

Sandra Eberhard:

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Hi, I'm Marl O'Donnell, visionary at EOS worldwide. And I'd like to welcome you to another edition of the EOS Life podcast, where we explore the why and the how of entrepreneurs actively living their ideal life, now, not later and not in retirement. The world of entrepreneurial freedom and the impact on those around you depends on it. Today, I have the pleasure of speaking with Sandra Eberhard. Sandra is president and CEO of the WBEC Metro New York and WBEC Greater DMV, two of the 14 regional affiliates of the Women's Business Enterprise National Council, WBENC, the nation's leading advocate of women owned businesses and third party certification organizations, certifying more than 475 businesses each year as 51% women-owned, operated, managed, and independently run. Sandra supports an operation of women business enterprises that generate more than \$3.1 billion in revenue and employs more than 30,000 workers in the New York State, Northern New Jersey, Southern Connecticut, Maryland, Virginia, and Washington, D.C. territory. She uses her skills to help not for profits meet their mission and has a passion for helping others by providing experiences that teach them worth, value, and talents they have inside. Welcome to the show, Sandra.

Sandra Eberhard:

Thank you, Mark. I just would like to say, the statistics that you gave are for the Greater DMV alone. Both councils, which I became president of in March, we employ more than a hundred thousand women in the local territory. There are more than 2,500 businesses that are certified and go through the process each year, and more than \$10 billion of revenue. So it's just bigger and better.

Mark O'Donnell:

Amazing, amazing, just absolutely great work and such a huge impact.

Sandra Eberhard:

Thank you.

Mark O'Donnell:

So, welcome to the show. And I'd love for you to tell us a little bit about yourself. What do you do? What is your role? What are you responsible for on a daily, weekly basis?

Sandra Eberhard:

So, back in September of last year, the president and founder of our organization became ill. And we are a not for profit. We have a board. They asked me to run both operations, New York and the DMV. I'd been in the DMV for the last 10 years, bringing that organization from 300 certified businesses to close to 800 before taking over the New York office. My role is, and has been since September of last year, is to separate us from our parent organization. We began with the Women President's Org, which is also focused on women businesses and women leaders. But they have a very different working perspective than we do. And so we have a validation process that we use, which is [inaudible 00:03:38] validation process. And then we support business owners in our local territories, as you said, New York, New Jersey, Connecticut, as well as Maryland, Virginia, and D.C.

What that means is that we provide business content to them. We help create community. And we also connect them to opportunities. And all of it is so that we can fuel the local economy through them, help them grow. We all know when women do well, everybody does well, and that includes the local economy. And you support the local economy by bringing the businesses to a level where they can hire, where they can hire workers and the money stays in the community. So daily basis, we work through building that correct content for the different levels of businesses that are in our network and delivering that content as well as helping our community meet one another, do business with one another through what we call programming, and then of course, working with our corporate members who have supplier diversity programs. We want to work with diverse vendors, not just women, but there's a whole host of diverse vendors in our market. We work to connect them.

Mark O'Donnell:

Sandra, the work that you are doing is just immensely important to not only the United States and the areas in which you're working. When you say DMV, you're talking about the D.C. Metro Virginia area, right? Not the Department of Motor Vehicles.

Sandra Eberhard:

Correct. Oh yes, yes. Those of us from New York say DMV for the Department of Motor Vehicles [crosstalk 00:05:10].

Mark O'Donnell:

All of a sudden I see long lines in my head.

Sandra Eberhard:

Exactly.

Mark O'Donnell:

So first of all, thank you for the work that you're doing. And I couldn't agree with you more that when women do better, everybody does better. That is such a true statement. And so, as you know, the focus of this show is to help other people discover their ideal life. And how we define an ideal life here at EOS worldwide is doing what you love with people you love, making a huge difference, being compensated appropriately, and having time to pursue other passion, those five points. And oftentimes, that means at some point you weren't always living your best life. And so I'm just going to jump in here, and if you could take me to the moment where you discovered that maybe you weren't living your ideal life. What was that moment? When did you realize things needed to change?

