

SEPTEMBER 16 2024 | ISSUE 04

# POOLNATION

SPOTLIGHTS & INSIGHTS

NEXT GENERATION  
OF FEMALE LEADERS



POOL NATION  
WOMEN'S SUMMIT 2024

POOL NATION  
CONFERENCE NOV 9-11  
AT PSP EXPO-DALLAS





# POOL NATION CONFERENCE

Elevate Your Skills:

NOV 9, 10, 11  
DALLAS, TX

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# Z GOF R P GWR WK G VGSWGP EGU

## ISSUE OF POOL NATION INSIGHTS & SPOTLIGHTS

Did you know women now represent nearly 25% of the U.S. pool industry workforce? In fact, over the past five years, the number of women-owned businesses in the pool sector has increased by 35%, with more female leaders stepping into roles traditionally held by men. From technicians and engineers to marketing directors and business owners, women are diving into every corner of the industry—and we're here to celebrate their achievements! In this issue, we're riding the wave of change and celebrating the remarkable accomplishments within Pool Nation.

This summer, we were inspired by the success of the third annual Pool Nation Women's Summit, an incredible event that highlighted some of the brightest and most

innovative female leaders in the industry, igniting a renewed sense of hope for the future.

Now, we shift our focus to two other exciting upcoming events – **the 2024 Pool Nation Conference and the Heritage Pool Appreciation & Business Summit (Nov. 9-11, 2024, at PCP Expo in Dallas, Texas)** and the **Fourth Annual Pool Nation® Awards on November 13, 2024.**

The Pool Nation® Awards are the only awards show dedicated to recognizing excellence in the pool service and repair industry, shining a spotlight on the top companies, products, and professionals—chosen by pool experts like you! Voting opens on September 11, so be sure to cast your



vote and celebrate the outstanding contributions of your peers. We are also deeply thankful for our sponsors and partners, who understand the power of community and continue to uplift and support our industry.

In this latest issue of our Spotlights and Insights, we are thrilled to highlight the stories of five inspiring women who are driving progress and innovation within Pool Nation. These women are entrepreneurs, marketing gurus, technicians, and trailblazers in their fields. They're mothers, business owners, show directors, and experts at their craft. Each of these women brings a unique perspective and a powerful commitment to excellence, driving innovation and setting new standards in their fields.

We're thrilled to introduce you to Brittainy Klein, Jeanette Horn, Kris Osterbusch, Lacy Davis, and Lindsey Lawless—professionals whose leadership and accomplishments are paving the way for a brighter, more inclusive future in the pool industry.





# Pool Nation's 2024 Women's

## Summit Empowers **INDUSTRY LEADERS** to Reach New Heights

*Story: Tamara Jolee*

MCKINNEY, Texas – Women from across the country gathered at Heritage Pool Supply on Aug. 29-30 for Pool Nation's 2024 Women's Summit, a highly anticipated event aimed at empowering women in the pool and outdoor living industries. Attendees connected with industry trailblazers, enhanced their professional skills, and explored opportunities to advance their careers and personal aspirations.

According to attendees, the air buzzed with excitement at the third-annual summit, where a sold-out crowd of 127 passionate participants filled the room, eager to connect, learn, and elevate their industry impact.

"It was such an incredible event," said Leanne De Jesus, Senior Director of HR for Pool Nation. "There was a ton of excitement even before the sessions got underway built around anticipation. During the presentations, there was a ton of engagement and people just had fun. You could tell the women wanted to be there."

Unlike in previous years, when the summit spanned just a few hours, this year's gathering extended over a day and a half,



allowing for deeper engagement and more meaningful connections. The expanded schedule included a special bowling night, where attendees had the chance to unwind, connect, and enjoy some fun with their peers.

Many women arrived early, eager to network and meet others like them in an industry often dominated by men. The summit offered a rare opportunity for participants to share their experiences, exchange ideas, and form bonds that could help propel their careers forward.



Matt McDermott, President of Heritage Pool Supply Group, opened the summit and shared his company's commitment to empowering and supporting women in the industry.

"We are so proud to host this amazing group of women in McKinney," McDermott said after the event. "Thanks to all these women leaders from across the industry for showing up and investing in both themselves and betterment of the industry. Thanks also to Edgar De Jesus, Zac Nicklas, and John Flawless for the vision and partnership. Alone we are strong... together we are unstoppable!"



## The Future of Women in THE POOL INDUSTRY

As the pool and outdoor living industries continue to flourish, the role of women is becoming increasingly vital, driving innovation and growth in new directions. Women making an impact in these fields come from diverse backgrounds, including marketing, public relations, human resources, business owners, top level executives, technicians, engineering, science, and a wide range of other expertise.

"The women's participation when the presenter talked was incredible," Leanne shared. "They were glued to the presenter and showed a deep understanding and level of respect for what was shared. They gave examples of what they have experienced in their careers, and to me that showed a high level of vulnerability, too. Many of the participants are the first in their workplace to have experienced something like this, or they often feel alone and isolated because they might be the only women in their office. They spoke openly about their challenges and it was such a safe space because everyone was so encouraging and supportive."

