
Profile

JASMINE FREEMAN

The road from being a 15 year old teenage mum to becoming Vice President & Chief Executive Assistant at Office Dynamics has not always been a smooth one but as Jasmine Freeman explains in this moving interview, there are positive lessons to be learned and inspiration to be found in every journey.

Can we start with a little background information? Where are you from? What is your current role?

I'm originally from Council Bluffs, Iowa (a city that borders more popularly known Omaha, Nebraska). I'm currently in Las Vegas, Nevada as the Vice President & Chief Executive Assistant to the CEO of Office Dynamics (administrative training expert, Joan Burge).

The American Midwest couldn't be farther from Las Vegas – it's a complete switch! I never intended to be here but the right opportunity came along bringing me to the desert and I fell in love with the potential of this city. I don't think I'll ever leave.

What is your background?

I've been in the Assistant role in a variety of capacities for 16 years. I'm an avid connector, volunteer, mom to four lovely children and wife to one *very patient and supportive* man!

Discovering my administrative professional career was a "happy accident" for me. I had never considered it my path yet I've been passionate about helping others, serving and making a difference, and this role perfectly melded those things for me. I could partner with a leader, support them in a way that would lift them up and make them shine and by doing so expand their influence (as well as my own). Ultimately, making things happen in the world! Over the years, senior Assistants took me under their wings and coached me, guided me and helped me understand the expanding importance of this role – that was a huge blessing.

I began with OfficeTeam on temp assignments – from a garbage company run out of a woman's home to the most prestigious of offices and corporations in the Omaha area. Temping was a great way for me to see what different administrative roles would be like. My drive and interest in making things happen landed me great opportunities along the way that eventually led me to Office Dynamics International.

A discovery I've made along the way is that I really enjoy writing. I blog for Office Dynamics, dabble on my own blog, www.WildWonderfulWorkingWoman.com and I've since become a contributing author in two Life Choices books and co-author of the administrative book *Who Took My Pen... Again?*

It is well documented that you were a very young teenage mother and this must have been very difficult at the time. It makes your

current success even more impressive. What would you say were the key lessons learned from this period in your life?

I became a mom at 15. I kept that story a secret until 2010. Once I started sharing my story, I just couldn't help but continue as I learned how it impacted others. It allowed women who had similar stories to free themselves of the guilt or burden they carried. There is a stigma that follows "teen moms". I share my own story to encourage young women who could be experiencing the early stages of teen motherhood – to let them know they can break the mold and fight against being another typical statistic.

I learned:

- **It's never too late (or early) to turn your life around.** I had a serious attitude adjustment about life at 15 years old. Things changed fast and I started making an effort. I wanted to be something. I wanted to do something with my life that mattered and I wanted to be a shining example for my son.
- **I'm in control of my destiny.** I don't have to be a victim of my circumstances. I admit, I spent many days feeling sorry for myself and thinking my life was over. I genuinely thought it was. Yet, there came a day when I accepted the situation and took control. I decided to be victorious, and the real journey began.

• **Love conquers all.** It's amazing what a person will do for love. I changed myself from the inside-out. There was no room for selfishness. I had another person's life I was now responsible for. The decisions I made would impact not only me but him as well. That was huge!

You are best known as Joan Burge's right-hand woman. How did this come about and how has it changed your working life?

Joan Burge recognized me in class and commented that she wished she could find a similar Assistant in Las Vegas. She'd been trying without any luck. The opportunity was extremely intimidating but I knew in my gut it was for me and I went for it.

She put me through a rigorous interview and assessment process before making the final hire. I took a risk and moved from Iowa to Nevada without knowing a soul – along with my husband and our (at the time) three young children.

Joan and I have been Strategic Partners for over seven years! This opportunity has literally changed my life. Joan doesn't settle and she





doesn't let anyone around her settle either. If she recognizes a talent within you, she is the first person to utilize it and see what you can do. Anytime I started to feel comfortable or "set", she'd raise the bar for me. She's not a "one-notch" bar-raiser either. No, she goes for 10 at a time. We go together so perfectly because I like the challenge. Even though I think I want to stay in my comfort zone, I ultimately want to see what I'm made of just as much as she does. I never say "no" to a new challenge. I assess it and I figure out how to make it happen. That is likely how I've come to acquire so much responsibility at Office Dynamics International.

You seem to be taking more and more responsibility within the Office Dynamics business. What advantages do you think the additional responsibility that you are being given as an Executive Assistant gives to the business?

