

Beyond the Uniform Approach

P/Strada maximizes the advantages of global business

STORY BY TIESHA MILLER | PHOTO BY KENNY JOHNSON



Patrice Manuel took a gamble when she began P/Strada, a management consulting firm, from her home as the CEO and lone employee. But by narrowing her focus on operations that could most benefit from her specialties, a decade later she's operating a 59-employee company with its main office in Kansas City's midtown and a client list that spans the United States.

"I think the first year, when you say you're a home-based business, people don't think you have skin in the game, that you're fly by night," Manuel says. "You have to be aware of that perception [and] know where the capital is and that you're going to have to be in debt to be able to grow."

P/Strada helps companies maximize their leaders' talent and capabilities; its main clients are based in federal, state and local governments. The remaining 25 percent are commercial companies.

The strong government representation is no coincidence. After 20 years in the Army, Manuel understands the intricacies—and downfalls—of bureaucracies. Near the end of her service, she put her background in chemistry to use as a project manager in advanced technology in a battle lab. Her

experience there got her thinking about effective leadership.

When she left the Army, she moved home to Kansas City and began her business.

"I'm interested in how people think [and] how people learn," Manuel says. "A lot of scientists would rather deal with their niche [of science] and not people," she continues by way of explanation. "How do you get scientists to be authentic yet demonstrate a lot of their innate leadership abilities? [At P/Strada], we help people ... utilize their abilities."

Also not a stranger to international travel—though stationed stateside while in the Army, her job sent her often to Korea and Germany—Manuel sought out global business opportunities. Four years ago she attended her first Futurallia international business forum. She was so impressed, she has since been instrumental in bringing it to the United States for the first time in its 16-year history.

May 18–20, Futurallia will host more than 800 companies from 30 countries at the Kansas City Convention Center. The largest component of the event has been called "business-to-business speed dating." When registering, companies can pre-select and be matched with other companies with whom

FAST FACTS ▶

- ▶ Patrice Manuel
- ▶ Founder and CEO of P/Strada
- ▶ Company Profile: Founded in 2001, P/Strada is a management consulting firm that helps client companies maximize their leadership and executive talent.

they would like to network. Onsite interpreters facilitate international conversations, and delegates from each country verify attendees are legitimate, certifiable companies.

"The unique thing about [Futurallia] is it networks small businesses," Manuel says. "Say a small company makes cosmetics in the United States. There is a company in France that has a new line, and they want to launch it in the United States, so [the U.S. company] might be[come] the distributor. People think they need to have a skill set that is so unique that [you can't get it] overseas, [but your product] could be something as simple as a lotion or a gadget. If businesses don't open themselves up to a global outreach, we end up being really limited."

Of course, Manuel also recognizes the importance of networking and growing a business locally and recommends looking to chambers and volunteer opportunities. But she warns against limiting yourself: "In order to stand out [companies] need to understand that they can go outside of those [traditional] gates. A [small business] can't go in like a big company. People need to be open to change their paradigm, not thinking there is one way to work, one way to do things." **KCB**

COMPANY CHEMISTRY ▶

Manuel says the best tip she has for success at Futurallia is to have "a warm touch." Once you register for the event and know with which companies you will be meeting, send an email to or Skype each one. This way, once face to face at the event you can say, "It's nice to finally meet you in person." Establishing a basis for conversation beforehand will help ensure a more productive and warm in-person meeting.

