

Meet Travel Titan Pamela Hurley-Moser

By Maralyn D. Hill

As someone who does a lot of travel research, I couldn't wait to interview travel titan, Pamela Hurley-Moser... after hearing about her, I knew I had to meet this woman. One of only 120 worldwide representatives qualified to sell Virgin Galactic's Sub-Orbital Space Flights, Pam focuses on the extraordinary and runs a profitable business at the same time. When others faltered, Pam soared.

The best way to share her journey is to share our interview:

Maralyn D. Hill: Pam, share a little about yourself and Hurley Travel Experts?

Pamela Hurley-Moser: I've been in the travel business for twenty-five years, and my mission continues to change, as I journey through life. The one thing that stays constant is my commitment to offering the finest travel services we possibly can. Raising the bar is very important to me – and surrounding myself with fun, positive people.

MDH: You've grown a business 30% in spite of the recession in the economy. It's amazing you started a Travel Agency in 1993 during excessive fare wars, commission caps in 1994, and Internet pricing availability. Can you elaborate on your insight?

PHM: I targeted and started in adventure travel. I didn't know it at the time, but the experiential travel area lacked agencies with travel expertise. I was a world traveler at a young age. When earning my own money and going to Travel Agencies, I would say, "I want to go hiking in

Nepal." They wanted to sell me a Carnival Cruise. I realized there was a need for experiential travel. I liked making people happy and travel is exciting, travel makes people happy. Back then, I was all about the vacation traveler.

I got into travel incentives, business retreats, as a client was talking about this vision he had about trying to sell more liquor. Suddenly, we had several hundred people going to Cancun, Mexico. I learned as I went along.

I started my own agency and was getting press around the adventure and experiential travel aspect of the business. Corporations called me to come in and meet with them and I thought, "Okay, corporate travel, that's interesting." What was interesting is I remember getting three requests for proposals within a couple weeks for large corporations in Maine. I thought it would be neat if I got one, and I landed all three. It was a good problem to have. I got into the corporate business overnight and basically delivered. I made promises on these RFPs and was determined to keep them, and did.

In 1994, when commission caps came, I was working hard, learning how to run a business. A fax came through from Delta Airlines, saying, "Dear Valued Travel Partner, as of midnight tonight, we will be reducing your revenue by 20%." The first was 10% to 8%, and I knew my profit margin was around 10%. While not a financial genius, I realized I would be losing money when I opened the door. I called my customers and set up

meetings, asking them to pay more money. I was charging \$5 service fees for tickets before anybody else. That was one of the reasons I was able to grow. Now, it would be \$10. Nervous about asking for more money, it was an "a-ha moment"—the value of relationships, face-to-face, connecting with people, having them understand your vision.

You have to constantly redefine, invent yourself, and change your business model to respond to the marketplace.

MDH: Reading your website, you've targeted the corporate travel market, retreats, luxury vacations, travel for tourism. Having written travel incentive programs, I believe breaking into that early was good for you. How did you discover what was involved for an Accredited Space Agent?

PHM: My Director of Marketing brought it to my attention. An email from Virgin Galactic stated that there was an essay contest. Richard Branson was going to select 50 people to represent his new space product. Richard Branson is somebody I have admired for his entrepreneurialism. I met him when I was in my 20s and I have a photo with him on my desk. Interestingly, my Director said, "I think you should fill out this application. If selected through an interview, you go to Kennedy Space Center for mission training."

I looked into it for January. Well, it was a snowy end of November and I was nine months pregnant. Wondering how I could manage, I applied, and was accepted. I had my interview while going into the hospital in labor.



I never told them I was pregnant. My six-week old daughter accompanied me down to Kennedy Space Center, sharing such a milestone in my career. People ask how long I've been an Accredited Space Agent. I know how long because it's exactly her age.

MDH: Do you have any insight as to when the space travel may be offered in the U.S.?

PHM: It's being offered now in the U.S., Sub-Orbital Space Flight, and they've been selling tickets. The space ship and the mother ship have been built, they're in testing phases right now, and realistically, in a very short time, the first flight to orbital space will be going up.

MDH: Your company recently celebrated 20 years in business and you continue to grow including opening an office in Naples. Can you tell us about that?

PHM: In the past two decades Hurley Travel Experts has grown from a company with a single full-time employee to one with 48. Based in Portland, Maine, the company opened a second office in Naples, Florida, in 2011. I tried to create an environment that was energy-infused and which attracted the best travel advisors, and the result was a dream team. The company did \$40 million in business last year, specializing in Corporate Travel Management, Luxury and Experiential Vacations and Meetings and Incentive Group Travel.

The Naples office has been an important addition to the business, and we have truly enjoyed servicing our great clients in that area. Our success has partly been achieved by recruiting an experienced team of travel experts, which we have done in Naples. This team ensures exceptional customer service for our clients, keeping us in line with our mission.

MDH: From your website, it is obvious you have exceptional people. How do you find them?

PHM: The largest part of our training program is customer service, true added value, going the extra mile, and raising that bar. I've hired people who said, "Wow, I thought I was best, but I come here and I'm not best." We really feel they have to be retrained regardless of their experience, because of the high demands of being exceptional.

MDH: You have 100 on-the-ground representatives?

PHM: Through Virtuoso, we have two affiliates. BCD is 100% corporate

business travel management and Virtuoso is Executive VIP. We also feature customized experiences.

MDH: How does it feel being the largest employer of travel consultants in the State of Maine?

PHM: It feels great. I love Maine and I do everything I can to keep my business in the state's that we do business in, Maine and Florida. At the end of the day, it's about supporting your community.

MDH: What did you do to celebrate 20 years in business?

PHM: Being involved with the community has always been a part of the company culture and mission. In honor of our 20 years of success, and to give back to the community, we created a "20 for Twenty" online travel auction. A Viking Danube River Cruise and an all-inclusive 7-day Caribbean cruise for two aboard Silversea's Silver Spirit were just two of the luxurious trips put up for bid, with proceeds going to nonprofits. This campaign raised more than \$50,000 for local charities, including the Conservancy of Southwest Florida.

MDH: You were awarded the annual Woman of Distinction by the Girl Scouts and you were a Girl Scout. Was this a total surprise?

PHM: It was a total surprise. I was very honored. I looked at the list of whom they honored in the past and it was humbling.

MDH: You do emphasize a return on investment, ROI for corporate accounts. Did you realize, in the beginning, you had to put it all together?

PHM: I think managing travel, as the environment of being a Travel Agency and Management Company, became more competitive with the Internet. The separation was between having a service or doing it yourself, separation between one that didn't cost anything and one with a service fee. We continually had to prove our worth, our value, and show our customers what we were doing for them. We evolved.

We started saving our customers money, but weren't telling them. It was exciting to show what we were saving. I thought instead of just showing, let's save them more. It comes down to streamlining, educating, guiding, and modifying travel behavior and funneling business through one source. Saving companies money, improving their bottom line, and enhancing the experience of the travelers are our goals.