Pool Nation never imagined how quickly the Women's Summit would evolve. The first year saw just 22 attendees, and by the second year, participation blossomed to 80.

Realizing there was a significant gap in the industry, the Pool Nation executive team knew they wanted to be the answer,





providing a platform for women to connect, grow, and lead in the pool and outdoor space sectors.

In its third year, the event nearly doubled in size, and it will only continue to grow. Rising together was a key theme at this year's summit and the speakers brought unique perspectives and skills that challenged conventional norms, while fostering creativity, and encouraging collaboration. From leading marketing campaigns that elevate brand visibility to developing strategic human resources initiatives that enhance company culture, women are influencing every facet of the industry.

Their involvement in business operations is also reshaping how companies streamline processes, improve customer experience, and achieve greater efficiency.

"Everyone there really came with a purpose, so that was amazing from the business perspective," said Leanne De Jesus. "And then, at lunch and during breaks, people were talking and getting to know each other and those who were strangers before this day. There was a lot of networking going on. People loved the content and presenters and it was just really special from start to finish."



# 2024 Pool Nation

## WOMEN'S **SUMMIT** SPEAKERS

**T**he summit opened with Alicia Stephens, Director of Training & Education at Biolab, who set the tone as the event's emcee and opening speaker. In her presentation, "Breaking Boundaries," Stephens shared her personal journey of passion, discovery, and making a difference in her field, energizing the attendees with laughter and tears.

**Leanne De Jesus** followed with her session, "Driving Results Through Accountability," focusing on the power of clear expectations, performance metrics, and fostering a culture of ownership to achieve exceptional outcomes. Her practical approach offered valuable takeaways for women looking to enhance their leadership skills.

After a midday break, **Carrie David**, Chief HR Officer at SRS Distribution, delivered a compelling talk on "Maintaining Company Culture in a Time of Growth." David emphasized the importance of cultivating a strong organizational culture through engaging dialogues, Employee Resource Groups, and upholding core values, even amid rapid expansion.

The afternoon continued with **Doreen King**, Director of Talent Development at Pool Nation, who spoke about "Emotional Intelligence in Effective Leadership." King highlighted how emotional intelligence enhances communication, empathy, and decision-making, all critical components of effective leadership.

Her presentation resonated with many in the audience seeking to refine their leadership approach.







To close the first day, **Stacey Gearhart**, General Manager at Raypak, shared her story of rising to leadership in a male-dominated industry. Her presentation, which focused on authenticity, resilience, and confidence, offered practical advice and encouragement to women striving for leadership roles in any field. The day concluded with a networking event hosted by Heritage, allowing participants to connect and share insights in a more informal setting.

Day two kicked off with **Jamie Novak's** workshop, "Speak Up, Stand Out: A Public Speaking Workshop." Novak provided attendees with best practices for public speaking, including creative storytelling techniques and strategies to build confidence and enhance presentation skills.

Following Novak, **Tracy Baier** addressed the audience with "Breaking Up with Burnout," offering practical strategies to prevent burnout, achieve a sustainable work-life balance, and maintain long-term success.

**Sabeena Hickman** followed with a session on "Balancing Career & Family: Strategies for Success." Hickman shared valuable advice on time management, building support systems, career development, and creating flexible work arrangements, all aimed at helping women harmonize their professional and personal lives.

**Franceen Gonzales**, recently named President LegoLand Florida, then shared her journey in the aquatics industry, which began with her first summer job and culminated in her new executive role. Her story highlighted the importance of perseverance, passion, and adaptability in achieving career success.

The summit concluded with **Missy Morgan**, who offered closing remarks and "Final Thoughts" on the themes of the event, summarizing the key takeaways and reinforcing the importance of continued growth and empowerment for women in the pool and outdoor space industries.



# WOMEN ARE LEADING

By: Tamara Jolee

**A**ccording to recent studies, the global swimming pool market is projected to grow from \$3.8 billion in 2023 to over \$5.4 billion by 2028, at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 7.2%. This growth is driven by increasing demand for residential and commercial pools, advancements in pool technology, and a rising focus on wellness and outdoor living trends.

Women are increasingly taking on leadership roles in the pool and outdoor living sectors, driving innovation through diverse perspectives and skill sets. According to a recent industry report, women now make up 28% of senior management roles in the pool industry—a notable increase from 20% just five years ago.



Looking ahead, the future of women in the pool and outdoor space industries appears brighter. More organizations and businesses are recognizing the value of diverse voices and actively seeking to amplify female leadership. Initiatives like the Pool Nation Women's Summit are paving the way for greater representation, providing a platform for women to connect, grow, and thrive.

The 2024 Women's Summit concluded on a high note, leaving attendees inspired, empowered, and equipped with new strategies for growth in the pool and outdoor living industries. With this year's event setting a new standard for connection and collaboration, participants are already looking forward to what's in store for next year.