Sandra Eberhard:

So, I was working for corporate America, and for the first time in my 30 years, it wasn't quite 30 years at the point, but it was getting close, I was on vacation for two weeks. That was the first time for two weeks. My first job in corporate America, even though you earn a lot of vacation time, you're told, or I was told during that time, "If you can take two weeks off, we really don't need you." Oh, young and adventurous and ambitious, you feel good about that comment. Well, clearly they need me. And you work harder and longer hours. Fast forward many years, and I'm sitting on vacation in Europe. And I had entered or left with management a way to save money for the organization through improving processes using technology. And right now, it's old technology, but it was young technology at the time.

But what that meant was of course it would've been a reduction in staff in my organization. And thinking that it was September and knowing that it could be started in January, I would have time to move people around and give them other opportunities in the organization. While I was on vacation, I received a call on my cell phone and the call said, "Sam, we love your proposal. We have a shareholders meeting. We're going to do it now." So while I was on vacation and it was early on vacation, so I still had two weeks to go, and before I came back to work, this plan that I had suggested and proposed was already an action for shareholder interest. And at some point there, I said, "Okay, Sandra, this may not be where you need to be. You may look at this differently." It was never my intention to truly end my operation. It was about improving and enhancing our operation, enterprise-wide, my operation, and then eventually enterprise-wide. And I said, "Okay." So that's the moment I started thinking that maybe I didn't belong in corporate America any longer.

Throughout my life, Mark, I always volunteered in the woman's space as a young person, as a female. My home was children should be seen and not heard. I will tell you what your opinion is, so forth and so on. I come from an older generation. And part of it was to protect me and protect me as I'm moving forward as a black female. But I always had an opinion. I always had an opinion, and I wanted it to be heard. So I thought that if women stuck together, that we could do more. And when you look at the women around you, in your home, in your community, in your church, in your schools, it's like, "Okay, we should have a voice." So I've always volunteered in the women's space.

So at the point where I said, "Maybe I should look at something differently," I was actually president of the New York Women's Agenda. And it's a volunteer organization in New York City. At the

time, the goal was to improve the lives of women and children in New York. But it was a coalition of 102 women's organizations. So I had a lot of access and information about what women were doing, what women were capable of. But also, it was my community of people who thought that we could work together to improve the lives of women and children in New York. And my current president and CEO of the organization that I'm in, sat on that board, actually sat on that board. So I had the opportunity then to move into a space that was better for me and my goals in life, which I had newly created.

Mark O'Donnell:

So as you're sitting in corporate America and you're making this decision to really go all in on making a huge difference, what was the first step? Did you just, say, talk to your boss at the corporate job and say, "See you later," just write that? Or what were some of the steps you took to set that up?

Sandra Eberhard:

Yeah. No. So when I came back from Europe, as a matter of fact, I worked for the organization for several years after that. And I wasn't sure which way to go and what to do. So one of the things I did was make a decision, I want to say, three or four years later, that I couldn't do both. I couldn't look for my dream career, job, next step, and I actually did leave the organization. And then I got a life coach. I didn't want a job coach. I wanted a life coach. But of course, as you're working through what does that really mean, I kept interviewing for positions in the morning that fit my skill levels and fit my experience. And that took away from my mental state, "Sandra, what are you doing?" Took away the questions, took away you're hurting yourself, the guilt of you're not working anywhere after working for so many years.

And working with my life coach, identifying what were all of the things that I absolutely loved about every job that I worked in. What did I love? And believe it or not, the things that I loved is that number one, I felt like I loved the people that I worked with and I made friends in the years that I worked in corporate America and taught, I didn't say that I taught as well. And that where I was, people were in different positions, people were doing different jobs. And many times in corporate America, no matter how high you go, you get further and further away from the consumer, further away from seeing what your impact could do. And so I identified that I wanted to work in a position, work somewhere where I could see the impact, all of the work that I put in, I work hard, that's not an issue, but I wanted to see my impact. So I wanted to like the people that I worked with and make new friends. I wanted to see the impact that I could do.

