

## **Episode 73 - Colleen Keyworth - Woman of the Year [00:15:33]**

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

**David Heimer:** Hi everybody this is David Heimer. Welcome Profiles In Prosperity. Today I'm talking with Colleen Keyworth. Colleen is the director of sales and marketing for Online Access, which is an HVAC web marketing company located in Michigan. And let me just say, they are partners of Service Nation. Online Access is a fabulous company. I've worked with them for years, and I just think the world of them, I recommend them all the time to people. They're the nicest people in the world. And whenever you work with them, you get the sense that they are really worried about your success. And it's true, that's the kind of people they are, so just a little segue there. Colleen grew up in our industry, the family owned and HVAC and plumbing business, so she has a really clear understanding of contracting and also the realities that come with owning and operating a profitable business.

Colleen has an impressive list of awards. She was named to the ACHR News 2019, top 40, under 40. She is the Vice President and on the board of directors for the women in HVACR for the last six years. And a side note here, during this time when she was on the board, the organization has grown from a hundred to over 500 members. So very impressive. She is on the board of the Southeast Michigan Air Conditioning Contractors Association. And last year she was named the Service World Expo Woman of the year, so really fantastic stuff. Colleen, welcome to Profiles In Prosperity.

**Colleen Keyworth:** Thank you for having me, David. And thank you for all the nice things you said about Online Access, we appreciate you.

**David Heimer:** It's all true. I appreciate what you guys do and I recommend you guys to people all the time, and with really good results as well, so thanks for all you do for

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everybody. Let's start off at the beginning. You were probably some kind of slave labor to your dad and your uncle in the business. And from there, you ended up joining the business full-time somehow, I'm not sure how all that happened so talk us through it.

**Colleen Keyworth:** So there's a couple of different stories on that, but the main one being growing up in our family, my grandfather who Vincent's, he was very adamant that all his grandchildren would learn how to do any kind of work or labor, we own apartments under the Vincent's name too. So we had some side real estate apartments or ventures if you will, that the family kind of shared and did some additional income. And so as grandkids, it was one of our duties to work with grandfather and redo a lot of the roof or repaint, or redo carpet or rip up things. And in addition to that, we would sometimes be asked to sort copper for the business or, you know, just get bucket loads of cash barrels, copper and cut it up all day. So we all were very aware of hard work and we learned valuable lessons in that growing up.

I had no desire to be involved in our HVAC company. I kind of knew what it was about. I had kind of a rough understanding, but in general, it was just not my cup of tea. I did work for my uncle Dan, in college for a little bit, and I did emergency dispatch or I would fill in and do other clerical tasks for them while I was going to college part-time. And I actually, again, made a very big mess of that and actually was dismissed from Vincent's - very little known fact, I was actually fired.

**David Heimer:** it speaks well for the family business when they can fire one of their own.

**Colleen Keyworth:** So I was fired from that job while I was in college, and then I actually spent most of my passion and time actually doing event planning. I did weddings professionally for about four years, and then on the side I also did childcare. I

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worked a midnight job. I was a bartender at one time, I had all sorts of different odd jobs, but the main one being the event coordinating. And one day I had gotten the opportunity to do a speaking thing for a friend or go to a conference with a friend. And I got up on stage and really kind of felt like it wasn't that bad and did really well doing a product demonstration and sales pitch. And I called my dad immediately after that and I was like, "Hey, maybe this whole sales thing, isn't such a bad idea." Because he'd been bugging me for a while to join the other side of the business, which is the online marketing company.

My sister actually started working with him first. I didn't start working with Online Access until about almost eight years ago now. And Online Access has been in business for about 21 years where Vincent's has been in business for about 62 right now, so I actually had no desire to be involved. But I quickly joined up with Online Access after that experience; started working in the office and learning the industry, and started to actually mimic my dad quite a bit. I had to do a crash course and understand the difference between a water heater and a boiler, and a wholesaler and manufacturer. These are things everybody takes for granted that I had to learn very, very quickly, and everything kind of goes from there.

Joining the women in HPAC organization started very quickly after that, which was a godsend. I joined women HPACR in 2015, right around the time I had started in the industry. I met my now mentor, {inaudible 05:01} in Nashville Comfort Tech many moons ago, and immediately got asked to join the board. And I really will say that has been one of the biggest catalysts to my success as far as networking and even understanding the industry at a breakneck speed would be the involvement in that organization at a very early start.

