coffee table," recalled Santiago, president of the company. "I had a portable typewriter my father gave me in seventh grade."

Last year, Para-Plus had sales of \$2.6 million, up from \$2.3 million the year before, earning it a place on the Philadelphia Business Journal's list of fastest-growing private companies in South Jersey. It has a dozen employees.

Para-Plus offers translation-and-interpretation services in more than 100 languages. It calls on literally hundreds of subcontractors — people who know languages but may also have specialties in medical, legal or scientific fields.

Clients include the U.S. Department of Justice, U.S. Customs, the Drug Enforcement Agency, Social Security Administration, FBI, the states of New Jersey and Delaware, Met Life, Kennedy Memorial Hospital, AIG Life Cos., among others.

Santiago is semiretired now, but son Robert Santiago, a civil engineer by training, serves as chief operating officer. Another son, Carlos Santiago, was recruited from his job as a high school physics teacher to handle systems work, as well as sales and translation work. Each son had his own career before joining Para-Plus.

Rob Santiago, who joined the company three years ago, said he and his brother share a respect for what their mother built.

"Especially as a product of what was going on at the time in the '70s. ... As a woman to take herself out of a law firm where she had a good job; it was a big risk," said Rob Santiago.

While working as a paralegal, Sonia Santiago, a native of Puerto Rico, was frequently asked to handle translation in court or for depositions.

"I worked with attorneys and judges and they were asking me to step in — all for free," she said. "Attorneys saw me in court and said, 'Can you help me?'"

That's when Santiago struck out on her own, adopting the "para" in paralegal to offer translation services.

"No one else was providing the service," she said. "I worked out of my house. I dressed in my best suit and had a briefcase. I would hand out cards and flyers. I would tell [prospective clients] I would do the first job for free. I had no fear at the time."

Her first client — still on board — was the Social Security Administration, which would ask her to provide translation services for administrative courts throughout New Jersey.



CURT HUDSON

No. 21

Para-Plus Translations Inc.

430 CLEMENTS BRIDGE ROAD
BARRINGTON, N.J. 08007

FOUNDER: Sonia M. Santiago.

DESCRIPTION: Para-Plus is a translation and interpretation company offering global translation and interpretation services for businesses and the legal, government, financial, health care and educational industries in more than 100 languages.

FOUNDED: 1980.

STARTUP CAPITAL: \$100.

PROFITABILITY: 11-15 percent.

REVENUE GROWTH 2009-2011: 8 percent.

"First it was Spanish, then Greek, then Italian," she recalled.

Eventually the service grew to more than 100 languages, which created challenges in finding skilled interpreters. "Once we started, people started seeking us out. But we'd also go to colleges or we'd look for international programs," she said.

It became more complex as clients asked for someone who was familiar with, say, a specific language but who

Sonia M. Santiago, president of Para-Plus, with her sons Robert (left) and Carlos, who now run the business.

was also familiar with courtroom procedures or medical specialties.

"We needed someone who could speak the language, but then we'd also have to prepare them for court," she said.

These days, Rob said, translation-and-interpretation is a big business, a \$1 billion industry. There are state regulations. It's subject to accreditation by medical boards, courts and other bodies.

"A lot of people can speak Spanish and speak Spanish very well. But it doesn't mean we'd send them into a hospital," he said.

A linguist or translator may need to know Slavic but also have familiarity with engineering.

There's no end to the factors affecting translation.

"We try to marry up the language and marry up the skill set," Rob said. "If you took a language, you could have all sorts of variations. You could have Mexican Spanish, which is different from Puerto Rican Spanish, which is different from Spain Spanish. It's also different from the Spanish that's spoken in the suburbs of New Jersey." ■



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