



# Riding in Style

By Akia Ashmond Brew

**T**ransportation methods and concepts are experiencing a remarkable shift today—and it often takes an experienced chief executive officer to keep a business in this industry afloat. Having spent time with hundreds of business leaders over the years, I don't know of any other woman who has built and branded a firm like **Kristina Bouweiri** has!

Bouweiri, president and CEO of **Reston Limousine** in Reston, VA, just outside of Washington, D.C., is a powerhouse. You only need to be in the area for a few minutes before you can spot one of her employees escorting patrons in one of their exquisite vehicles. From buses to stretch SUVs to traditional limos and Town Cars, Reston Limo is everywhere, has a respected reputation, and backs that reputation up with excellent service. The company has the eighth-largest limo fleet in the country.

Bouweiri was one of a few select speakers to address the business influencers who came to celebrate the debut of my book, *Seen and Sustained for Small Businesses*, in 2011. She was also on the advisory committee and contributed to the contents of the book, which is meant to help visionaries express their ideas in writing and then communicate them to their leadership teams, board members, staffs, and ultimately, customers.

Bouweiri is also the founder of **Sterling Women**, a group in Northern Virginia that supports the unique needs of women running, starting, or simply interested in business.

Recently, I followed up with Bouweiri for a Q&A. I'm sure you'll appreciate the level of candor with which she so graciously offers her advice.

**Q: Your fleet is quite impressive, but what's your favorite?**

**Bouweiri:** It is really hard for me to pick a favorite vehicle! I love the new Lincoln Continentals. They have a beautiful grille on the front and very luxurious armrest in the back seat. I also love the executive Van Terra. It is a fancy van with a table inside, perfect for wine and brew tours. I love the Mercedes Sprinter, which has two TVs and beautiful lighting inside. Finally, our 55-passenger deluxe motorcoaches are incredible—all new and so comfortable.

Fall 2018 MBE

**Q: How many vehicles did you start out with in the beginning?**

**Bouweiri:** Reston Limousine incorporated with five vehicles in the fleet: one sedan, a van, a bus and two limousines.

**Q: What geographic areas do you service?**

**Bouweiri:** Locally, we service D.C., Maryland, and Virginia. Globally, we can provide a car and driver in any city in the world through an affiliate network.

**Q: You provide many jobs to residents of the greater Washington metro area. How has your leadership in staffing evolved over the years?**

**Bouweiri:** We currently have 400 employees and could use another 60 drivers! The first 10 years, I was very involved in interviewing and hiring employees. The next 15 years, I was not that involved because I had a team in place doing a terrific job. The last few years, I have gotten back involved, especially for driver recruitment and retention. We have a tight job market in this region, and there is a national shortage of drivers.

**Q: Is autonomous driving a factor in your future planning?**

**Bouweiri:** Autonomous driving is coming whether we like it or not. We will embrace it and look to house, maintain, and wash the vehicles.

**Q: How have you responded to the ever-growing "shared" driving companies?**

**Bouweiri:** Uber and Lyft have not taken away our client base, but they have affected the driver pool. Many Uber and Lyft drivers apply to work for us when they get tired of paying all of their own expenses.

**Q: Did you ever think you'd own a company such as Reston Limousine?**

**Bouweiri:** I call myself "the accidental entrepreneur!" I have a degree in international affairs and wanted to join the Foreign Service. Long story short, I found myself in advertising sales and sold an ad to the founder of Reston Limousine, and he asked me to quit my job and come work for him.

**Q: The limousine world seems exciting from the outside, but are there good days and tough days?**

**Bouweiri:** Yes, when you own a business, I would say the highs are high and the

lows are low! The limousine business is challenging because it is open 24/7/365, and it is seasonal. Managing expenses and staffing is critical.

**Q: How do you stay on top of your schedule and corporate priorities?**

**Bouweiri:** I have a regimented schedule that includes regular meetings with my team. I have an executive assistant who manages my schedule for me. I belong to Vistage, a CEO membership organization that provides me with an advisory board and business coaching.