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**David Heimer:** So tell me more about what you do, kind of day-to-day with Online Access.

**Colleen Keyworth:** So my job is kind of a hodgepodge of things, but my main responsibilities consist of any of our marketing for any outbound marketing we're doing. Our sales for any sales calls or customers, any kind of our - in the new world I'm not sure what this looks like, but trade shows and a lot of our training. So I do a lot with wholesalers and I do a lot with manufacturers and industry organizations to speak and train and talk about different industry topics. Besides that, my main focus would probably be Google My Business or Search Engine Optimization, getting into professional soft skills, all these different things. And so, my new life has been mostly webinars. But in general, usually, I would travel to all these places and do in-person training. And then I would create partnerships with the wholesalers and manufacturers to be able to do web work for their dealers or even tools for directories that they need to use. And so, that's kind of my main priority is honestly, industry relationship and training.

**David Heimer:** You are vice-president of Women in HVACR, and you've been an active member in it for years. You said you joined in 2015. One of the knocks about our industry is that there just aren't a lot of women in it. And I'm wondering from your perspective, what can a contractor do to make his or her business more attractive to women? Maybe the question is what can we do to make the industry more attractive to women?

**Colleen Keyworth:** Well, there are several areas of this. Number one, the thing you hear a lot is, you hear a lot of women who are in our industry, talk about uncles or fathers or grandfathers who offered them an opportunity or brought them in, or it's usually a relative or something. And I will say that makes up a large portion of the

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females that we have represented in our industry. So continuing to do that, they're a really good way to start. In addition to that, the marketing; if you think about it, when we do hiring posts, when we do any kind of marketing, when we talk about our guys in the field, it's still guys, the way we talk, being able to change up the pictures we use. We have such a stigma wrapped around what we do, whether it be in the field, in the office or in sales, or in engineering, that we don't even realize it.

And I don't think there's necessarily a problem like when people do it intentionally, it's just become such a norm. And trying to break that up and kind of take a step back and look at how you're using your marketing and how you're painting the picture of what the opportunities are in our fields, that's a big deal. So looking at using more pictures, using more photos of women, appealing to women, offering things that appeal to women like childcare. My goodness, that one this year took a really big spin. If you think about it, the thing after COVID, I mean, many things took hits, but one of the biggest one was women in the field, women in the office - women had to come back home. As soon as school was canceled and virtual school took over, mom had to come back home.

And I saw lots of different companies do many creative solutions to this, where they would bring in or hire a teacher part-time and have a conference room set aside where all the kids could go in and have a tutor do their virtual learning, but then have somebody on standby to monitor this. That way, the company was able to still have their employees working, but then they would provide childcare and they would provide options for people to help them through the virtual schooling because that became such a huge burden. You know, everybody was like, oh yeah, they're virtual schooling. Now you have to become the parent and the teacher. So, those are just examples of kind of redoing your culture to kind of fit that and make that a priority that makes it appealing for people who don't have many options if you have a family.

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**David Heimer:** It makes sense to go through a little bit of effort. If you think about it, what we hear from people constantly in our industry is I can't find good people, and what they're really talking about technicians and plumbers for the most part. But generally, I can apply it to the rest of the company as well. But what they're looking for so often is a guy, they're avoiding half the population, seems like.

**Colleen Keyworth:** More than half actually.

**David Heimer:** Yeah, that's right, about 51%.

**Colleen Keyworth:** Again, changing up your marketing. How are you asking? Who are you looking for? Are you going into schools? Are you talking about these opportunities? As a high school student right now, most of them don't even realize that this is even an option where they're going into a trade, not doing a four-year college, working as an engineer, maybe doing tool design for our industry, maybe doing airflow, maybe planning out buildings. These are all opportunities that nobody talks about. I had no idea what any of this was leaving high school. And most people only asked you where you're going to college.

**David Heimer:** Yeah. When my kids were in high school, the counselors only talked to them about going to college. None of them ever talked about trade school. They didn't talk about all the opportunities in the trades. They're really doing a disservice to the kids. So we've talked about marketing, the way you market your company to women, make sure that you are open to the idea of women coming in, also put women in the ads; what else could they do? Is there something they could do to make the business more women-friendly?

