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**Full-Service Communications Consulting, Marketing, Branding, Digital Media Services and PR Firm for Transportation, Healthcare and the Environment**



**Colleen Gants, Denise Walz, and Keri Shoemaker  
Co-Presidents**

**PRR, INC.**  
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**“Our entire process is about creating awareness, trying to inspire trials, minimizing risks, creating a really good experience with whatever that is and then having them evangelize it to others. That is because we believe we can change the world, face to face, friend to friend.” - Denise Walz, Co-President**

**CEOCFO: Ms. Shoemaker, what is the idea behind PRR, Inc?**

**Ms. Shoemaker:** PRR is a woman-owned, employee-owned communications consulting firm. We are a fully integrated communications consulting firm with the idea that we believe in human powered change and work that can change behavior, improve lives and help protect the environment or the planet, as we like to say.

**Ms. Walz:** Our mission is do good, have fun and make money, in that order. Therefore, our entire organization is based on providing the perfect solution to whatever problem you are having or challenge you are having. This is why we have all of our communications tools under one roof. Sometimes, when you are a marketing firm and you go to a marketing firm

and they say, "I have a problem I need to solve," nine times out of ten the answer is going to be marketing. If you go to a PR firm, nine times out of ten the answer is going to be PR. Part of why we put all of these communications tools under one roof is so that we are not beholden to anyone and we come up with the best possible solutions for our clients.

**Ms. Gants:** We do that in the areas of transportation, health and the environment; all good for the world.

**CEOCFO: *Would you explain the human powered part of your concept and mission?***

**Ms. Walz:** Human powered change is about harnessing the power of one. The whole idea behind human powered change is that the people who call on us really want big change and they want tomorrow better than today. Therefore, they are looking for a better way to engage and empower individuals, and in some cases the whole country, to improve things like business, transportation or health. We come in and we unleash the human potential. We connect the hearts and the heads of people to uncover the catalysts and motivation for each individual to impact a solution.

**CEOCFO: *What does that mean day to day?***

**Ms. Walz:** Basically, what we do is we tell people to stop what it is that they are doing and to do something else and that is not very easy to do. A perfect example would be that when we started working with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's ENERGY STAR program the challenge was that there was an incandescent light bulb in almost every home in the US. We found that it was very bad for the environment. It was something that was using up a lot of energy, so in walked the CFL, Compact Fluorescent Light bulb. Our charge was to help Americans replace their incandescent bulbs to CFL bulbs. Therefore, what we have is a behavior change continuum where we go through several different steps to try to make that a purchasing decision that they believe in, that they want to try and that they evangelize to other people. Our entire process is about creating awareness, trying to inspire trials, minimizing risks, creating a really good experience with whatever that is and then having them evangelize it to others. That is because we believe we can change the world, face to face, friend to friend.

**CEOCFO: *How do you come up with this strategy? What goes into your assessment, whether it is statistics or research? Does gut feelings and trends come in as well?***

**Ms. Walz:** We believe that you cannot do good work without good information. Again, we have research. We have statistics, we do internal auditing and then it does sometimes come down to intuition. Much of the stuff that we work on is an emotional thing. It has you changing your behavior, that is why they call it behavior change marketing. It is about making that connection and I do not think you can make that connection without relying on your gut a little there.

**CEOCFO: *Is there a difference in the industries you work with or at the end of the day are you reaching people and there are more similarities than differences?***

**Ms. Gants:** I think there are definitely similarities. We are asking people to make a change in their lives. This is across the board. It makes me think a little bit about one of our transportation approaches. We are working across the country with multiple states who are investigating the possibility of paying for transportation by the mile instead of by a gas tax. It is called road usage charge. We are asking people, just like that they have their Fitbit where they measure their steps and they have their weightwatcher app where they measure what they eat, they have their bike app where they measure how many bike miles they are going and various different things; we are asking people to take a look at their behavior when they are driving and to be more aware of that and pay for transportation by the mile. The problem is that people do not really know how transportation is paid for. They know they just go and put their pumps at the gas station and magically a tax; we do not know how much it is, is attached on to that. Therefore, we are asking people to make a change to something they are not even aware of right now. You can see the challenge is there and the struggle sometimes, so we have to educate, be informed by research, continue educating and getting people to make a big change in their lives. Whether it is some type of light bulb they are using at home, the type of washing machine they are using or getting a vaccination for HPV. These are all things, but to your point it they are all different things, but human powered change is at the heart of all of them and our beginner change continuum.

**CEOCFO: *In June of 2017, is it easier to get people to change behavior or think about changing? Is it harder? Has it made a difference over the last few years reflecting the macro environment?***

**Ms. Walz:** I think that attention is the new scarcity. It is very difficult to cut through the clutter and the noise of everything that is news, fake news, education, Facebook, social media and all of that. Attention is a scarcity. I think that there are benefits to all of the new things that are out there that help us spread the message and reach people. However, I also think that it is harder to move people. We are living in an age now where there are kids that have never lived without a screen in front of their face! That is amazing! That is our new reality! I think that we are always having to morph our strategy a bit, but for the most part it is all about getting people's attention and making that connection.