I'm excited that I'm being seen as an Ambassador for the next generation of Assistants. It's quite an honor! The role is changing and Office Dynamics International's work over the last 23 years has been instrumental in this evolution. The responsibility is greater than ever and it's not just over what I do in the office – it's related overall to this *profession*. I have a responsibility to my fellow Assistants to raising awareness about the importance of this role; the high-level of responsibility of the career Assistant and to be cognizant that I'm an example to others. While it's a big responsibility, I believe I'm up for the challenge!

You recently went to Peru with your son on a humanitarian expedition. What did you learn from your trip?

This trip was a life-changer for me. In December 2013, I did a TEDxWomen Talk about my experience and how I learned what it takes to really connect with people. I saw poverty firsthand. Our team was privileged to roll up our sleeves and do work with the people of the barrios in Trujillo, Peru. The children in this community face issues such as abandonment by parents, having to work to help support their families, little access to clean water and more. For just a few days we were able to take those kids of the barrio and do a Camp for them in Peru. In this very short period of time we took those kids from scared and afraid to laughing with us, having fun and calling us their "best friends". I realized the connections we made in this short period of time were something you could do anywhere in the world.

My three biggest takeaways from the trip were to 1) Be humble. So much can happen in the way of connection with others when you put your ego aside. 2) Love people and show them love by the things you do. and 3) Be silly. It's okay to let your guard down and have fun with people. I've been guilty of trying to be successful or professional and at times lost track of my silly-nature. It's really important to let yourself enjoy life.

What inspires and motivates you?

The potential of people. Every one of us has this amazing amount of "us" that hasn't been tapped into yet. Whether it's fear or doubt holding us back from the life we're capable of living or whether it's uncertainty about what it is we should or could be doing. I get motivated to share the message to dream and to encourage others with a "you can do it" attitude.

What has been the highlight of your career so far and why?

Just one? The last few months of my career have been a huge highlight. I've learned more about who I am and what I'm here for. I was appointed the Vegas Young Professionals Advisory Council Chair as well as the PR & Marketing Director for a local nonprofit called The Cupcake Girls. I did a TED Talk about a life-changing trip to Peru, was asked to lead out the 2014 trip to Trujillo, Peru... and the icing on the cake – my Strategic Business Partner named me an officer of the company that I've been so dedicated to for the past seven years. I'm now Vice President & Chief Executive Assistant to the Founder & CEO.

All of it is a result of years of hard work, dedication, dreaming big and loving people – authentically. I never expected this all at once but it's here and I'm just trying to soak it all in.

What advice would you give someone just starting out as an Assistant?

Listen and observe. It's important to know who you are working with. Get a feel for the culture, working styles and personality types before getting really ambitious about your ideas and showcasing your work. I say this because it gives you the opportunity to showcase your ideas and work when the time is right and you know exactly who you are dealing with. It sets you up for more wins because you can approach it in a way that is appealing to them.

Staying power. I believe in a staying power. Things might start off a little dull. They did for me anyway. Yet, I believed in the role and what I was doing so I stayed put to learn some valuable lessons along the way.

Be confident in yourself no matter what others think of this role. There were times I doubted my career of choice. Others would discount my value to the company because I was simply "a young Assistant" – some viewed me as eye candy to make the front desk look pretty and others felt it was fine to walk all over me to "get to the important people". Stand strong in knowing who you are and that you do bring value. The proof is out there that a great Assistant is worth their weight in gold and those who haven't subscribed to that way of thinking aren't worth setting you off track. There are others out there who want to support you and lift you up – including me! Get a support network, that leads me to my next point...

Make friends with everyone. Many make the mistake of only considering to connect with those in high-level roles, thinking they are the people they need to know. That is not always true, you never know who knows who. It's good form to never discount someone simply because of their role – isn't that what we've been fighting for in our own profession? Grow a diverse network of people who value and support you.

So what's next for Jasmine Freeman? Where do you want to be in 5 years' time?

As I reflect on the last five years of my career, part of me has no idea how to answer that question. Another part of me knows that the next few years I'll be working to further expand my role at Office Dynamics International and my influence with the profession. I look forward to making waves, joining forces with IYOTSA and seeing the men and women who have chosen this profession to boldly rise up and be heard.

I also look forward to making a difference in my community through my involvement with Vegas Young Professionals & The Cupcake Girls. I want to see the culture of our city shift. The ultimate goal is that Vegas becomes a place where my family feels connected and rooted – hoping it's a place they choose to stay because of the community work we're doing today.

I also have a desire to expand my family – my husband and I have discussed adoption and I know that when and if the time is right, our home will be ready.

