

THE BOSS

Farming to Franchising

I GREW up on a 100-acre farm in Michigan with almost every farm animal imaginable, including horses, peacocks, pigs, sheep and chickens. At age 6 or 7, I'd watch my father butcher the cows and I'd help pick the feathers off the chickens after they were slaughtered. I wouldn't have the stomach for that today.

I demonstrated management skills early. At 13, I got a job detasseling corn on another farm. The next year, I became a team leader over six other teenagers, and at 15 I was appointed supervisor of a group of 40 other students.

My dream was always to go to the University of Michigan and become a mental health therapist. I started at Central Michigan University, then transferred to the University of Michigan for my last two years and graduated with honors in 1992.

I started at Molly Maid that year as a receptionist. I told Karen McKinnon, who was married to one of the company owners, that I planned to return to school to get a master's degree in social work. She was working at the company and asked me to commit to staying a year. I agreed. When it came time for me to leave, she and her husband said they'd help with tuition if I stayed on and attended night school. I agreed, which let me avoid taking out loans.

In one of my night classes, I saw a documentary about addiction that brought tears to my eyes. I went home and prayed for the people in the film. I realized that I was internalizing other people's problems and that it might be hard for me to be a therapist. I had seen how small businesses could benefit people, so I thought I might be able to help others by working for a franchisor.

In 2000, David McKinnon and his partners started Service Brands International as the umbrella company for Molly Maid and other franchising companies. Over the years, I rose to senior



MOLLY MAID

KRISTI MAILLOUX

President of Molly Maid, Ann Arbor, Mich.

AGE
42

RECENT VACATION
A Disney cruise

EVERY DAY
Reads the Bible

HERO
Jesus

director and then vice president for operations at Molly Maid. Then I became president and chief operating officer of 1-800-DryClean, a sister company of Molly Maid. In 2006, I became Molly Maid's president.

Before my latest promotion, I was worrying about whether I was ready for this position at such a young age. Todd Recknagel, president and C.E.O. of Mr. Handyman International, another sister company, pulled me aside and told me a Bible story about Esther. She risked death by approaching her husband, King Xerxes, without being summoned, in an effort to save her people from being killed. Todd spoke about her courage and toughness and said my experience had prepared me for the role.

Some people say our industry does not pay its workers well. Molly

Maid team leaders can make up to \$13 an hour, and our employees who are mothers are able to be home for their children in the mornings and afternoons. Many employees stay for years.

We have more than 400 franchises in the United States and almost 300 in other parts of the world. People who have been downsized in other work seem to like owning franchises. Nine years ago, my husband, Todd Mailloux, was a supervisor for a manufacturing company related to the auto industry. He wasn't downsized, but he left and bought a Mr. Handyman franchise. (He would have been laid off from the manufacturing company, however, because it ended up closing.) Todd has flexibility in his schedule and helps with our children when I'm traveling on business.

Molly Maid has chosen an end to domestic violence as our cause. Two years ago, I was at an employee's 20-year anniversary celebration when another employee pulled me aside to say how much she appreciated our efforts. She had been a victim of domestic violence herself and liked to take part in our annual drive to raise money for shelters. □

As told to Patricia R. Olsen.