**Ms. Shoemaker:** I would just add that at PRR we really strive to work with the type of clients who are making a difference in those communities that we are serving. That makes our success all the better. That is what inspires PRR. It is the work that our clients are doing out there. We are there targeting people that want to make change. What they want to see is progress and climate change. They want to see fewer cars on the highway. They want to see vaccinations. Therefore, we tend to attract and want clients that think the way that we do and that are overall helping and making a difference in the communities that we serve.

**CEOCFO:** *What have you learned over time about being three co-presidents, three equal partners - delegating and running a successful company?*

**Ms. Gants:** I want to say a little bit about what we were talking about earlier. We have been spending some focused time, the three of us, on how we lead this company and how we best work together. The others will build upon this in a different aspect, but one of the things that we were talking about was that our favorite projects that we tackle, for example, in our company, are projects where the three of us all bring a strength that we have; myself in the community engagement, Denise Walz in the marketing and branding and partnerships and Keri Shoemaker from the public relations aspect; all informed by research. For that aspect of it the work and that we do; we love it when all of those things come together. Some of our largest projects, like the Elizabeth River Tunnels project in Hampton Roads, Virginia, a public/private partnership, it is most successful when we bring all of those pieces and aspects of our work together into one. The same thing happens when we are leading our company. We really play off of each other's strengths.

**Denise Walz:** I totally agree. One of my strengths is culture. I love culture, so I also think that who we are comes across in culture. We are three women. We are a "women-owned" firm and the rest of our firm is employee-owned. When we bought this firm a while back, one of the things that was super important to us was that the employees all were owners. We wanted everyone to feel like they had a huge part in what it is that we were setting out to do as a company. Together we have really, really changed things. We put together an employee listening committee and we found out from them that family leave was super important. We now have a family leave act that is up to twelve weeks. We also are very big on, for whatever you call, family. For some people, they do not have a husband or a wife, but they have a parent and that parent needs some time with their child if they are not well. We also noticed that there are husbands and husbands and wives and wives and husbands and wives and some people with adopted babies. Therefore, we wanted to make sure that you have twelve weeks of paid time to be with your family. I think that that is one of the other things that we have learned. The three of us really very rarely disagree. We are on the same page and we always put the employees first. We want a culture that is amazing!

**CEOCFO:** *PRR was recognized as One of the Best Places to Work, so clearly your culture is working well. How do you reach out for potential clients? Are people turning to you because they recognize what you do and the depth and breadth of your offering?*

**Ms. Shoemaker:** I think that clients come to us when they are at one of those two critical intersections. The first is when they have a problem that they need to talk a lot about that requires an unknown solution. The second is frankly, when they have a vision of success, but it requires the involvement of others. Clients that have come to us kind of run this spectrum of Fortune 500 companies that include Nike and Starbucks, but also federal agencies like the US Environmental Protection Agency and CDC, as well as many state and local governments and non-profits. The bottom line is, we believe our value propositions and the way we think about things and really applying that human power change is how we deliver results and how we exceed our client's goals. Our work has often been measured by not just increases in engagement or behavior change, but in making an impact. I think clients tend to find us because of the work that we are doing in those arenas and they see that success and want that for their own. I would probably start by answering that question.

**Ms. Gants:** I think you nailed it! In fact this week we had someone reach out to us and they found us online. They looked at our website. They needed something specific, and in this case it was advisory work for a large transportation public/private partnership and they were just delighted with our project experience that they saw. The proof is in our work and our results. He is scheduling an interview with us next week, but it does not sound as if we are even going to have to compete much for it. He has been pretty pleased with the work that he sees us doing.

**Ms. Shoemaker:** Our belief is that if we cannot provide you with a better solution, a different solution or a solution of better value, then you should not hire us. In other words, no one really ever calls asking that we make tomorrow just like today. I think that really kind of embodies who we are as a firm. I think Denise Walz and Colleen Gants and I really strongly believe that as three women who are running this company together, we get to set the tone and we are doing that through that ethic and belief.

**CEOCFO:** *What is next for PRR, Inc? What are the plans moving forward?*

**Ms. Gants:** Our mission is to be the most successful "women-and employee-owned communications agency in America. What we are finding Lynn, is that people from around the country are noticing what we started in Seattle and the special

work that we do with human powered change. We are focusing a lot of time on our Mid-Atlantic practice, which is the DC, Maryland and Virginia area. Also, in our Southern California area, there is a lot of growth there. We are also in Portland and Austin. You have seen our website. I call it the Nordstrom model, but we are taking the magic that was started here in Seattle and spreading that throughout the major metropolitan areas in the country. I would say that those are some of our target areas; large metropolitan areas.

**Ms. Walz:** I would say that sometimes how we describe ourselves is the best, least known, communications firm. And that is because we give our clients all the credit. Truly, if you look around your home right now, there are at least, two or three things, that in partnership with our clients, we have influenced. If you ever see a CFL or LED light bulb in your light socket, if you have an ENERGY STAR computer or TV, we have inspired that. We have introduced water saving toilets and washing machines. If you have a toll tag in your car, we have worked on that. We are everywhere! Therefore, as we are looking at expanding into new markets, what we really want to do is continue to elevate our clients and the work that they are doing and integrate that into every-day lives, making the world a better place.

