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## Creating Meaningful Jobs and Delivering Exceptional Service: A Conversation with Velocitii’s CEO



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**“We want to provide jobs that our employees feel good about fulfilling, in a culture where they feel valued, rewarded and heard. That translates into the delivery of excellent service and therefore happy clients. It comes full circle for us.” Heather Smith**

**CEOCFO: Ms. Smith, would you tell us the overall vision behind Velocitii and your focus today?**

**Ms. Smith:** The company was created about nine years ago with a singular focus to create meaningful jobs in western New York, specifically in areas such as Medina, New York that had been negatively impacted by business closures. Fast-forward to today and we are still focused on job creation, but our focus is much more than that.

We strive to be an employer of choice based on the culture we have cultivated, and the jobs created as a result of the clients we partner with that are truly aligned with our core values. If a prospective client does not care about providing exceptional service to their customers and is more focused on quantity versus quality, then they are not a good fit for Velocitii. We want to provide jobs that our employees feel good about fulfilling, in a culture where they feel valued, rewarded and heard. That translates into the delivery of excellent service and therefore happy clients. It comes full circle for us.

**CEOCFO: When you are talking with a prospective client can you gauge quickly whether they will have that commitment or not?**

**Ms. Smith:** We can typically tell quickly if the conversation becomes focused on more of the quantitative metric, such as how many calls someone can handle in an hour, and less on the level of service and the type of skill set that we would bring to that partnership. A client that is a good fit for Velocitii focuses the conversation on the quality of the people

we would put on the program and the importance of satisfaction level of their customers with the experience.

**CEOCFO: *Do you see that businesses are focused more on their customers and having a good experience or are they still behind the curve?***

**Ms. Smith:** With the customers that we are dealing with, I believe they see it as a differentiator. I think COVID had an impact on the way consumers deal with companies. So much of it is now either online or over the phone versus in-person. It has become much more of a differentiator than it used to be. We do find that a lot of our clients and prospects are interested in not only attracting new customers, but they recognize that type of experience they have when they interact with someone representing their company directly correlates to customer retention.

**CEOCFO: *BPO, Business Process Outsourcing, is a big umbrella. Would you tell us about the range of services you provide?***

**Ms. Smith:** It is a big industry. Here at Velocitii we specialize in customer service, technical support and back-office transaction processing. We are industry agnostic in that as long as it is a client that cares about the experience that their customers experience, the industry the client is in can range from healthcare to waste management and anything in-between. Some examples include healthcare clients where we do everything from claims processing, to handling inquiries from policy holders and providers to telephone interviews. We also support a few high-tech companies with technical support and troubleshooting for their products. And one client where we handle inquiries about classic car insurance policies and also sell memberships to their club.

**CEOCFO: *How do you help your people recognize how to match the style of a customer?***

**Ms. Smith:** That is an art. Every client is a little bit different, and we spend a lot of time discussing the agent profile upfront when we onboard a new client. We ask them about the kind of experience they want their customers to have and whether any specific type of experience is necessary. A great example is the car insurance client I mentioned earlier. There is a tremendous amount of role playing that happens during training. The customers calling in like to be asked about their car and want to talk about what they did over the weekend, so role playing these types of conversations is helpful in preparing the agent to carry on casual conversations. For some of our other clients, you would not necessarily get that type of engagement because the people calling want to get on with business and move on. We tailor the training to match the specifications that the client needs and the type of experience they want their callers to have.

**CEOCFO: *What has changed in your approach over time?***

**Ms. Smith:** Well, COVID really forced a change in approach for most businesses. We had to completely change our thinking from an in-office approach to one of equipping and managing a remote workforce and we did it very successfully. We had no disruption to our service delivery for our clients and in fact, many of our employees were happier having the ability to work from home. What has become evident is that the world

was not shifting back to an in-office work environment in many areas and quite frankly, there is not a business need to do so in our industry. We find that when we are recruiting today, the first question many candidates ask is if the opening is a work-from-home position. Luckily, we can happily reply yes. We developed the ability to measure the quality and deliver the same level of service with a remote workforce. That has become a differentiator when competing for talent because many local employers started pulling people back into the office as COVID waned. The nature of our business and our productivity and quality measurement tools have allowed us to offer the flexibility of working from home or in the office. We went through that transformation quickly and we have a well-oiled machine when it comes to onboarding someone, getting them their equipment, going through training using the tools that are available to us today, and getting them productive, even if they never set foot in our office.

