

## **Episode 36 - Crystal Williams - 2018 Service World Woman of the Year (Part 1) [00:22:40]**

**David Heimer:** Hi, this is David Heimer, just a quick note about this episode of Profiles in Prosperity. Typically, our podcast interviews are pretty short, 20 minutes or less. But this interview with Crystal Williams went over that. Usually, we just edit the interview until it is short enough. But this time we couldn't find anything we wanted to cut. So we split it into two episodes. This is the first of two, Crystal is a great interviewee with lots of information. I think you'll quickly see why she was named Woman of the Year.

**Intro:** Welcome to Profiles in Prosperity, the leading podcast for residential service contractors, sponsored by Service Roundtable, and hosted by David Heimer.

**David Heimer:** Welcome to Profiles in Prosperity, I'm David Heimer. I'm delighted to welcome Crystal Williams to our podcast. Crystal is the marketing director at McWilliams and Son Heating and Air, in Lufkin, Texas. McWilliams is known for strong growth in sales and profitability, and Crystal has a great reputation in our industry. This year, she was named as the Service World Woman of the Year. So, Crystal Williams, welcome to Profiles in Prosperity, and congratulations again on your award at Service World Expo. That's fantastic!

**Crystal Williams:** Thank you so much, I was truly honored. That's quite the honor, I had no idea, so I was super surprised and just honored to receive it.

**David Heimer:** So, it was a surprise you didn't know going into it at all?

**Crystal Williams:** No. Quick story, I was dressed to fly home, my brother says, "Hey, you're probably going to want to change clothes for some pictures." So I went and changed clothes. And thank God, because I would have killed him if he would have let me take a picture in a yoga pants that I was planning to fly home in.

**David Heimer:** You know it's great to have a brother looking out for you.

**Crystal Williams:** Isn't it though? Especially right then, you know.

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**David Heimer:** You guys are a family business. Tell me, how did you get into this industry?

**Crystal Williams:** So back in the early 70s, my grandfather retired from the Navy, and started an appliance, and HVAC repair. And actually, in the town that most of us live in, which is called Diboll, it only has about 5000 people. He opened McWilliams Appliance Repair, my grandmother opened a craft shop, right there in town. And he just kind of started doing appliances, and things like that. So it just kind of evolved into HVAC. And then, when my dad got old enough to be his helper, he became his helper. When Trey got old enough to be my dad's helper, then Trey became my dad's helper. So, they just kind of, for three generations, have evolved into this great - I consider us a great company. So, 2019 will be our 45th year in business, and like I said, Trey is the 3rd generation. But basically, it's the skills that my grandfather had, when he retired, and just felt like he could pass along. And all of them are just trained by hard work.

And so, it really has grown our company, just because I think they're very knowledgeable. There's a lot of knowledge there. And then, I was doing marketing for our local Coca-Cola bottling plant here, and pricing and things like that for them. And I had my degree from Stephen F. Austin, in communications. So, Trey reached out to me and said, "Hey, I'm really getting ready to take us to the next level, and I need some help, would you be interested?" And so, that's when I came on board, and I've always grown up here though. I spent many summers being the phone answerer, and the dispatcher, and whatever they needed me to be. And so, it's fun now that I'm here full-time and getting to do what I love.

**David Heimer:** Yeah, that's awesome! So, your last name is Williams, the company is McWilliams, couldn't you have chosen an easier last name to make this work out better?

**Crystal Williams:** Yeah, it is so funny. When I got married, I told everyone I was just dropping the Mc. But it is the highlight of my day when people will call my brother Trey

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Williams, and he's like, no. But yes, I just dropped the Mc when I married Ray, my husband.

**David Heimer:** That's great. So, you sort of characterize this as - it is a family-owned business, and you guys are family. But you guys are no longer a trivial business. I mean, it's not your dad and your brother working together in the business and you do a little bit of marketing. You guys are of significant size now, and you have been taking it to the next level for some time. Tell me just a little bit about the company in terms of employees, and scope of work, and stuff like that.

