

How I Transitioned from Employer to Employee

Carol Caggiano, AIFD, PFCI

Consultant and speaker

Years in industry: 50

Who she is: In

addition to operating a successful retail florist, Glen Head Flower Shop, for most of her floral career, Caggiano has traveled extensively throughout the United States as well as Japan, Korea, Italy and Singapore sharing her design skills, creative techniques and business knowledge with her fellow florists. She is the winner of numerous industry honors including SAF's Tommy Bright and Paul Ecke, Jr., awards.

What she did: Recognizing that their children had other interests, Carol and her late husband, Neil, sold the longtime family business after working together for nearly 40 years. Rather than waiting to create an exit strategy at the end of their careers, the Caggianos carefully planned for the next chapter of their lives — and their business—throughout their professional lives.

Motivating factor: Love. Like many family business owners in the floral industry, the Caggianos needed to find a solution that worked both for their family and the business they worked so hard to build.

Takeaway tips: Stay open-minded, be flexible and make the tough choices for your future today. It's never too late to plan for the future, but it certainly is easier when you start early.



How I Went from Slinging Wieners to Selling Flowers

Art Conforti, PFCI

Owner, Beneva Florist, Beneva Solutions
Sarasota, Florida

Years in industry: 35

Number of locations: 1

Number of employees: 45

Who he is: Conforti purchased Beneva Flowers from his father, Arthur Conforti Sr., in 1992. Since then, Beneva Flowers has grown to be recognized as an industry leader and has been awarded a top 50 florist in the U.S. five years in a row. Locally, Beneva Flowers has been named a top florist by The Sarasota Herald Tribune and Sarasota Magazine, among many other publications. Conforti also has been singled out with honors including a 40-under-40 award and recognition as a "top boss."

What he did: Conforti has looked far beyond the boundaries of his physical flower shop, creating new companies and tools for retail florists, including Beneva Solutions, which offers cooperative marketing solutions to a network of florists. In 2005 he launched the Conforti Collection, a line of custom containers, often created in collaboration with other brands, including Lenox and Spode. He also markets the mobile app FloralApp and a SCOOP, which helps manage social media marketing.

Motivating factor: It's all about the flowers. Teaching people about flowers every single day is a big part of the job. Get customers excited, get them thinking about who they can buy flowers for, regardless of their budget. It's about product, service and value.

Takeaway tip: Listen first. Don't approach situations with a preconceived idea about the idea about the solution. And remember, no one needs flowers. They choose to have them. That's why service is always so important.



How I've Squeezed Seven Careers Out of One Job

Paul Fowle

Vice President, DVflora
Miami

Years in industry: 25

Who he is: Having

worked his way through college, Fowle has been promoted several times and has held senior management positions in operations, finance and sales. DVflora Miami, the import division of Delaware Valley Floral Group, serves wholesalers, retailers and event planners across the U.S., Canada, and the Islands; Fowle has full sales, margin, and profit/loss responsibility for the division.

What he did: Among Fowle's many accomplishments, in 2013-2014, he led the Miami team through a software transition to get the group on the same computer platform as the corporate office. Being on one computer system instead of two created internal efficiencies, and, most important, created a universal platform from which to go to market.

Motivating factor: Teamwork. While Fowle thrives on new challenges and opportunities, he also deeply values the ability to help his staff achieve their goals.

Takeaway tip: Take the detour. Unexpected turns can be a good thing in a career, even if those shifts seem to take you away from an earlier path or vision.



How Going Bankrupt Launched a Career

Paul Goodman, CPA, PFCI

President, Floral Finance Business Services
Tulsa, Oklahoma



Years in industry: 40-plus

Who he is: When times are tough for floral businesses, Goodman gives florists what they need: financial advice that's not always easy to hear but dangerous to ignore.

What he did: As founder and publisher of Floral Finance, Goodman has provided sound advice on both day-to-day and long-term financial challenges. He has a legacy of financial wisdom found in the pages of both Retail Florist, which he founded and publishes, and as the author of The Profit Minded Florist, the well-known handbook of floral financial accounting. He also is a longtime contributing writer for SAF's Floral Management. Goodman is the originator of Rosebud, the first floral accounting package in the industry. In 2011, he was awarded SAF's Paul Ecke, Jr., Award.

Motivating factor: Despite a grueling schedule that keeps him on the road much of the year, Goodman teaches Sunday school and serves as an elder at his church in Tulsa. He's participated in more than 20 mission trips to Kenya, Tanzania and areas of Oklahoma, served on the National Prayer Breakfast board and founded a Christian men's ministry.

Takeaway tips: Embrace change. Sometimes, your worst experiences can turn out to be your best ones. The trick is to figure out how to learn and grow from adversity.

How Milking Cows Makes for Great Floristry Training

Jerome Raska, AAF, AIFD, PFCI, CAFA, CF

Co-owner, Blumz by... JRDesigns
Metro Detroit



Years in industry: 30

Number of locations: 2 retail locations, in Detroit and Ferndale, and an event studio in Ann Arbor.

Number of employees: 30

Who he is: When he's not running his business or participating on various boards in the city of Detroit, Raska shares his design and business experience with florists, garden clubs and suppliers. He is past president of the Michigan Unit of Teleflora as well as past president of the North Central Chapter of AIFD and the Michigan Floral Association. In 2013, he was awarded SAF's Tommy Bright Award.

What he did: Raska and his partner, Robbin Yelverton, AAF, AIFD, PFCI, with their combined 60 years of experience, have grown Blumz by... JRDesigns into an award-winning, full service floral and wedding/event planning company. In the heart of the city that has suffered arguably the worst and longest-term financial crisis in the country, they've managed to not only survive but thrive, adding most recently an event location in nearby Ann Arbor. In addition, Blumz has a robust sympathy business as well corporate business base with high profile clients such as Quicken, MGM Casino and the Detroit Tigers.

Motivating factor: Raska doesn't do anything halfway. He commits fully to his employees and his community, often working with multiple groups at the same time. He challenges himself and others to think big — and still have fun in the process.

Takeaway tips: Find your passion and stay passionate. Raska — the king of frequent flier miles — never turns down the chance to spread the word, in a positive, uplifting way, about the floral industry.

How I Finally Got Over Myself

Clara Varga-Gonzales

Co-owner, Tiger Lily Florist
Charleston, South Carolina



Years in industry: almost 20

Number of locations: 2

Number of employees: 15-20

Who she is: Along with her husband Manny, Clara turned Tiger Lily from a struggling neighborhood florist into a nationally recognized, thriving industry leader.

What she did: After purchasing Tiger Lily in the late '90s, Manny and Clara built a hugely successful wedding business, fueled by Clara's passion for the segment and design talent. The shop has created memorable, sophisticated designs for thousands of brides and been singled out by Modern Bride and Southern Living, among many other publications, as a top wedding florist in an ultra competitive market. Even more impressive, in 2011, Clara and Manny put into place a new plan that allowed Clara to move out of weddings and focus on purchasing, dramatically reducing cost of goods sold and making the overall business even more profitable.

Motivating factor: Time on the beach. After years of dedicating her weekend time to weddings, Clara can now spend Saturdays and Sundays with her family, thanks to a thoughtful, strategic transition plan that allowed the wedding segment to flourish while Clara invested her time and energy in other areas of the business — and herself.

Takeaway tips: Know yourself — and your limits. Recognize your ego and how to start getting along with it before it hurts your business and family.