

SILICON VALLEY BUSINESS JOURNAL

C-Suite Awards 2021: Kathy Ryan, Founder and Chair of RoseRyan

Kathy Ryans's nomination to be a C-Suite Award recipient came from the now-CEO of her consulting firm, RoseRyan: "I've worked with more than 30 companies throughout my career, and I have never met a leader as compelling and successful as Kathy," wrote Dave Roberson, who Ryan passed the CEO baton to at the start of 2020.

Roberson praised his boss for being "self-aware, courageous, industrious and determined, future-oriented, resilient, grounded and caring."

A self-described introvert, Ryan said that during a tumultuous 2020, revenues at the \$14 million firm stayed flat – a welcome achievement considering the pandemic year – while the number of new clients rose 50% and profitability grew.

What have the last 12 months been like for RoseRyan and for you? We have stayed flat as far as revenue from 2019, which is good. We weren't sure what to expect, to be honest with you. But we've done well. We have stayed flat on revenues. We've increased by 50%, I think, the number of new clients that we have. And we are far more profitable. So all in all, a good year from a business perspective. It's not been an easy year, I will give you that.

How does this compare to some of those other troublesome periods? This is like the third recession, the third difficult time I've been through. How does it compare? It's been a little bit different. But I think I've had practice now, right?

The first time when you go through – like the dot-com bust was the first recession – "Wow! What are we going to do? How are we going to do this?" It was challenging then – now, I'm more practiced at it.

Did you adopt any tactics or tricks to get through this time? We really ramped up communication ... Now, we want feedback: "How are things going with you? How is it working at home? Is there something else that we can do?"

We have an office. We have space. People can come in here and work if they need to have a new

view or get away from the kids or have some quiet time or something like that, to do some work. So we've been open about that.

And I think a lot of this comes down to transparency and lots of communications with people. Our culture is based on transparency. I've been transparent with everything, with my employees, from day one. And we've really kept that up.

Why is transparency such an important idea for you? It's a part of who I am: I'm quiet, so that's one thing. I've never wanted to play – and I don't mean this in a terribly negative (way) – political games. I didn't want to be somebody who I wasn't, right? If you ask me a question, I'll tell you the answer, right? I certainly don't tell confidential information and things like that.

We started that from day one. I shared, for example, all financial information with all my employees. We tell them what our plans are, what our focus is, where we're headed, why we're doing this and why we're not doing that. I'm very open about that kind of thing.

And I take lots of questions from my employees to say, "What's going on here?" and "Why are you doing that?" or whatever. And I have had people, employees, I've hired people who've come from competitors. And they've said, wow, this is so different than what they've seen at some of their companies – I've always appreciated that feedback.

Do you have a principle that has guided you through your career? I have several models that I go by, and they play out over and over and over again.

I learned, from the VP of engineering at Quantum, "Go for incremental progress versus postponed perfection." That is so true in business: Take a lot of little steps; you look back; wow, you've come a long distance. I really like that.

What's it like to build a business and have it last for almost 30 years? I'm very proud of RoseRyan. I'm proud of what we have created ... But



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I was once told that I make it look easy to build a business – let me tell you, it is not easy to build a business.

I don't care what business you're in. It's very difficult. But I have enjoyed it. I love my job. And I really can't imagine doing anything different. I have absolutely no regrets on the path that I've taken for the last 30 years. It's been very rewarding.

What would you like the legacy of your company to be? I think that we were a company that lived our values. I found that values are critical to creating my culture, the culture that I wanted as a company. That we lived our values and that we were... Or that are – I don't want it to be a were, in the past – but that we are a group of talented individuals who excel at their jobs and are trustworthy. That we're a great team to work with. This is internally, as well as externally. And that we were just a great company to work for, a company to be with and be associated with. That's the legacy that I want.