But also, I wanted everybody to have the same goal. Many times in corporate America, you're working in a team, you're working in a unit, a division, a department. And your goal is to get your work done to the next department and pass it off. Again, away from the consumer, from that impact. But also the team sitting right next to you had a very different goal and a different focus than you did. I wanted to be in a place where everybody had the same goal and focus so that we were all talking about the same thing that we were doing. So it was like the people, like the goal. I wanted to work with women. Everybody had the same focus. And I wanted to see the impact.

And so with that alone, just with those items alone, a job became available. It was almost like we always say, as soon as you can get clarity around your thoughts, then you can see better. That's what happened to me. I got clarity around what I really liked about my jobs, what I really wanted, and would make me feel better going forward. And a position became available for me that I was willing to move for and take, and have been happy ever since. I've been in my role now for 10 years and will be 11 in this organization in March.

Mark O'Donnell:

Wow. That's an amazing story. And so few people... I would imagine that having worked in the corporate environment for as many years as you had, that it takes courage to make that type of change, to kind of leave what you know is not necessarily good for you, you have a certain income, and then to say, "You know what? I'm leaving that." And I would imagine during that period of time where you were doing that job searching, and then hiring the coach, you're like, "Oh, I'm supposed to be making money right now." There's a lot of supposed tos in there, right?

Sandra Eberhard:

Oh, yes.

Mark O'Donnell:

Lots of supposed tos.

Sandra Eberhard:

And I forgot to say this is because of that, you are absolutely right, the things I'm supposed to be doing, "Sandra, are you crazy? You have a good job." I actually sat down and determined how much money I really needed just to survive, pay my rent, I was living in Manhattan at the time, pay my insurances, what I had to do. How much money did I really need to make as compared to how much money I was making? And that number was very different. It was astounding. And truthfully, it let me see that, what did I do with my money, by the way? What did I do with that money that I was making because of not being so satisfied with myself and where I was, then the money, I gave it away or bought things for other people or spent it on whatever. It was very different. It was eyeopening for me. I can tell you that.

Mark O'Donnell:

Yeah, that's an interesting point and there's so much to unpack with your story in general. But on that being compensated appropriately of living your ideal life, it's you designing the life you want and then doing exactly as you did, is saying, "Okay, well, how much money do I actually need to do this?" It's not about more and more and more, while we can certainly fall into that trap. It's living your life with intent and creating the income in order to do that. So, you really just went through the process... What I found really interesting in what you said, Dan Sullivan always says that... Who's the owner of Strategic Coach and my coach, is that you only see and hear what your brain is looking for. And you went through systematically saying, "I want to work with these type of people who have this type of mission, making this type of impact." And then all of a sudden, the world open to up to you. So my question for you is, were those opportunities always there? Did they appear?

Sandra Eberhard:

I think that the opportunities were always there. I don't think I could see if I could put quotes around the see. My eyes, for very many years, was around position, authority, high salary in corporate America. I was doing well in corporate America. I had influence. I had impact. I had position and power. I also had tunnel vision. And I knew that I was unhappy. I knew that I was not living my best life. But sometimes you say, "You're doing okay. You don't have a right... You don't have a right to complain, just move forward, just keep moving forward." And so for very many years, that's exactly what I did. I just kept moving forward until I got to that pain point where it was truly hurting me, was hurting me to keep going the same way that I was. And so taking that very clear look and saying, "I can't continue like this. How do I move forward differently?" Which is why I ended up getting a life coach rather than a job coach, because I think a job coach would've kept me in the same environment, utilizing my skills and

experiences that I already had that were not making me happy. And I figured out somewhere along the line, Mark, that you can have a career and still be happy. And I wanted to find that. I was on a mission, absolutely on a mission.

Mark O'Donnell:

And there's a hundred thousand workers in New York and \$10 billion of revenue happening as a result of you going on that mission. So my question for you would be that I have to think, especially now coming, maybe we're coming out of the COVID pandemic, maybe not. I'm not sure. But people have spent so much time at home. They have come out of their jobs. And now we're seeing people coming back to work in different ways. Some people are not coming back to work because they've had time to think and space to think, and those supposed to be starting to go away for that. And so I have to think that there's millions of people who right now, today, are in that position that you were in those years ago. And you hired a life coach to help you get clear. What would be your piece of advice to those individuals who are in the same position that you're in? They don't feel... They're doing all the things, but they're not happy about... They're not really happy at all. What's their number one step?

