

Spotlight On:

Brianna Blaney | Founder and Managing Partner

Envol Strategies, Est. 2016

Raised in a family-owned trucking business, Brianna saw firsthand the difficulties that organizations have with building and retaining great teams. After graduating from UBC with a BComm in 2012, Brianna got into the recruitment business with a Vancouver-based company and saw an opening in the market she knew she could fill.

That's why Brianna built Envol, an employer branding, recruitment marketing and talent acquisition firm specializing in helping businesses grow. Primarily working with small and medium-sized BC businesses, Envol helps organizations identify who they are as an employer, what makes them unique and then attract the right people to support ongoing growth. Through strategic talent acquisition, Envol provides invaluable support on the full employee life cycle. Envol prides itself on helping smaller companies grow — it's very much a hands-on partnership.

- What was the motivation behind starting your own business?

I was actually reluctant to start a business; it wasn't an immediate path for me. I never believed in starting a business for the sake of starting a business, and I knew that whatever I built, I wanted it to be a true solution to a problem. When I realized there was a significant gap in the market, and that this gap was especially painful for small businesses, I decided to start Envol.

- Who inspired you to become an entrepreneur?

Without question, my parents, who are both entrepreneurs. Also, the communities we are part of and the businesses we partner with. Community is incredibly powerful — especially as a woman entrepreneur, community is everything.

- Who is your mentor?

I haven't ever had one distinct mentor. For a long time, I felt like I was doing something wrong early in my career because I didn't have a traditional mentor. Instead of more traditional mentorship frameworks, I have been privileged to experience what I call "mentorship moments". I've had "mentorship moments" with so many people just by being open, curious and willing to learn. You can learn something from almost anybody. I've had these moments with people who are significantly more senior than I am and with students and peers — people who are in my industry or in completely unrelated industries. That's how I have approached mentorship; instead of seeking formal mentors, I've learned from all the people around me. It took a while to get comfortable with my non-traditional approach, and that really only happened once I realized I was actually getting all the things I might look for out of a mentorship — just not from one person!

- How has mentorship or networking played a role in where you are today?

My most poignant mentorship moments have been around leadership. I've been very lucky to be surrounded by incredible business people and community leaders. Just watching people in their element and being open to feedback can shift how you interact with people in life.

- What do you see as your greatest accomplishment to date?

The accomplishment that I'm most proud of is the impact that I've had by participating in and creating community. A lot of this stems from some of the incredible opportunities I have had to support and be part of initiatives and fundraising for our local B.C. community. I knew early in my life that being actively involved in the communities around me was critical to my values, as well as seeking opportunities to give back.

- What has been your biggest lesson learned about being your own boss?

The single biggest lesson I have learned is the sheer amount of things that I don't know. Entrepreneurship continues to be the most humbling experience of my entire life. It's about learning how to check my ego at the door, to identify and be aware of my weaknesses, what I'm not great at, and then strategically build a team of people around me to complement those weaknesses. I still have a long way to go, but I'm at what I would call stage 1: awareness.

- What has been your greatest reward to date as a small business in your industry?

The greatest reward for me has been seeing the tangible impact we have on our clients' businesses every single day. To date, our growth has been entirely organic through referrals and word of mouth. We have spent zero dollars on advertising or marketing, and I think that is a real testament to *us*. Someone once told me that the greatest compliment you can receive is a referral.

- What unique challenges have you faced as a woman entrepreneur and how did you overcome them?

Being a woman entrepreneur is really only as big a limitation as you allow it to be. I try not to focus on the 'woman' part. As an entrepreneur, you realize that you will never stop facing challenges — that it will never be easier than it is today. The nature of the challenges you face will evolve, but you will never stop actively investing in your business. For me, it's about recognizing that different people are going to have different expectations of me. My role is to demonstrate our credibility and value. And most importantly, not worry about seeking everyone's approval.

- Looking back, what advice would you give to other aspiring woman entrepreneurs from your experience?

I think we often believe that people expect us to show up with all the answers. It's ok to not have all the answers! There is so much magic in the uncertainty, and sometimes the best business growth comes from not knowing. Also, you don't have to be a hero; it's ok to ask for help. It's unrealistic to think that you can do it all on your own.

- Your motto is?

"Say yes and figure it out later." I ripped it off from Richard Branson, but it is 100% how I operate. If I only ever said yes to the things I knew I would excel at, I don't think I would ever have started a business. If we all waited until we were ready, none of us would ever do anything!

- Tell us a little known fact about you.

I'm building another venture right now, a technology platform that uses artificial intelligence for recruitment optimization. The platform will help business-to-consumer companies increase their profitability by hiring high-performing workers with more accuracy. The platform will use business data, employee data and performance data to predict the performance of job seekers when they are applying to the company.

- Where is your favourite B.C. destination?

Definitely the Okanagan, I love wine country!

The Bottom Line:

- Envol employs five full-time staff and continues to grow its team with satellite offices in Toronto and Calgary to complement its Gastown HQ
- BC Business Top 30 Under 30 Award winner
- Envol sees itself becoming an even more full-service solution for small business clients in the next few years and is already expanding their service delivery to the United States
- Once Envol masters their North American market, they will look to expand their scope and adapt a more global focus