The other thing I focused on when I started Velocitii was more of a cultural transformation. The majority of my career has been built around creating environments where employees love where they work, they enjoy the people that they work with and feel valued for the work they do, both monetarily and recognition programs. I want employees that wake up on Monday morning and say, "Thank God it's Monday, I get to go back to work," not employees that say "Thank God it's Friday, I can't wait to get out of here." We have been successful in doing that and just this year we were awarded The Top Workplace Award, and it was the first time we ever applied for it. Employee engagement is all about making sure our employees have a voice and they feel valued. We provide multiple ways for employees to offer suggestions, input and feedback and they know that we will take action and do something with the feedback. They feel like they are part of making Velocitii an even better company tomorrow than we were yesterday. That is where I have spent a lot of time and energy since joining Velocitii, making us a differentiator in the BPO industry.

The focus of many BPO companies is what I would call "we'll take on your mess for less." It is more of a discussion around price versus value. What differentiates Velocitii is that we are leading with what is unique about us in the industry which is around our employee culture and our focus on meaningful job growth, and we can prove it just by things like The Top Workplace Award, our retention, our employee engagement and all the things that lead to a more productive workforce. That is where I have spent a lot of time and energy since joining Velocitii, working to have us stand out from the typical BPOs.

**CEOCFO:** *How do you help your employees understand that you mean what you say at Velocitii and you care about what they think?*

**Ms. Smith:** We must prove it consistently. In the last few years, we have seen a lot of employee referrals. We have employees that work for us now that we have proven that too, that are going out and talking to their friends and family and saying "This is the place that you want to work." Right now, at least 35% of our new hires are due to an employee referring somebody to the company. We cannot just say it, we must prove it. We have a virtual suggestion box and we named it "Tell Us

what is on Your Mind". We just relaunched it and within minutes we had two submissions come in. All submissions come directly to me and both employees had a response in thirty minutes. One was a great suggestion that would benefit multiple employees and it was implemented before the end of the week.

The other was feedback about the level of support that they felt they needed for their particular program. I had a one-on-one conversation with that employee, and we put some things in place to correct the situation. At the end of the discussion she said, "I have never worked for a company where this would have happened, where the CEO would get on a call with me and ask more information so that the problem could be fixed, and this is why I stay at this company." You hope that she will tell some of her coworkers and the word spreads from there. Once they see it in action, they realize it is real.

**CEOCFO: *Would you tell us about western New York and the Old Pickle Factory?***

**Ms. Smith:**

Medina is a bedroom community located in Western NY between Buffalo and Rochester and the region has over two million people. You hear about a lot of companies struggling to fill positions. We do not have that problem because we have a large enough pool of candidates that we can pull from. We have also launched a pay-for-performance structure so candidates can see a path to higher earnings.

The Olde Pickle Factory is a historic building owned by a Medina native who believes in giving back to his hometown. After purchasing the Olde Pickle Factory he renovated a portion of the building to be suitable for a call center to help support the growth of more office type jobs. That is where Velocitii is headquartered today.

**CEOCFO: *Do you do much outreach for new business?***

**Ms. Smith:** Yes, we have a sales team focused on new client acquisition, but we also recognize the significant role our operations team plays in existing client growth. I am happy to say that we have countless examples of jobs added to support current clients as a result of the exceptional service delivered by the Operations team.

**CEOCFO: *How is business today?***

**Ms. Smith:** It is great, and we are continuing to see growth. From 2020 to the end of 2021, we increased our revenue by 71%. We are on target this year to exceed that and I think 2023 will grow by at least that. Our employee engagement is better than you would typically see in this industry. We have 86% employee engagement based on this latest survey and that is against a benchmark of 75%. That to me is an indication that we are doing a lot of the right things and we need to continue to focus on that kind of continuous improvement.

**CEOCFO: *What surprised you about Velocitii as you took on the role of CEO? How has the changed today?***

**Ms. Smith:** Before I joined, I did a lot of due diligence around the financials. What surprised me the most was the level of employee dissatisfaction at the time, and the high level of attrition. That is why

that became a big focus after I joined because we needed to stop the bleeding and find the root cause of the issues. The starting point was putting together an executive leadership team that was aligned with that mission and I am proud to say we have that. We needed to figure out how to transform the culture so that employees not only wanted to work here but wanted to stay. That was probably the biggest surprise, but it has also been the most rewarding because we have seen the culture transform over the last few years. Culture is a journey and something that we will always focus on.

Our transformation has been so significant that we now have candidates knocking on the door saying, "I have heard great things about Velocitii, I want to come work here." That is a great position to be in.

