

## BPE Global Hot Topic – October 2024

### Happy 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary BPE Global!



BPE Global celebrated its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary this month! To celebrate, the team took a trip to Santa Fe, New Mexico for some company strategizing and some R&R. We enjoyed making stained glass art ornaments and even took a delicious cooking class! I had the opportunity to sit down with Beth Pride, our President, to talk about the company, how it started, its growth over 20 years, and for her perspective on the past, present, and future in terms of global trade. Here's what she had to say while sipping champagne in the cozy library at the Rosewood Inn of the Anasazi...

**Evelyn:** How did you start the company?

**Beth:** I had been running a dot com company and came back from vacation and the CEO said he wanted to meet with me. I asked him if we had gotten our funding because we were running out of money. Instead of telling me what was going on, he fired me. (The whole company was laid off just 2 weeks later.) That same afternoon he called me and asked me to lunch the next day. When I first met him, I had told him that he knew nothing about Global Trade and couldn't teach me about it, but that he could teach me everything there was to know about being a CEO. When we met for lunch he said, "It's time for you to start your own company." He named it Beth Peterson Enterprises, and I started writing the business plan the next day. That was October 2004, and I've never looked back!

**Evelyn:** What was the process like to start the company? Was it overwhelming?

**Beth:** No. Many times, people are trying to start something new, but they still have a job. I didn't, and I could focus 100% on writing the business plan, figuring out who my target market was, and signing up for the [Renaissance Entrepreneurship Center](#), which taught a Business Planning class. I signed up for an 18-week business planning class and used every minute of the layoff.

**Evelyn:** Was it the intent from the beginning that BPE Global would be a woman-owned, women-led company?

**Beth:** Hah! The intent was for it to be a one-woman company, and it would make millions of dollars, and I could do it all on my own (that's what the business plan says!)

**Evelyn:** So, how did the company transition?

**Beth:** I learned quickly that I'm a collaborative person. I cannot work alone. I had a small number of customers early on and I wanted to hire an employee who could collaborate with me on not just doing the jobs but building a great company. I realized that within a year of starting the company.

**Evelyn:** Who was the first employee?

**Beth:** My best friend, Julie Gibbs. She came over for drinks one day and my ex-husband suggested to her that she join BPE. I had been considering it and knew I needed somebody and that she would be perfect. I think the fact that my husband said it, and not me, caused her to think about it more seriously!

**Evelyn:** What has been the biggest challenge as a company owner?

Accounting!! I am not an attention to financial detail person, and I made some pretty big QuickBooks errors early on. I struggled with getting the help I needed. For the first few years I was spending time on financial things when I preferred to be finding new customers and helping my existing customers. I was taught at Renaissance to learn what you're not good at. I knew I needed help, but at that point we couldn't afford to hire a purely administrative person. It wasn't until about 2010 when I could do that and finding that person was a quick process!! All it took was one call to a recruiter, a payment to them of their fees, and 15 minutes for them to make a single call to Gloria.

**Evelyn:** What are you most proud of at the company?

**Beth:** We have supported our employees. We have approaching retirements I'm happy to help support, we have implemented maternity leaves, bereavement leaves. And the whole benefit structure is based around how to reduce catastrophic expenses in the event of illness. What can be emotionally catastrophic, we don't want to become financially catastrophic.

**Evelyn:** I know it's a big question, but how has trade compliance changed in 20 years?

**Beth:** When I first wrote my business plan, the list of services I thought I'd offer were vastly different than what we actually ended up doing. I thought we'd be doing more Customs Assessment Trade Toolkit (CAT) assessments, audits, classification, and savings on imports. I also thought that because my background had been in Global Trade Management solutions that we would be implementing GTM Solutions. So, the original business plan doesn't synch up to what we actually do today. It turns out that our first client needed an export compliance program, and a disclosure.

**Evelyn:** What has been the best change for.....

**Beth:** Gloria! Our Controller.

**Evelyn:** How sweet! Actually, I was going to say “with respect to global trade regulations over these past 20 years.”

**Beth:** Hmmmm. Export Control Reform. There are so many levels to why I loved Export Control Reform. First, my president knew what I did. Barack Obama said, “This is what is going on,” and he figured out how to put tall walls around the really important stuff and lowered the walls around the stuff that wasted time and money for so many companies.

What we quickly learned was that people who were embedded in ITAR and knew ITAR had no clue how to work in the EAR. That was a really engaging, strategic time for the company, teaching people how to use both sides of their brain, ITAR and EAR, and that you couldn't just say we're all ITAR anymore.

**Evelyn:** I remember how nerve-wracking it was for me at my company to have my products go from ITAR to EAR. It was the hardest, scariest change. I can remember how many times I was asked “Are you sure?” But it went smoothly. Then, because we had so carefully planned and tested for the transition, management probably thought that we had we had made it out to be a bigger deal than it was! You can't win.

