

Expert Interview I with Mary Pillow Thompson, Co-Founder, COO, at foh&boh
Including | thoughts on building your own business that improves the lives of
others.

>> *Mary guest curated Strands on August 11, 2022. [Read it here.](#)*

Tell us a little bit about yourself and what keeps you busy. How did you end up doing what you're doing today?

While I currently live in my hometown of Nashville, TN, I didn't always think I would be here. Upon graduating from Denison University (Ohio), I packed my suitcase and moved to my favorite city, Paris, France. In those days, if you wanted a job, you wrote letters (on paper, people!) and mailed them and then waited (patiently hoping) for a phone call, which would undoubtedly come when you were away (no cell phones, folks!) and that little blinking light on your answering machine would hold so much power. And this is how I landed myself a job with an American shoe company in Paris. It led me to stints in Toronto with frequent trips to Hong Kong and Taiwan and all over the States selling shoes to the likes of Payless, Kmart and Fashion Bug from my sample bag. Yes, I was a real life Al Bundy...and I loved it!

Today, almost fifteen years removed from my shoe career, I am a co-founder of a tech company who's passion for delighting customers through incredible product and service stemmed from those early days of having to measure up to the high standards of retail buyers.

I spend my time thinking about the future direction of our product and the ways in which we can surprise and delight our users with features they love but didn't know they needed. At my core, I am a problem-solver, a fixer, if you will; so my head is forever filled with ideas on how to improve life!

What excites you most about what you do?

At foh&boh, we are keenly aware that we are not just another piece of software that restaurants and hotels use. We are technology that gives our users time back. Time they can spend with their family and friends, or time to spend thinking about how to



grow their company. We help the hospitality industry hire the right people faster which allows the operators/ owners/ managers to get on with other aspects of their business. This motivates me to keep improving on this mission to continue to improve the lives of our users.

What beliefs define your approach to work? How would you define your leadership style?

My belief is that each person takes 100% responsibility for themselves and their circumstances, no more, no less. The world doesn't happen to us; rather, we all have the choice each day on how we want to play the hand that we have been dealt. This means, not blaming the world for a pandemic or your co-worker for missed deliverables, but instead, owning our part and getting curious on how each situation can be in our favor. I am not a micromanager but I am a very willing collaborator and mentor. I expect people to show up each day and make today count!

What has been the most rewarding project you've worked on, and why?

In the very early days of building foh&boh, when the technology was still very much an MVP, we had restaurant managers who were using it and exclaiming to us how amazing it was, how they were immediately able to schedule interviews and hire staff within days. To hear how we were able to impact their life in a small but meaningful way, has kept the fire burning within me and my co-founder to keep improving upon what we have built.

We are big believers in diversity -- Not only because we believe in equality, but because we also think it's better for business. The Black Lives Matter movement has shaped industry conversations around both global injustice, and also lack of representation in our industry. How do you frame these kinds of conversations, both internally and with clients? Is there an emphasis on action, or are the conversations really more about communication?



As a company founded by 2 females with a leadership team comprised of a 4 to 1 ratio female to male, we are very much attuned to the value of diversity and inclusion of the thoughts from all of our team members. We serve an industry (hospitality) that is naturally very diverse at the ownership level and all levels within the workforce. We encourage the leadership teams of our customers to engage and listen to the feedback from their employees-- this is a key factor in employee retention and satisfaction. Promote from within and develop a culture that shows you value upward mobility of the people that work for you.

Switching gears a bit, how do you find time to balance personal interests with your career? Do you believe work/life balance is possible? Anything you've implemented that you recommend that others try?

These days, my work is my life and I include my family in my work-- not literally but conversationally. I tell my boys (ages 10 and 11) about the issues and celebrations of my work. They are experiencing what it is like to build a company--- the joy and sadness. I work from home, in a dedicated room that is my office. My balance comes in short breaks where I leave the office and spend 10 or 20 minutes completely focused on my children or husband or cooking dinner or a conversation on the phone with a friend. I have learned to make "uni-tasking" a priority-- which means that each task, each person I interact with, gets 100% of me. This practice has made me more efficient and more present.

What's your media diet? Where do you find inspiration?

I left social media in 2020. It came down to this 1 simple question I asked myself: do I feel better about myself after just spending 20 minutes on insta? or worse? The answer was never "better."

I enjoy listening to business-related podcasts and finding amazing blogs that feed me with learnings and tidbits from people smarter than me!



As you know, we believe there is so much value in having a wide range of teachers. What's the best piece of advice/knowledge you've stolen, and who/where'd you steal it from?

As I mentioned above, my first job was a shoe salesman and I traveled all over to visit customers. One day, when I had returned from one of these trips, my boss (the actual owner of the company) sauntered down to my office and asked me how the trip went. The exchange goes like this:

Boss: How was the trip?

Me: It was good! We had a really good meeting!

Boss: I can't take a good meeting to the bank

Me: (mouth slightly ajar, at a loss for words) uh, I understand

And that's it- best advice: You can't take a good meeting to the bank.