

Lori Johnson – Point of Pride Transcript

[00:00:00] **Lori:** From the time I was a child, I knew I wanted a career, but I wanted kids, too. Little did I know just how difficult it would be to have both. Balancing personal and professional responsibilities was a challenge, but luckily I was able to find a way to make it work, and in the midst of it all, I found my true calling.

[00:00:30] **Misty:** Hey there friends. Thanks so much for checking out our Point of Pride series. In celebration of our 40(ish) anniversary. Simantelites are sharing stories about the work they're most proud of that made a difference for Simantel, the client and perhaps most importantly, themselves. I'm excited to share this story with you from our Executive Director of Service Management, Lori Johnson.

[00:00:48] I'm so proud of the way Lori trusted what she wanted and asked for it. Then put in the hard work to make it happen. Have a listen as Lori shares her point of pride.

[00:01:07] **Lori:** My point of pride at Simantel is twofold. It's about discovering my true passion professionally while balancing life as a mom. I'm Lori Johnson, Executive Director of Service Management, and I've been at Simantel for 14 years. I grew up in a super traditional household. My dad was a farmer and the primary/only provider, and my mom stayed home to raise us kids and take care of the household.

[00:01:33] I remember as a child, thinking to myself, "When I grow up, I want to be able to support myself and not rely on anyone." So I always set out to have a career. In fact, remember who's the boss? Angela Bauer. That was the goal for me. However, I also knew I wanted children - three to be exact. Fast forward to 2008, the year I came to Simantel.

[00:01:57] I had a two-year-old at the time, and I remember being so happy and seen during my interview when Susie, the owner at the time told me she didn't ever want an employee to miss the moments in their child's life because of work. She didn't want them to miss the games, school activities or other commitments having children requires. At last, someone understood.

[00:02:22] So I had the career at an ad agency, no less living the Angela Bauer dream. And I had my first child. I was well on my way to achieving the goals I'd set for myself. Yet I started to have this nagging feeling that I wasn't enough to my son and sometimes I didn't feel I was enough for my job. Balancing life and work was becoming difficult.

[00:02:46] My work at Simantel was very rewarding. At the time I was working with Knapheide on a new brand launch. And soon another seed was planted that sparked my true passion. Simantel was defining a new approach to our work called The Simantel Way, and the Knapheide project was selected to pilot the approach.

[00:03:05] Through this pilot, I discovered my excitement for helping people understand how work flows through the agency. But the nagging desire for more time with my kids persisted. I continued to feel torn between my work and my family. By this time, my second child was born and I wasn't doing a great job of having it all.

[00:03:24] So at this point, I approached the owners about creating an alternative work week that would help bring more balance to my life. I know that's pretty commonplace now, but it wasn't really a thing back then. I was so excited when they agreed to let me. Of course, I entered into this knowing I may be stunting my career growth by taking this path, but I was willing to sacrifice that to have extra time with my kids.

[00:03:48] What a difference it made for me personally. I felt so much more productive at work when I was there because I knew I had some extra time built in for my family. Sure, it was hard sometimes to set the boundaries. It required a lot of flexibility on both my part and my coworkers' part. Sometimes I worked beyond the 32-hour work week we had agreed to, and sometimes my coworkers filled in for me or did a lot of shuffling to work around my schedule.

[00:04:16] The most difficult part was probably being in a client facing role while having the schedule. I remember the Knapheide client showing a little concern about that with Misty. She could have easily taken that as him questioning my commitment and demanding I adjust my hours. But instead, she had an expectation conversation with him and me and just made sure everyone was aligned.

[00:04:39] Even then, Simantel was on the cutting edge of new approaches and pushing for what their employees need. They recognized the value I brought to the table and wanted to keep me happy and engaged. In return, I was accountable and remained a high performer, eventually working my way up to Senior Account Manager.

[00:04:56] I remember feeling like I really had the best of both worlds and feeling like I really could have it all. Here I was enjoying a career and experiencing professional growth, all while striking a better balance with my family, which had grown to now include three children, just like I had always wanted. I began to talk with the owners about my role in training new folks how to approach client services and focus on workflow and financial management that fit both the client and the agency needs.

[00:05:24] True to so many folks' path at Simantel, I found a passion and worked with my supervisors to outline a business need, and I eventually found myself in a newly created director role. By that point in my life, my kids were in school full or at least part-time, and I was able to resume a more traditional 40-hour work week. But Simantel still allowed me to work one of those days from home so I could be there when my kids got home from school.

[00:05:47] As I continued my effort working across the agency to drive clarity, consistency and accountability, I eventually built up a team to focus on the day-to-day efforts, and I joined the executive director team helping to run the business and set the vision for the agency. A few years later, the pandemic hit and everyone went to an alternative work approach.

[00:06:07] And since then, many companies have made permanent accommodations that allow for better work life integration. However, I will always be proud of myself for advocating for what I needed and proud to work for a company that fosters that equilibrium. Simantel understands the importance of flexibility and the satisfaction it can create for employees in all areas of their life.

[00:06:29] After all, a happy employee is a productive employee. Over the years as a leader, I've continued to do the hard work to understand myself as a leader, establish boundaries and make space for all the things that a week throws at me. Of course, it hasn't always been easy. It's been filled with hard work, late nights and a few tears along the way.

[00:06:50] However, three kids and 14 Simantel years later, I can honestly say true to Susie's word, I never felt like I missed any big moments. In fact, I was there for lots of small moments, too. People

often ask me what has kept me at Simantel for so long. Of course, it's because of the people, but it's also because they believed in me and allowed me this flexibility to make sure I was not only taking care of Simantel, but also taking care of me and my family.

[00:07:20] And that's why I chose this as my point of pride.

[00:07:28] *Misty*: As a fellow mom, I can totally relate to Lori's story. As an owner of the agency, I'm proud of the incredible shifts we've made at work and beyond to empower all of our Simantelites. Ultimately, it helps us all work better to achieve our common goal of success. If you like Lori's story and wanna hear more, head over to marketingsweats.com and check out our very special season six, where you can hear my full interview with her and other Simantelites as they share their point of pride in celebration of our 40ish anniversary.