**Beth:** Well, that's one of the reasons why we hired you. You were born to help companies understand this point!! Sometimes people are looking for a burning building [before addressing an issue], but what they don't understand is that if they don't get it, that building could have burned down before they even realized it, and they'll have millions of dollars in sales that they can't let go. It's all about the basics. When you start a company, you incorporate, you get a tax ID, you pay your taxes. People who don't get export controls aren't doing the basics.

**Evelyn:** What else did you appreciate about Export Control Reform?

**Beth:** Because we had connections with American Shipper, we'd be put on webinars with BIS officials, and more people heard about us because of that. Our company got known because, yeah, we were with *them* [BIS].

**Evelyn:** Was there ever a favorite customer project that you've ever worked on?

**Beth:** Well... I love all my babies. But if I had to choose, it would be a small startup aviation company that was going to disrupt the on-demand economy for transportation. It was really fun. They didn't understand that their technology needed export licenses for their engineers. When we explained it to them, we sorted it all out and we became an essential part of them growing, to the point where they went public while we were helping them. It was joyous. It was really fun to be a part of that. We also helped them get export licenses to share technology with their foreign investors. Then we did what we had to do until it was a full-time job, and we told them they needed to find a full-time person. And they did. And we do that for so many clients!!

The fun of being at BPE is that you get to be in these companies at that moment where they can put all the fundamentals in place or ignore them and crash and burn. We are part of those fundamentals, and we help build the bones of the next generation Fortune 500 companies. We fulfill that and we have fun doing it! I always tell potential clients “We're going to have fun doing this.”

**Evelyn:** How do you manage work-life balance?

**Beth:** Actually, it's "Life-Work" balance. I work non-stop, but I also know that if I work every employee at the level I work, that's not appropriate. So, we've set great, appropriate quotas and goals for our team that are achievable month after month, so that they have an opportunity to work with great customers we have. We don't manage by "You can do more", we manage by "You can kick ass."

**Evelyn:** Have you ever considered hiring a man?

**Beth:** We did!! We hired Deron Marvin into the company early on. He helped us with our marketing strategy, and we expanded into training and education. He took BPE from best friends [working together] and said let's put in procedures, marketing strategy, and sales forecasts. Unfortunately, though he brought great structure to the company, we had expanded just when the recession hit in 2008. He was our only layoff ever. It was devastating, but to this day he's one of my best friends.

**Evelyn:** What is the greatest lesson you've learned along the way?

**Beth:** You're not alone. You're never alone. You're never making a singular decision. There are many resources, like the regulations, citations, online search tools, CROSS, etc., but we also work with an amazing group of people who are our resources. If I hit a wall, I get to ask somebody on our team. And if we hit a wall, we have a network of amazing partners that we can call and ask "How would you do this?" And they will give us guidance. And how do we accomplish that? Because we would do the same for them. No question. It's a community.

And this brings me back to my Berkeley roots. BPE Global is a community. And I learned that when I founded the company and thought I could do it on my own. What I've realized is that I am a community builder, and one of the big communities I helped to build was WIT-NC. I was their Secretary, and then I became their President. And it was really wonderful to have that community that I could be a part of while I was building my company. My time at WIT-NC was dreamy. We revived what is one of the most well-known names for a women's trade association, we grew it beyond our expectations, we put in standard processes, we built successor plans. I was with WIT-NC as a board member for 12 years. And we're still members!

I also want to acknowledge how important succession planning is. We are blessed at BPE Global with the fact that Gabrielle Griffith is my successor. I am proud of the legacy that I someday will be leaving in her capable hands.

**Evelyn:** What do you wish more people knew about BPE Global?

**Beth:** I think our passion is the most important thing, and the fact that we love doing what we do. We're not punitive in any way, but if you're not doing it right, we're going to get it right for you, and we're going to show you the easiest way to do it... and we're going to protect you because of that.

**Evelyn:** Pulling out the crystal ball, how do you see compliance evolving, changing? What will be different?

**Beth:** Compliance will be a part of the executive team. It doesn't have to be a C-Suite title, but the executive team will understand the value of trade compliance. The companies that are successful will have leaders in the company that can prepare the company, support the company, and effortlessly let the companies go through changes. My future is that people will

get it, it will be taught in schools. I mean, if I can understand the regulations, everyone should be able to understand the regulations. I started off as a truck driver. In this career, if a truck driver can understand this, anybody can!

**Evelyn:** Final thoughts?

**Beth:** Even in the hardest times, I've never said "Woe is me." Quitting was not an option! I'm happy. I ended up where I needed to be, where I can create goodness.



Evelyn, Gaby, Julie, Gloria, and Beth  
Here's to the next 20!

Let BPE Global know if we can help you with any of your trade compliance needs. BPE Global is a global trade consulting and training firm. Evelyn Bernal is a Director of BPE Global. You can reach Evelyn by email at [ebernal@bpeglobal.com](mailto:ebernal@bpeglobal.com) or by phone at 408-718-0265.