

# THE HUFFINGTON POST

## Women in Business Q&A: Rebecca Black, Director of Operations, Chronic Tacos

*Rebecca Black is currently the Director of Operations for [Chronic Tacos](#), a growing fast casual franchised concept that delivers true Mexican flavor with authentic third generation family recipes.*

### **How has your life experience made you the leader you are today?**

I grew up changing schools every year, sometimes more than once in the same year; as a result, I fought hard for stability both in the workplace and at home. Sometimes there were consequences, though. Upward mobility in a large organization typically means you will relocate if you have to, which can lead to family becoming a secondary priority. The first big move was hard enough and then the next promotion meant another move, and I did not want to put my family through that again. This realization took me from being a smaller fish in a bigger pond to being a bigger fish in a smaller pond. I left my first job and the security of a large organization and became a partner in a franchise group with the rights to build 37 restaurants. Becoming a franchisee allowed me to stay local which gave my family the stability they needed.

In 2013 I accepted a position as the Director of Operations for Chronic Tacos, a growing fast casual franchised concept that delivers true Mexican flavor with authentic third generation family recipes. I transitioned back into corporate life with a unique perspective and understood how franchisees felt when being asked to make a change. For instance, when franchisees are asked to make a change to a current process, I try to provide them with the "why's" to gain their buy-in. Explaining how they will benefit from the change helps them become advocates for the change. Forced compliance usually works -- only until we walk out the door. Thus, having a better understanding of what it is like to be a franchisee has helped me become a more effective leader.

### **How has your previous employment experience aided your career?**

Each opportunity has had a positive impact on my career. When I was about 17 years old, I took a job washing dishes at the local Pizza Hut. By the age of 18 I was promoted to General Manager then to Multi-unit Manager and ultimately to the Division Training Manager for Pizza Hut corporate where I was responsible for training at over 400 restaurants.

Growing up in Pizza Hut during the PepsiCo era gave me structure and taught me the importance of systems and tools. I learned how important it was to get a good return on investment and the impact I made on that investment. For my next venture, I became a partner in a Panera Bread franchise so I could broaden my expertise outside of the pizza niche. As a franchisee, I learned how to get work done through fewer people. I also learned how to wear quite a few different hats simultaneously. These experiences helped prepare me for subsequent roles in the corporate environment where I had a unique perspective understanding both sides of the business.

### **How do you maintain a work/life balance?**

I wish I could say that 50/50 is an achievable balance, but the reality is that sometimes it's 90/10 and sometimes it's 10/90. The good news is that times of extreme unbalance are short lived. If I am ever in the middle of something that pulls me away from my family, I always make sure I have a plan and that my family understands the timing of what I am doing. Once, I had spent 13 weeks away from home and I would take the red eye every ten days so I could spend a couple of days at home. I usually didn't sleep while I was home and would often cook and freeze meals for while I was gone. I did this partly out of guilt, but I also wanted to make sure my family would think of me and appreciate the efforts. When it comes to life balance, I have found that I am usually the one I have trouble making time for. When I was in school, I would do my homework after the kids went to bed and there were a few times that my husband found me still sitting in the same spot when he'd wake up for work. There was no internet back then, so Saturday afternoons were spent at the library. Balance can be elusive and I learned that being the best I can be in the moment, whether it's being a mother, boss, subordinate or wife, is what keeps me sane. Trying to be all things to all people, all the time, is a recipe for failure.

### **What have the highlights and challenges been during your time at Chronic Tacos and as a professional in general?**

The most exciting part for me has been offering solutions based on my previous experiences that have made a difference in the restaurants. Building consistency among the franchise system has been the biggest challenge as well as the most rewarding experience to date. Being able to gain buy-in and support from franchisees takes time, but it's all about choosing the right battles.

### **What advice can you offer women hoping to start their own franchise?**

Being a business owner is hard. It is risky and rewarding at the same time. I advise women looking to start a franchise to make sure the franchise you choose is something you will be passionate about. This is what gets you through the tough times. Spend time getting to know and speaking with other franchisees. It's important to build those relationships so they can help you through the good and the bad. Find a successful female franchisee to connect with and understand they don't need to be in the same industry in order to offer valuable advice. You should also have an exit strategy. It may be five years or 15 years, but know what the next steps will be for you and your business.

**What do you think is the biggest issue for women in the workplace?**

We are often our own biggest issue. We frequently lack the confidence we need to succeed. We are told as little girls that we can be whatever we want to be, but it isn't always perceived as realistic when very few have blazed the trail. Strong women are still seen as bossy, which often negates their leadership. The lack of good role models in a lot of businesses often results in women trying to be something they are not. Women bring so many different things to the party; they just need the opportunity to take them out of the bag.

**How has mentorship made a difference in your professional and personal life?**

It is so important to always have that "go-to" person. A good mentor doesn't give you the answers, they help you think through the problem, ask good questions and support you so you're able to find your own answers. Being an effective listener is the most important thing a mentor can bring to the table. It doesn't matter whether it's a business situation or how to deal with teenagers; talking through your struggles with a good mentor will help you gain a better perspective.

**What are your thoughts on Sheryl Sandberg's Lean In book and movement?**

I recently read Sheryl's book while traveling on a business trip, and I caught myself nodding in agreement several times while I was reading. I was able to relate to so many of the scenarios in her book. Reading this book reminded how common it is for women to see themselves as outsiders which I believe makes them consequently act like outsiders.

**Which other female leaders do you admire and why?**

I have so much respect for Indra Nooyi, CEO of PepsiCo. She is brutally honest and calls it like it is. I heard her speak a few years ago and when asked how she balances her work and life, she candidly said she doesn't. It was the first time I heard someone actually say it. It was such a relief to know that there are other women out there that struggle with the same things I do. We make sacrifices every day and hold it inside. As a leader, sometimes something just has to give. It doesn't change the fact that you are still striving to be a great leader, both at work and at home. One of my favorite quotes from her is, "Leadership is hard to define and good leadership is even harder. But if you can get people to follow you to the ends of the earth, you are a great leader." Be a great leader and others will look past the stereotypes we have been saddled with.

**What are your hopes for the future of Chronic Tacos?**

I aspire for the brand will grow exponentially and achieve 100+ locations in the next few years. Our growth will create opportunities for others to become great restaurateurs.