Sandra Eberhard:

I would say the number one step is first of all, is to be honest with yourself. You're not happy. Take a glance at your life. Is there a way to monetize that, that you want, like you said, earning the money that you need to make your life whole and happy? It took me a while to say I'm not happy. No matter how much money I was making, how many friends I had, how much travel was going on, it wasn't the right place for me. And I think that's happening now, Mark. I've heard stories of folks who have left corporate America jobs. We are very close to corporate America, even where we live now, which is why I was able to bring my skills in a different way to this environment, to this new ecosystem. But I've heard stories now where folks are leaving their corporate America jobs to open landscaping businesses, to open flower shops.

Folks are looking at their lives and what's important in their lives. Many people lost those important in their lives during the time when they couldn't even say goodbye. So I think the pandemic has given us an opportunity to review our lives and where we are in our lives and where the other opportunities might exist. We're in a little bit of a labor crisis because of that. But I think folks are taking a look at their lives and deciding on what could make them happy.

And get help. I didn't do this by myself. I couldn't have done it by myself because you've got to dig deep. You have to look at some things that might not be so good in your life so that you can be honest with yourself to find that layer, to find the level of where you want to be and need to be so that you can move forward the right way.

Mark O'Donnell:

And that's just gold for anyone listening, to follow those steps, just so wise, and I appreciate that. And it brings up a couple questions for me. People kind of thinking about starting that landscaping business. And I'm going to screw up these stats here, but I think it was in 1900, 97% of Americans were what we would consider entrepreneurs. 3% worked for some big business. Fast forward a hundred years, it's the exact opposite. 3% are entrepreneurs, 97% work for a big business. Do you think we will see a shift in that way? And specifically, as you think about your passion around women-owned businesses, do you believe that we will see that shift, kind of the pendulum will swing back the other way? Or once the pandemic is "over," people go back to being unhappy in their corporate America jobs?

Sandra Eberhard:

Not everybody is unhappy in corporate America jobs. There are lots of folks who are very happy there and excel there. So I'm not going to cop to that one. However, there's other statistics right now that are happening. So I'm wavering here. We lost a lot of moms to the workforce in COVID. Over these last couple of years, the number of women who left their jobs because they couldn't work with their children at home and work in an environment that was still as stressful as it always is, you're just working from home. It made it even more stressful. You're trying to teach your child Microsoft Teams. I met a woman online, she had to teach her second grader Microsoft Teams before... She had to get off my call, my work call to go do that. So that's the kind of work that the women have done.

So I think that the pandemic has caused people not only to reevaluate their big business jobs, but it's even forced some of them to leave their big business jobs. Some want to go back. And if they get the opportunity, they will. Others are looking at the skill sets that they have and say, "Okay, this is the time now where I can start my own business one step at a time." We have seen growth, which was surprising to me, in 2020 and continues in 2021, in our networks in both the New York territory and in the D.C. territory, growth of businesses coming in. However, what we're seeing are solopreneurs. So they're not the employer-based businesses yet. But that's our job. Our job is to help them grow by giving them the business information so that they can grow and scale and move their businesses forward. And we do that on a local level, as you know, and on a national level.

So I think people will go back to corporate America. I think corporate America has been, what is the right word? Made more gentle than they were in the past in that act I was there for 30 years, I never saw corporate America take a stance in public like they did last year over the social injustices that happened in our country. That helped employees look at their employers very differently. And so the unhappiness that may have been there before, the lack of diversity and inclusion, the lack of equality, I think those are changing during these times because of the pandemic and the social injustice that was brought to the top of the heap. So if corporate America changes for the better, I think that folks will go back. So you'll see both, growth in both areas. Because I like to say as the world turns, if I'm allowed to say that in person, my mom used to watch a soap opera a long time ago called *As The World Turns*. So I don't say there's a new normal, because I don't think that there ever is going to be a normal. I think the world is going to keep turning and we're going to get better at who we are and what we do. And that includes corporate America.

