



How she did it:

Gabrielle Christman's path to success

Meet Gabrielle Christman, a longtime Key4Women® member, certified women's business owner, and co-founder of SPARK

Cleveland, a group established to encourage young women to explore careers in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM).



Christman's inspirational path into entrepreneurship demonstrates how determination, exploration, continuous learning, and networking

can be powerful accelerators for business growth.

"When I was young, I spent a lot of time hanging around my dad's engineering firm. I loved spending time in the concrete lab tinkering with a centrifuge or out on jobsites observing sedimentation in action," commented Christman, president and CEO of Hunter International Recruiting. "I was exposed early on to the wonders of math and science, and with my dad as an example, what it's like to be an entrepreneur."

Later, when it came time for college, Christman chose Miami University of Ohio, an institution well known for its concentrations in research and science. She majored in pre-med with the hope of someday becoming a pediatrician.

Key takeaways



Exploration will lead you to your passion.



Curiosity and continuous learning are entrepreneurial strengths.



Networking is key to business growth.



“As I worked my way through the pre-med curriculum, I found myself getting pulled into campus leadership roles, which I enjoyed. I ultimately accepted the role of President of Campus Activities, a time-consuming, but rewarding, position,” Christman commented. “I learned I was a good organizer, and, like my dad, I was able to rally others around a common goal or project.”

These experiences and self-discoveries were key in shaping the next steps in Christman’s career trajectory.

“When it came time to apply and choose a medical school, I chose another path altogether. I worked hard in college and I was successful, but I just wasn’t ready to commit to many more years of intense study,” added Christman.

“I decided to work first. My passion for science led me to roles at the Cleveland Clinic and then Eli Lilly,” said Christman. “Even at those organizations, I had people telling me that I needed to pursue a career in medicine. But what I observed at both of my jobs led me down a very different path.”

What Christman noticed, especially while working in talent attraction at Eli Lilly, was that searching for talent to fill specialized roles quickly was a struggle.

Finding her niche

With that idea in mind, in 2006, at the age of 25, Christman decided to forge her own path in the recruitment industry. She left her role at Eli Lilly and founded Hunter International Recruiting in her basement.

“I was exposed to entrepreneurship working well in my family, so I really had no fear of failure,” Christman commented. “After the initial shock, my family have been huge supporters of my entrepreneurial efforts.”

Leaning in with Key4Women®

Additional support came from the partners Christman chose to do business with. “I opened a business checking account with KeyBank. I knew where I wanted my business to go, but I needed the support of the bank and its network,” said Christman. “Balancing labor and cash flow is a bit of a dance for business owners, so to have the expertise on hand at Key to help me think these issues through was phenomenal.”

Beyond financial advice, Christman tapped into the expertise of the Key4Women organization for tools and resources, plus the expertise of other members to learn more about running her business effectively. “The women business owners in this group support each other and meet regularly to learn and share their expertise. We can even request curated help when we need it,” said Christman.

Building on the best

From the outset, Christman positioned Hunter International to compete with large, publicly traded recruiting firms. “We recruit exclusively for positions in STEM and we don’t hire recruiters to recruit,” Christman said. “We hire scientists and engineers who speak the language of the talent that we are looking for.”

It was only two months after founding Hunter International that Christman and her small team landed a national client. “I vividly remember the energy and pressure in that meeting room. That day, a female research and development leader made the decision to award their contract to Hunter,” she said. “It was a pivotal moment for my company’s future, and for me, finding my niche as a woman business owner.”

WBENC certification propels growth

The barriers to entry for women business owners are many. For Christman, turning these challenges into strategic assets to build relationships and serve the community was the key to moving forward. In addition to her affiliation with Key4Women, Christman pursued certification from the Women's Business Enterprise National Council (WBENC) after her first year in business.

"The community of WBENC is unmatched. The ability to connect with other women business owners from many different industries has added value to our organization and allowed for my professional development," says Christman. "WBENC also provides networking and resources to assist with growing a business, including the Business Development Program, which both our controller and I attended. Since we took part, our revenues have increased by 65%."

Christman is currently involved in the WBENC organization at the local, regional, and national levels, and several of her staff are active as well. This gives the Hunter team access to role models and learning from other women in business in a variety of industries, in addition to tools and resources available from the organization.

Leadership at Hunter also gives back. The Hunter organization was recently honored with the prestigious

B2B Award in both 2018 and 2019 from WBENC, Ohio River Valley, for their commitment to creating opportunities and awarding business to Women's Business Enterprise (WBE) suppliers.

We've got this

Influenced by the world of one-click purchasing, Hunter's customers refuse to compromise on speed. "When companies want to fill a second shift or build out a project, they don't want to wait; they want the best and they want it now," says Christman. "Customers still ask us to do things that we never thought we would do, but we now have operational systems in place to work quickly, sometimes within 24 hours of a request. We've also hired data scientists to arm our recruiters with information they need to move quickly."

All of these strategic growth initiatives have enabled us to say, "Arizona? Of course we can help you in Arizona!" commented Christman.

Hunter International has grown to 320 employees in 17 states, most recently expanding to Arizona. The organization broke ground this year on a new headquarters adjacent to their current offices in Avon, Ohio.

The support you need

For more Key4Women resources to help you reach your goals, visit key.com/women, or [email us](#) to learn more.

Would you like to weigh in on future topics? Please take our [survey](#).

For more information about Hunter International, visit hirecruiting.com/.



How she did it: | 3 of 3
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