**Q: What is your secret for maintaining personal and corporate brand relevance?**

**Bouweiri:** I would say that my raw talent is marketing and branding, [which] come easily to me. It also helps to be an extrovert. I enjoy meeting people and attending networking events.

**Q: What about business keeps you up at night?**

**Bouweiri:** The things that keep me up at night are retaining my staff and providing them with the best benefits possible, accidents, and the price wars we are currently experiencing in my industry.

**Q: What area of business do you wish you had more experience in before becoming CEO?**

**Bouweiri:** Definitely accounting. I love spreadsheets and numbers and I enjoy cost proposals, but I have never fully understood some accounting concepts.

**Q: What is something that would surprise people most about the limousine business?**

**Bouweiri:** There are few barriers to entry and therefore, there is a lot of competition. To truly run a great limousine business, you must have infrastructure that includes a safety program.

**Q: How have you tackled equity, gender, inclusion, and diversity issues over the years?**

**Bouweiri:** I have always encouraged my employees to grow and try new things. Many of my managers have been promoted from within. I am proud to say I have a huge percentage of female employees. My client base and my driver base are very international and diverse. I am on about 10 boards. On many of the boards, there is a shortage of women and diversity, and I have always

done everything possible to recruit new members who are diverse.

**Q: How do you approach partnership opportunities?**

**Bouweiri:** We have partnerships with other limousine companies locally, nationally, and globally. We have partnerships with restaurants, venues, sports teams, charities, nonprofits, and more. We look for a mutually beneficial relationship. In many cases, the business is looking for transportation in exchange for services. We look for like-minded businesses that share similar client bases so that we can cross-promote each other.

**Q: What has been your one saving grace in business?**

**Bouweiri:** My positive mental attitude, optimism, and gratitude.

**Q: Does it get lonely in your leadership role?**

**Bouweiri:** The first 10 years I was in business, it was lonely because I never left the office and had no time for



friends. Today, I have many friends and colleagues who also own businesses, and there is always someone to talk to.

**Q: How did Sterling Women come about?**

**Bouweiri:** I started Sterling Women in 2008 because I wanted a great networking event for women near my office. I realized that 85 percent of my clients were women. The person calling to make the reservation is usually the executive assistant, office manager, HR manager, or wife, sister, mother, or girlfriend! Let's face it: Women are the event planners at work and in the family. I was attending eight women's networking events per month. By organizing my own event, I thought I would save time and money and meet the same objectives.

**Q: What major successes have occurred since it launched?**

**Bouweiri:** Sterling Women has exceeded my highest expectations in every way. Fourteen of our speakers have become authors. Many have built and then sold their businesses. New businesses have

been inspired and launched. We have raised \$200,000 for charities with our fundraisers, which we do twice a year.

**Q: Have your relationships with members of that community helped you with decision-making and in other areas of business?**

**Bouweiri:** Sterling Women has created a community of people that are able to help others with so many needs. We have graphic designers, social media experts, printers, spas, therapists, weight loss experts, realtors, insurance agents, jewelers, pest control companies, and more. Our attendees find new clients, new vendors, friends, and inspiration. Our mission is simple: We showcase women in business.

**Q: What do you want for Sterling Women?**

**Bouweiri:** For the next 10 years, Sterling Women is launching several women's giving circles to encourage supporting the many charities and nonprofits in Loudoun County, VA. Loudoun County is one of the richest and fastest-growing counties in the country, and because of that, people don't think we have issues in our community! We do have issues that we will work to address, including homelessness, hunger, and mental healthcare, to name a few.

**Q: Do you consider yourself an advocate for small businesses or women business owners?**

**Bouweiri:** Yes, I am absolutely an advocate for small business and women-owned businesses. At Sterling Women, we showcase women in business. I try and steer people to do business with small and women-owned business in our community, rather than the big chains.

**TELL YOUR STORY!**

What about you? Are you busy running your business and supporting your region through a community-based program or nonprofit? I'd like to share your story with the MBE community. Bouweiri has paved the way for many women in the transportation industry, which is male-dominated. She's also a mother and quite the socialite! I hope you get to spend some time in one of Bouweiri's extravagant, luxurious vehicles; be sure to tag @mbemag when you share the fun on social media!

ThinkBIG!!