So you might see less unhappiness as they build a new hybrid space, hybrid offices, hybrid workforce. When I was there, military style team leader had to be in place to see that their team did their work. There was no trust about doing work. It was work. We'll measure it. We'll tell you how you're doing. Everybody sitting at home, working harder and longer hours, corporate America and every other kind of America work environment won. So we've learned so many different lessons about the workforce and folks' willingness to work to get the job done. So, I still think corporate America will be fine as we'll see more entrepreneurs. I think we will see folks happier because they going to take the chance to be where they want to be in the environments that they want to be.

Mark O'Donnell:

For sure. And as we think about that ideal life, the EOS life, people will have the freedom to do what they love with people they love to make the impact they want to make, to be compensated appropriately, and having those times to pursue other passions. And pursuing other passions and having the time to do so probably doesn't include working while telling your kids about how to use Microsoft Teams. That's probably not time to pursue other passions. But to have the freedom to do those five points of the EOS life, I think it would be really interesting to see in our future that maybe the pandemic

will, to your point, have softened the sort of stiff structures of the corporate world. I got my career started in pharma, for big pharma companies. And it was pretty regimented, although I worked in a startup division of a big pharma company. And so I did have a lot of freedom even then. But as your point, you got away from the impact, you get further and further away. So companies are a great platform to make huge impact around the world. So hopefully people don't absolutely lose sight of that as we go forward.

Sandra Eberhard:

Absolutely.

Mark O'Donnell:

So, if you could describe for me, you've made a lot of progress. You're making the huge impact that you're making now. Can you describe for me what living your EOS life looks like? The day in a life of Sandra, what is your life like?

Sandra Eberhard:

Oh, I'm having so much fun. I have been able to create a team of leaders who help us actually create a vision. I had the opportunity in my EOS life and learning all about EOS to... We had a small team of people and I took the entire team to create our core focus and core values for our company. And so everyone, as we entered the new year, had that same focus. We created it, had that same goal. We have a 10-year target that's outrageous, an outrageous target to-

Mark O'Donnell:

What is it? Do you mind sharing?

Sandra Eberhard:

No, of course. To support 50% of the certified businesses in our network and be so aligned with our corporate members, that 50% of their spend is with our businesses. And so it sounds huge and it just made us all smile, but it actually keeps our focus in that direction. We were very focused on supply diversity. We were creative because of supplier diversity. And what that means to the world out there. Who's not part of the supply chain is diversifying the supply chain nationally and of course around the world so that the innovation of diverse suppliers makes a difference in that supply chain. So corporations have supply diversity departments. Sometimes it's one person. Sometimes it's more than one person. And they're the folks who are focused on finding diverse suppliers that meet the needs of their procurement teams nationally and internationally. But it's one department. And as you know, in corporate America, many times before now, I'll say that, many departments are in a stove pipe environment, so that supplier diversity works alone. And you could tell when the supplier diversity professionals in an organization had relationships internally, as opposed to those who didn't have those relationships internally with other departments and users and procurement, because there were different impact, different levels of success.

But now, with our new focus, and our focus has been expanded to improve the local economy through women business owners... So, we never really talked about the local economy as much as removing challenges for women business owners. But when you talk about fueling the local economy, today, for instance, talking with a women business owner who is a florist, who didn't understand the value of being a part of our network, I was able to help her understand that we could help her be visible

and help her get into a community of other like-minded businesses and put a huge woman-owned business logo, there's a special logo that we use, on her window. And what she didn't realize is that we've done the research and that we've learned that folks who know that businesses are women owned, are apt, 80% of the time are apt to use that business rather than another. They have choices.

There were so many different ways to support women owned businesses, it's exciting for me. And because of the EOS systems and us expanding our focus and targeting and realigning ourselves outside of supply diversity, yes, supply diversity is definitely there with us, and they're helping us get aligned with corporate social responsibility. Usually those are the departments that are in the community, as well as even a DNI. What they're doing engaging their internal employees. We have business owners in our network who provide services and products who could help all those departments. And so by connecting with them, aligning with them, and making that alignment nice and tight, we're going to reach our 10-year target.