**Crystal Williams:** At the beginning of 2019, we're going to go in with 53 employees, and I will be upfront and honest, people are shocked by this. I'm a full-time marketer and we have another full-time marketer and a part-timer. One in each of our markets, and so, that's 53, that does include us 3, and that does include Trey and Irvin. So, basically, we are about 60, 40 split, 60% of our business is residential, 40% is commercial business. And that's when really, for the commercial setup, back in 2015, when we purchased AR Commercial Services, which was a local company that was very heavy on the commercial side. So, we bought them in 2015. And back in 2014, we acquired a small mom-and-pop company out of Nacogdoches, which is our other market. So, we added them, they were pretty small, but heavy residential. In a good amount, commercial, they, here in East Texas, have chicken plants, and we call them Tyson and Pilgrim's Pride, and things like that. So, they had a good reputation with those companies.

So, we acquired them in 2014, and then the other commercial business in 2015. And so I think that's been a big reason as to why heading into 2019 we're pretty balanced and are getting more balanced at 60, 40. You know, like I said, Irvin has kind of stepped into the role of CFO, he's kind of behind the scenes, he's mostly in a consultant role. He's here probably only 60% of the time.

**David Heimer:** Irvin is your dad?

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**Crystal Williams:** Correct, Irvin is my dad, and Trey is my brother. And so Irvin is out, like I said 40% of the time. He and my mom are both retired now, or he's partially retired. So they travel and do things like that. He volunteers for things and stuff. And then, Trey is basically our general manager, so he runs overall, and then we have of course, our department heads, and then down to technicians. We counted today, we have 32 rolling vehicles, just to kind of give people an idea. We should do about eight and a half million this year, and so we're pretty excited with that. We're in what I consider three designated markets. We have our main office, which is where our central office, all of our dispatching and CSRs are out of this Lufkin office, and then about 30 minutes up the road, to the north of us is Nacogdoches. And then about 45 minutes south of us on Highway 59, is our Livingston office, which we just started mid-year this year, things are going great.

**David Heimer:** Tell me about marketing at McWilliams. What has worked for you guys? What do you do? Just tell me about what you guys do in marketing.

**Crystal Williams:** Sure, so, about nine years ago, Irvin just decided that he needed to pick it up a notch, if we were ever going to get over that 1million hump there. And so, we kind of set it.

**David Heimer:** About how many years ago was that?

**Crystal Williams:** I'm going to say, right about nine years ago, is when he really bought into an aggressive marketing campaign.

**David Heimer:** Okay, got it.

**Crystal Williams:** And I was not here then, he kind of did it on his own. He started working with this media company, and Service Roundtable, on Service Nights. All that kind of came about within two or three years of each other. And basically, I think he

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bought into a media program, and they didn't even have the money for it and prayed that it worked. And he was aggressive and we've never really looked back. Some of the things that we have that are super successful, the first thing that I'll mention is our jingle, Abba, heavy radio here. And our jingle is very memorable, I actually had it created into a karaoke version, and even with the bouncing balls that tell you when to sing. And I take that to some local school job fairs, and anytime I can take it to any little shows, things like that. It is always a big hit. I had T-shirts made, that say I survived the karaoke challenge, and I have McWilliams and Son on there, and they sing our jingle. It's just something that has really set us apart from our competition. And I buy heavy on the radio, you're sick of hearing it. But that's what I like. I like the fact that people are sick of it.

**David Heimer:** Are you going to sing the jingle for us?

**Crystal Williams:** Oh gosh! You know, we make people do that in an interview. But the best part is, "because we're not comfortable till you are" that is everybody's favorite part. So I'll sing you that part.

