



Alexa Bui and Betty Odeneal struck out on their own to build an aerospace staffing company in 2008.

BUSINESS

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By Rachel Slade

Alexa Bui wasn't expecting to be hired herself the day she went along with a friend to a job interview for moral support, but within three years she was the top recruiter for the DFW office of Butler staffing.

"I brought her lunch every day because I didn't want her to leave for lunch — I wanted her to recruit for me," remembers Betty Odeneal, who had started on the sales side of the company the year before Bui, in 1999.

The two clicked immediately, and Odeneal would take Bui along on sales calls to help her learn more about the other side of the business. Butler handles a wide range of industries' staffing needs all over the world, but the two soon found that their synergy worked best in aerospace: Odeneal worked the companies while Bui found the perfect contractor for the job.

"We always had a little private joke that all we needed was a bank, a cell phone and a computer, and we could do this on our own," Odeneal said.

The two decide in 2008 to strike out on their own and build a boutique agency together, working out of their homes. By the fall, they had eight clients using their services and about 40 contracted engineers on payroll across the country. Then 2009 arrived, and everything changed.

"In 2009 we lost every person on our payroll, went down to literally nothing," Odeneal said. "By the summer of 2009, we started rebuilding one by one."

They shifted gears, Bui said, focusing their efforts on military employers and swapping from fixed-wing aircraft

to rotary because the helicopter business had been hurt less in the recession. And because engineering had all but stopped, they hired direct aircraft technicians instead of engineering contractors. By 2010, there was an upturn and they moved into their first office in Bedford.

The two describe their work with smiles on their faces. It is a job all about timing, Bui says, like a giant chess match in which they align their contractors with the right companies and the right projects, whether that be designing new avionics on commercial aircraft or building \$200 million interiors for private jets.

"What Betty and I have done is we've taken aerospace staffing to a new level," Bui said. "I can lure an 80-year-old man out of retirement for the right project."

Success is found in a simple equation: Make the contract engineer happy with their pay rate and make the customer — companies such as Dassault Falcon Jet, Gulfstream Aerospace and Sikorsky Aircraft — happy with the bill rate. Against large staffing companies and a "good ol' boy" system of male-dominated industries, Bui and Odeneal say it is their style of treating their contractors like rockstars that has kept them in the game. Today, Agenté Technical is based in Colleyville, the team includes five support staffers and the company supports 21 clients nationwide with more than 100 contractors.

"There is some chemistry that has clicked between Alexa and these engineers, and me and these clients that makes stuff happen," Odeneal said. "This job is just like taking money and going to Vegas; it's a gamble; it's highly competitive. So it's what you've got inside that sets you apart."

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