Mark O'Donnell:

Yeah, you will.

Sandra Eberhard:

And everybody is focused on doing that.

Mark O'Donnell:

Just looking at you, and I know we're on a podcast here, so people can't see you, your passion is just oozing through the screen here. I'm like, "Yep, you're going to hit it." You're probably going to get there sooner than 10 years, I have no doubt, which is just great to see. So I appreciate and respect that deeply. So tell me, we talked a little bit about all the points of the EOS life, except for one, time to pursue other passions except for your main one. What do you do for fun?

Sandra Eberhard:

So I'm a reader. I read absolutely everything. I had an English teacher in the eighth grade, she was this little tiny lady, and she said, "Read, read, read, it will just make your life so much better." So I read and it makes me happy. I also cook and bake. So those things make me happy. And of course, now that we're getting ready to travel, I'm excited. So one of my goals is to live in Paris for a few years and work at a sidewalk cafe so that I can meet people and have fun as I'm serving them, so they can criticize my French and have fun with me, and then move on to another country, possibly Italy and the Amalfi Coast, and do the same thing. So traveling, cooking, baking, reading, and of course having time for my family, which is pretty amazing to me right now.

Mark O'Donnell:

That is amazing.

Sandra Eberhard:

Not always in that order when I was in corporate America.

Mark O'Donnell:

Yeah. It sounds like a great life that you are fortunate enough to have the freedom to do all those things and still make the impact that you want to have.

Sandra Eberhard:

Exactly.

Mark O'Donnell:

So before we end our episode here, being an avid reader, give me three top books that you would say, "Hey, if you're going to read anything between the now and the end of the year," what would you read?

Sandra Eberhard:

Well, since we talked today about identifying who you are, we've just done two different programs for our network, which is so unusual for us. One was called Ignite Your Power. And the second was called Ignite and Protect Your Power. And during our Ignite Your Power, we actually had a keynote speaker, Gay Hendricks, and Gay wrote the book The Big Leap. And so my Big Leap copy is dogeared and crazy, but it helps you identify where you are in your life at work as well as at home. And it helps you understand that there's another level, that there's a level of competence that we all kind of settle into and we're proud of, but there's another level called the genius zone that you can get to and really maximize your input. And he just finished, and has published, and it's on the shelves now, The Genius Zone. So I would recommend to anyone out there who's on that self-awareness journey and is looking for some assistance to get there, that those two books are pretty amazing. And a third book, I don't know, I read all kinds of stuff, so I don't know what the third book would be. It could be anything. I'm with my English, read, you can find words of wisdom in absolutely anything you read, words of encouragement, words that will help you move forward. So I'm going to say just those two.

Mark O'Donnell:

That's amazing. Well, Sandra, thank you for your time today. I appreciate the conversation. Enjoyed it immensely. Where's the best place for our listeners to learn more about you, learn more about WBEC and WBENC? Where can they get a hold of you?

Sandra Eberhard:

Sure. So the national organization, WBENC, is truly wbenc.org. There, you will find the mission of the organization, which is about to celebrate its 25th year, and it was started there, the validation of women business owners started there. And then they went out and we have a contract with them, 14 general partners, to deliver that certification across the country, and then support our local women business owners in our territories. So Metro New York, we have New York, New Jersey and Connecticut. You can find at wpeo.us. We are rebranded to our new name, but we haven't rebranded our website yet. And you'll find information there as well for both the D.C. territory and New York territory. You could always reach out to me directly at my first initial, last name, seberhard@wbecnymv.org. I will respond.

Mark O'Donnell:

All right. Thanks, Sandra. Thanks again. And have a great rest of 2021. And I'm sure you'll continue to make the huge impact that you're making. Thanks again.

Sandra Eberhard:

Thank you so much for having me, Mark. I really appreciate it.

Mark O'Donnell:

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Thank you for listening to the podcast. I hope you got value from today's episode. Remember to ask yourself how long will you wait until you demand the best for yourself? How long will you wait until you live your ideal life, the EOS life?