**David Heimer:** I like it.

**Crystal Williams:** Yeah. So it's a lot of fun, and people always say, I hate that dang jingle, I can't get it out of my mind. And I will always be like, yeah, that's the checkpoint for me. Because that's the way I know you're hearing it and you're listening. Yeah, so, our radio campaign is, again, a very important component. One of the things is, each year, I kind of evaluate what was successful in the past years, and then I always try to add in some new things. That way I can reach new people. This year, we're going to the cinema. So we're going to be at the movie theaters, in our market. So we get a 30 second, basically, commercial, right before the preview starts.

It's really cool, very affordable, It's on every screen. so I mean, it's a really good deal. Our theme this year is, Define Your Comfort, and thank you for letting McWilliams and

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So keep you comfortable for over 45 years, and we're using our own people in these commercials. So I really needed a visual punch, instead of just radio focusing on the jingle. I needed to add some visual aspects to our comprehensive campaign, and so the cinema was one of them. We're also doing a billboard campaign around that as well, this year. Again, I'm in rural East Texas, David. There's 35,000 people that live in the biggest city that we're in. But during the workweek, it's about 100,000 people that travel into this area to work. But, you know, we're about two to three years behind the national swing, what's nationally popular, just because we're just a little bit more rural.

But we actually have lots of success with direct mail. With Stochastic Marketing, I give so much credit to the Service Roundtable. We met Terry Barrett, then he and I just had some great conversations, and he and Irvin, he and Trey. A couple of times about how well this repetitive mailing campaign he was doing through Stochastic Marketing. So we got paired up with them and I call it their secret sauce. There's just something about their formula, if you will, that really proves successful. And I think, just like anything, I think it can wear off. But right now, we're still having probably a 20 to 30% return on what we're doing with Stochastic. An average home is going to get about eight mailings a year from us, which is not a lot. But it's a couple of reminders for their fall tune-up, reminders for the spring tune-ups, we offer a little special on those and then we mail a couple of letters. And being a millennial, I was born in 1981, I can't stand what they look like, the graphics on these mailing pieces. It is so bright.

**David Heimer:** They look like Dot Matrix Printer.

**Crystal Williams:** Absolutely.

**David Heimer:** They're like white, and it totally works.

**Crystal Williams:** It totally works, and when Harry Barrett showed me an example of one, and then stochastic send me an example. I went in there and I said, you cannot

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make me mail this out. Like this can't be a part of my portfolio of something that we promoted. But I think if I tried to change it too much into what I wanted or to swing it a different direction, I think that it would have totally lost its 'it factor' if you will. And so we kind of leave it alone, Eric over at Stochastic, he'll send me like, "Hey, these are some things that are working well for others." We looked at it, and outside of playing with the numbers a little bit, as far as the discount, I tried to read his wording, his color scheme, his design, all the same. Because I feel like that's what makes it successful. But again, it does really well for us. And so we'll be doing a pretty comprehensive campaign again this year with them. Another thing that we get a great return on is our phone books. Now half of the people that are listening right now just fell out of their chair, or don't even know where a phonebook is, but we still have a huge response in our {cross talk 11:46}

**David Heimer:** So you mean the Yellow Pages?

**Crystal Williams:** Yes, the Yellow Pages. Here we have Consolidated, if people still have landlines, which a lot of people here still do, they'll carry a landline for whatever reason. Again, because we're rural, it's not that unimaginable, we will lose cell signal, at least sometimes it's half a day or a couple of days, that cell signal is really bad if they're doing a bunch of tree trimming or anything like that here. Or like the hurricanes come through, because you know, we're within two hours of the coast of the Gulf of Mexico. So a lot of times people keep that landline for safety reasons. But Consolidated still sends out this, and the last time I checked, like \$300,000 worth of business came from that Consolidated phone book, phone number.

**David Heimer:** Wow.

**Crystal Williams:** Well, that's hard to pass up, you know, I don't want to just not do it, because it doesn't appear popular. Until phone books stop producing for me, I'm going to be in them. I track everything, I have tracking numbers on every single piece of medium that leaves here. So if I send out a postcard, it's got a unique tracking number.