**Colleen Keyworth:** If you have an intact culture, we get this question quite a bit. It

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really isn't a problem, but some people actually will ask us to get this sent to the organization, we get this sent in to our Facebook page; what do you do about any type of harassment in the workplace or what do the guys do, or what do you do about the pressure or the teasing or anything to introduce the women into that environment? And I'm thinking whenever I get those, it kind of drives me a little crazy because it's just a sign of a very already damaged culture if you already have to worry about any of that.

Most places that I worked with that have female field technicians or even office dispatch, most office clerks and most office dispatch are women. And they already have established roles, but I don't think you have problems with your techs disrespecting them. What's the problem with one being in the field? And so, being able to address that with your company culture, first and foremost, as far as a place of respect, women may not be able to do all of the physical things a man can do, but there are other ways to do stuff. Sometimes there are smarter ways to do stuff. Sometimes there is dexterity involved that makes it easier for women to fit in small spaces or how you hold the ladder. There's many things out there that kind of blow my mind every day when we inspect Facebook, and there's a whole bunch of women all over the country, sharing pictures of what they do every day. And it's kind of crazy, but the other side of this is they're better at sales.

I firmly believe that women make better salespeople because nine out of ten times, the person that you're selling to in the home is the woman. And there's kind of an empathy there and a trust factor that really kind of gets overlooked that creates an edge when you're doing sales. In your office culture, another thing would probably be just adjusting how you're doing your hours even. Now that we've kind of breached the barrier of looking at home work - I'm not a fan of working from home, but I do know that there's cases where it works because I feel like remote work sometimes loses, especially if it's

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not run well, loses that right hand talking to the left-hand type of communication. But there are instances where working from home can be a flexible thing that allows you to hire people for different positions for different times of the day that fits with their schedule.

So flexibility in a schedule is huge, and that's not just for women. I think you'll find that with even millennials coming up into the trades, that that's one of their biggest desires. Time-off is another one. Another big thing is probably open communication. What kind of goals are you setting for your teams? Because most people are goal-oriented and women want to know what they can do to improve, what they can do to help, what they can do to make it better; what their ladder of success is. Speaking in schools, that's a big one. We actually have an ambassador program for women in HVACR that actually sets up all of the materials you need, slideshows, PowerPoints, speaking points, pass out, handouts, statistics, infographics, we have all of that together that we provide our ambassadors or anybody who wants to be an ambassador so that they're equipped to go into their local high schools and start talking about opportunities in the trades. So we make that as turnkey as possible, as long as you have somebody that wants to go in and speak, we'll provide you everything you need to do so

**David Heimer:** That's awesome. Well, Colleen, this has been fantastic. I'm really looking forward to seeing what you do next. I should ask you in 2021, what are you most looking forward to?

**Colleen Keyworth:** Us going back to shows. I know that's probably the predictable answer for me, everybody that knows me knows that's probably the number one thing. I had a really hard time trying to pull back last year. It's kind of hard for me. I am a very social person and I thrive on our events. It's really kind of a family thing to me in some



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instances. But I did accomplish a lot last year, despite all the different pivoting everybody had to do. Everybody learned how to do virtual meetings so we kind of sped that process up. And in addition to that, I probably made more connections because people had time to breathe.

So, I was able to work through partnerships and establish them faster than I would have in a normal year. However, the word of caution I would say, I guess, that kind of keeps me up at night; a lot of people talk about how much money the industry saved not doing events and how we can do virtual ones and look at the cost savings and stuff. Most of us did really well last year operating on our existing connections and ones that we had already established for years. But going forward, making new connections becomes much more difficult if we live in a virtual world. And the person that gets in front of your customer first is going to get in front of your customer first. So, I'm hoping that the vaccine and several new mandates and just things clearing up in general that we're able to get back to, you know, seeing each other and being able to do in person training because I think all of us at some level need that contact.

**David Heimer:** I agree. And I'm looking forward to seeing you at trade shows, you're always a lot of fun at trade shows.

**Colleen Keyworth:** I do have a reputation.

**David Heimer:** Thank you so much for doing this. This was fabulous. It's always nice to connect with you and hear about your career and your perspective. So thanks very much and look forward to seeing you sometime this year.

**Colleen Keyworth:** Thank you for having me, David, I really enjoyed myself.

**Outro:** We're always looking for good ideas and interviews for our podcast. If you have

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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.