



Little PINK Book Philanthropy Hits Home



This 425-plus-unit franchise company gives back where they serve customers – in the home.

By Taylor Mallory

"We provide our services in the home, where most of domestic violence happens, so when we decided 13 years ago that we wanted a cause to rally around, we decided this was a good fit," says Kristi Mailloux, president of the \$164.3 million home cleaning franchise company Molly Maid, who points out that one in four U.S. women will experience domestic violence in her lifetime. "An estimated 1.3 million women are victims of assault by an intimate partner each year – and that doesn't include cases that aren't reported. We knew customers, employees and family members who were afflicted, so it was something everyone could get behind."

Through the [Ms. Molly Foundation](#) the company has raised more than \$750,000 for the cause. Franchisees clean local shelters for free year-round, and during October – Domestic Violence Awareness Month – they donate a portion of all cleaning fees as well as money raised from fundraising events. "Customers get excited about it too," says Mailloux. "In September we leave notes in homes, and when we come back in October, many leave money or goods for us to donate to local shelters."

Mailloux has worked for Service Brands International (which owns Molly Maid, Mr. Handyman, 1-800-DryClean and ProTect Painters) her entire 17-year career, serving as president of 1-800-DryClean for four years and spending 13 with the company she has helmed since 2006.

PINK: What are your professional success secrets?

K.M.: I started off as a receptionist with SBI 17 years ago right out of college. There were only 40 franchises then. I was 7th home office employee; now we have more than 70. Getting in early with a small, growing company allowed me to work with some great mentors and gave me the opportunity to serve in many different roles with different companies with SBI. I attribute much of my success to those mentors. Even when it was difficult to hear, they pointed out areas where I could improve over time. I learned how to be a better manager, how to strategize and develop tactics to take the company to the next level. They taught me about financials and the key metrics most important in running the company. And I've learned a lot from our franchise owners. Many of them contribute to committees I host and give us feedback. I don't make decisions in a vacuum.

PINK: How has the recession impacted Molly Maid, and what are you doing to keep the company strong?

K.M.: Molly Maid has fared pretty well because we have repeat customers who use us on a regular basis. We're going to have a relatively flat growth year. But we're not dramatically down like so many other companies. A large part of the country is still gainfully employed and working longer hours because of the recession, so our service is one of the last things they want to give up. At a conference a few weeks ago, a lady told me that she and her friends eat out less and cut other expenses but haven't given up their maid service, because it allows them to spend more time with family and friends. But we're not growing at the same aggressive level as in good economic times, not we're still seeing a net gain in customers overall. We're focused on keeping franchise owners spending on marketing at the same level but making those efforts more efficient and on customer service. We've put a pilot program in place to fine tune the potential customers' first phone calls and how we can improve the professionalism and experience.

PINK: Are you still bringing in new franchisees?

K.M.: We're still seeing growth in people buying franchises, often because of downsizing. Some people were in high-paying jobs in corporate America, left with strong 401(k)s or exit compensation and don't want to go back. They want control over their futures. We just sold one to an exec from Coca-Cola. He's not ready to retire but wants control of his future from now on and to have something to pass on to his children.

PINK: What makes you a successful leader?

K.M.: Having the type of personality that makes people feel they can relate to me on their level. Not coming in with a big ego or arrogance but rather making people feel like they can talk to me no matter what level. Like my predecessors at Molly Maid, I worked hard to create a family-based culture where people know they are cared about – from franchise owners to our home-office team.

PINK: How do you foster that culture?

K.M.: Integrity and trust. Being accessible on a regular basis to team members and franchise owners and spending a lot of time listening. When they bring in a question or concern, you react quickly to address it. People need to know you are empathetic, that you have a sincere interest in them and their careers. I think that's part of your personality, but it's also something you have to work hard at, so that you can motivate others to do what we do day in and day out. Work is easier if people believe you care about helping them achieve their goals.

PINK: How do you manage your Life/Work balance?

K.M.: That's something I work pretty hard at. But I enjoy work, so I'm not perfect at it. My husband of 10 years and I have two children – ages 7 and 5. We've owned a Mr. Handyman for seven years, which he runs day to day. With my career, I travel about 10 days a month, so it's great that he has the flexibility to be with the children when I'm out of town. And I have a great team that allows me to take time to focus on my children and family and still be good at work. Unless I'm traveling, I'm home most every night. My husband and I cook together. I try to be in the office as much as possible during the day, but much of the support I provide is via phone or e-mail, so I can always do that from home after kids go to sleep.

PINK: How do you relax and rejuvenate yourself?

K.M.: We live in a lake home. There's something very peaceful about looking out at lake, reading books or magazines or going out on the water. It helps me relax.

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