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We use the service tab and so I'm actually able to utilize all of their reporting options to track, and really know what's producing. And when I have to tell a vendor, "Hey, you know, I'm not going to buy this magazine next year." I can show them actual proof, no one called in off of it. So, that's kind of what I like to do and that's the basic side of things. That's the media buying side of what I do, which is actually a pretty small percentage of what I do. I do some social media stuff that I'm changing. I'm excited about a big change I made for social media for 2019. I'm actually moving to a local company so I'm excited to see how that's going to work out.

**David Heimer:** So when you say that, you mean that a local company is going to be managing social media for you? Or did you mean something else?

**Crystal Williams:** So, the current company that I'm with now does our branding on social media, so I'm an admin on all four of our pages. But what I really wanted to add is, you know, everybody's moving into a little bit more video. And the company that we have now was using a lot of panned images as I say, so, great content, a lot of times but the graphics were of models or whatever. Well, by partnering locally, we're going to use our own people, our own technicians, our own office staff, and she's able to come over and take pictures and video and do a lot more local connection for our followers on Facebook. And so I'm really excited to see, we'll be launching lots of videos on social media, like meeting our technicians, and just lots of fun engaging activities, that I'm hoping gets a lot more organic following if you will, than having to pay as much. So I'm excited to see where that takes us because it's going to be for all three locations. So, you know, giving Nacogdoches a local spin by featuring all of our employees that live in Nacogdoches, in our Nacogdoches ads, and so I'm really excited about it.

**David Heimer:** You sort of alluded to this, but you have a reputation for being brilliant at networking in your community. And apparently, you are driven to help the community. But it's one of those things where your involvement ends up helping your business also. Can you tell us about what you do?

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**Crystal Williams:** Sure, number one, I'm a Christian, and so a lot of times, I'm very drawn to helping people that are here in our own towns that we live and work in. I have a heart for the elderly, and for children, and things like that, and I truly feel like all of our employees do too. And so, our company is very - we're very blessed, and we're very fortunate to have what we have, especially my family, you know, our business support five of my family members, because my mom's sister and her daughter are also here, one in our accounting department, and one is our lead dispatcher. And so, really, there's five of us in one basic family that our entire livelihoods around this company.

And so, you know, we're all driven to give back and do what we can do because of how well we've been blessed. One of the things I do is, I always try to identify things that I feel like are true needs, in our community. And then, I don't just give dollars, you're rarely ever going to see McWilliams and Son just giving a \$500 check and calling it a day. I'm going to give a \$500 check but it's probably because I'm out there ringing the Salvation Army bell. Or I'm on their board already, helping them make important decisions and helping them, you know, be in their finances and we wanted to support or sponsor something.

I truly believe that people do business with people that they want to be friends with. And I know that sounds weird, but, I'm a Rotarian, when I'm in those Rotary meetings, it's all about service above sales, and that's the same way that I want our company to operate too. Where can we be of service? You know, what can we do? and a lot of times because I go after it, I'll go for it, with these different organizations and I'll say, hey, I don't want to just give you money, I want to be a part of what you need. It's nothing for us to donate to pay for goods to {inaudible 16:53} house, which is a place where single women can live while they go to school, rent-free, basically. We're donating paper products, or we're over - Wednesday and Thursday, every single employee that we have that wasn't on vacation, worked at the Habitat for Humanity House. We worked four four-hour shifts, every single one of our employees, during the day.

And so, you know, it's just because I think that now, that Habitat for Humanity director,

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you know, I had to call her a couple of weeks ago and plan it all out. And then I called her back and told her, hey, and by the way, we're also going to donate the system that you're going to install on this house. She sent me a message just yesterday, and the text message said, hey Crystal, I loved your employees, everyone was so kind and gracious. Y'all put us two weeks ahead of schedule and I just can't wait to tell everybody the difference that McWilliams and Son made. Now we did that out of the goodness of our heart, but it didn't hurt one bit. But she's now going to promote McWilliams and Son.

