

# Sharon Harper on life in Arizona, challenges in the industry, mentorship, and the future of Plaza Companies

Chad Schleicher



Sharon Harper, President and CEO  
Plaza Companies

*I sat down with the President and CEO of Plaza Companies for a candid conversation in hopes to find out more about one of the few female industry leaders in our market.*

Sharon grew up in Minnesota, attended Creighton University and majored in Journalism. Her first job out of school was for the Omaha World Herald and her move to Arizona did not occur until her now husband relocated for his residency.

So how did an Arizona transplant with no ties to the community and a background in journalism create one of the most well-known development companies in Arizona? Let's find out...

## **Where did the transition from journalism to developer begin?**

As a journalist I had followed various hospital groups and with my husband being in the medical profession, I started with what I knew and understood the best, the medical environment. Our first private investment was a medical office building (MOB) and really Plaza was founded around that. Now Plaza Companies focuses on three main areas of business. One is medical office/healthcare, the other is senior living and the third is bioscience/biotechnology.

## **How do you deal with challenges as a leader?**

A strong leader learns to pivot when challenges present themselves. Plaza Companies needed to pivot during our last recession and we did so by diversifying our revenue source. We added property management, leasing/brokerage, and construction services. These unique sector additions allowed Plaza to sustain in a market that many consider was hit the worst.

**“ Plaza Companies has done well because we do not deviate from our core principles. No matter how well we are doing we continue to stay grounded and remind ourselves where we came from. This creates a constant state of appreciation and continued drive. ”**

**Is there a quote, book, person, or company that you look at or to for inspiration?**

I keep a quote from John Quincy Adams in my desk and remind myself to look at it at least once a week. "If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more and become more, you are a leader".

**Any advice for our readers when starting their career?**

First and foremost learn every day; learn from others, learn on your own, and teach others. Learning never ends and those who think there is nothing more to learn are always wrong. When you are young, you don't have experience or a reputation that can back you up, so make sure you know the facts, that you are always prepared, and that you are knowledgeable surrounding the topic. Finally, get involved, volunteer, take on new roles within your company, join boards, basically do anything you can to expose yourself to new things.

**Any advice for our readers on work experience: Jump vs. Stay**

Find a company that provides growth, flexibility, cool space, allows opportunity to get involved, lead, etc. Here at Plaza Companies, I want each person to grow, lead, volunteer, and teach others. I like to think of each employee as being capable of being our next CEO.

**Where would you like to see Plaza Companies in the next 5 years?**

I would like to see Plaza continue to grow, maybe even double or triple in size and of course, never losing sight of where we came from and where we best do business.

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