**David Heimer:** What comes through loud and clear on this is that, you guys do all this, you help out the community because you think it's important and it's what's in your heart. But even if it comes back to you one way or another, it's not just that you feel good about it, it ends up being good for the business and it's good for your employees too. They feel better about where they work, right?

**Crystal Williams:** Oh, absolutely! I made a comment last night when I was sitting outside talking to my husband, I said, you know, the first shift on Wednesday morning, we show up and there stands four of our install team. And it's almost like they were afraid, they didn't know what to do, and I just said, you know what we're going to do? We're going to go ahead and do what we know best. And that's we're finishing up some walls on the inside of this house. And a lady from Habitat, she said, "this is a home for a lady that works two jobs, she has seven children, right now they're living in a two bedroom apartment." And it was like the light bulb went off for our guys like, oh my gosh, I'm about to make a difference. And the Habitat director, she did such a good job, because she would say, these walls that we're building are the twin's bedroom. And so, man, our guys were just like, wow! And two of them sent me messages yesterday. "Hey, thank you so much, because I would have never done this on my own."

And you know, that's another thing like, we really work hard to expose our team members to ways that they personally can succeed in life. It's not all about McWilliams and Sons. We just happen to do heating and air conditioning. But I feel like we are led to make the lives of our employees better, and that they can really be prideful in where

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they work. They can go home every night and not be overly stressed or overly tired and feel like me and my company makes a difference and I'm proud to be a part of that team. So, I'm super proud of that fact, that probably 60% of my day is spent on some type of non-profit organization or our chamber of commerce event, truly.

**David Heimer:** So, would you say that you are the face of the company in your community, is that true?

**Crystal Williams:** Yeah. So our logo, the logo that we promote a lot, is what I call our three generations logo, and it's these caricatures of my grandfather, my dad, and my brother. And so now the running joke, everywhere I go, is, when is your face going to be on there? You need to get your face on a magnet and stick it all over, all of the trucks. Because I think when people think of McWilliams and Son, or they'll call me and say, it needs to be McWilliams and Son and Daughter, like, why are y'all not getting that? You know, and that's what I was hired to do, and so, one thing that's funny is like, the office, I'm in and out so much, and some of the girls will say, Miss Crystal, I never understood, I mean, you're so busy, in and out. And I'm not saying I'm busy to get any kind of pat on the back but my job is to be busy. My job is to be everywhere. I'm at 90%, if our Chamber of Commerce, if they're hosting a ribbon cutting, or a red carpet salute, a business after five event, a university class. I am always offering to work it, showing up at it, holding the scissors, holding the ribbon. I'm introducing myself to every new business, to every new person from the chamber, and I'm making sure, hey, if you need anything, let us know.

If it's a new nonprofit I'm always like, hey, I have a team full of people that would love to support your organization, let me know more about it. And we're about to do an ugly sweater contest in December. And basically, my teammates, any of my team members can buy an ugly sweater, and we go on social media, and whichever one of our sweaters gets the most votes, the organization of our choice, the non-profit of our choice can win \$500. And so, my team, I just want them to feel empowered to make a difference. And again, because I'm so involved with the chamber or with these different

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non-profits, people then say, oh gosh! That's such a given company, we should call them. And it just really trickles down to read employee retention, employee engagement, customer retention. And then we get lots of customers that will call us and say, I've been using so and so but I'm on the board at the mosaic center, and Crystal came and fed our entire staff and I want to be partners with people that are doing that kind of stuff. I just think you got to get in there with everything you got.

**Outro:** We're always looking for good ideas and interviews for our podcast. If you have an idea, or maybe you think you should be interviewed, just shoot an email to [profiles Prosperity@serviceroundtable.com](mailto:profiles Prosperity@serviceroundtable.com). That's [profiles Prosperity@serviceroundtable.com](mailto:profiles Prosperity@serviceroundtable.com). If you think what we're doing has any value, it would be very helpful if you would give us a great rating on iTunes. Thanks for your support. Hope to see you again soon. Bye.