"These summits are incredibly inspiring and motivating," said Brittainy Klein, who serves as marketing director with Heritage Supply Group. "Hearing the success stories and learning about the challenges overcome by other women in our industry is empowering. They create a supportive community where participants feel understood and encouraged. Overall, these events serve as a powerful catalyst for professional growth and personal empowerment, helping women in our industry build more balanced, fulfilling, and successful lives."



# PHOTO GALLERY

Women's Summit  
2024



[www.PoolNation.com](http://www.PoolNation.com)





























# MEET THE NEXT GENERATION FEMALE LEADERS IN THE POOL INDUSTRY



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# Kris Osterbusch



**SHOW DIRECTOR**  
***Pool Spa Patio Expo  
and Deck Expo  
Informa Markets  
Construction***

Kris Osterbusch's day begins with a flurry of emails, phone calls, and strategy sessions, and it rarely ends the same way it started. As the show director of the International Pool Spa Patio Expo and Deck Expo, she thrives on the unpredictability that comes with managing one of the largest events in the industry.

"I've never had the same day twice or the same week twice," she says with a smile. "My husband is the opposite; he has the same day every day. But I'm trying to build the best 'city' for four days for this industry."

Osterbusch's role is not for the faint of heart. It involves coordinating a team of salespeople to fill exhibitor spaces with top-tier manufacturers, new products, and the latest innovations. She also oversees content development, educational programming, and creative networking opportunities. "I'm always trying to find new and creative ways to get people together, networking, and hanging out," she says. "It's a lot of balls in the air."

## **"Right Place, Right Time"**

Like many women at the 2024 Pool Nation Women's Summit, Osterbusch never planned to find herself in the pool industry. "It was just a stroke of luck," she explains. "I happened to be in the right place at the right time, which, as I was thinking about this interview, a lot of my success in my career has been taking on an opportunity when it's presented and just being ready to do it."



Her decision to lead the Pool Spa Patio Expo was spontaneous. "Someone asked if I wanted to do this, and I said, 'Sure, sounds fun!' I love that idea. I love pools," she adds. Her willingness to seize opportunities has been a defining trait throughout her career, taking her from logistics roles to managing entire events.

Kris grew up as a "military kid," moving frequently due to her father's career in the Air Force. "We moved around quite a bit, which at the time felt horrible because you're always the new kid in school," she recalls. But what seemed challenging then turned out to be a blessing in disguise. "In hindsight, it was really great. I learned to be a good observer and get along with many people, and I discovered that I enjoy being around and understanding people."

These early experiences laid the foundation for Kris's ability to adapt quickly, build relationships, and thrive in diverse environments—skills that would serve her well in her future career.

Osterbusch began her career in the trade show and events industry in the mid-1990s. "I discovered a passion for creating and putting on live events," she says. "There's something incredibly satisfying about seeing an event come together, knowing that you've created a space where people can connect, learn, and grow."

She started on the logistics side, working behind the scenes to coordinate the many moving parts of a trade show. But over time, her role evolved, and she found herself directing events, including the prestigious Pool Spa Patio Expo. "Now, I'm responsible for driving the vision of the event, getting people to show up, and putting together a good program—not just making sure it gets built," she explains.



### **A UNIQUE PERSPECTIVE ON LEADERSHIP**

Kris has had her share of challenges as a woman in a predominantly male industry. She reflects on a breakthrough moment in her career: "When I was younger, I used to feel like as a woman, you couldn't lean into your emotion or empathy," she says. "I've always been a very operationally minded, logical person. There were periods when I felt like my logical and emotional brains were in conflict."

That all changed when she realized that being both emotional and logical wasn't a contradiction but a strength. "The breakthrough happened when I realized that I could actually be both at the same time," she explains. This realization was not just a personal victory, but a source of empowerment. "I could have passion for something and still logically define the steps needed to make it happen."



This realization allowed her to bring a fresh perspective to her work. She could connect with people on a deeper level while maintaining the strategic vision needed to manage large-scale events. This balance has served her well in her role, particularly in an industry where emotional intelligence is often undervalued.

Osterbusch's ability to combine passion with practicality has proven invaluable in managing the complex dynamics of trade shows and events. "It's like building a city in three or four days," she says. "There's a process to it, and each piece has to fall into place. You're essentially creating a temporary community, and then, when it's over, everything gets packed up, and you move on to the next one."

Her work involves more than just logistics; it's about creating experiences that resonate with people. "It's not just about having a space and some booths," she says. "How can we make this feel more cohesive? How can we get people to hang out longer, laugh together, and walk away talking about it?"



Her advice for women entering the pool industry—or any male-dominated field—is straightforward: stay open-minded. "Be open to learning, to new ideas, to different perspectives, and to challenging your own beliefs," she says. "Understand who you are and recognize your strengths, but be ready to adapt when new information or changing circumstances call for it."

She also emphasizes the importance of self-awareness. "Don't be afraid to let go of goals that no longer serve you," she says. "You can change your mind."

As Kris continues to lead the International Pool Spa Patio Expo and Deck Expo, her focus remains on building the best 'city' she can, one that fosters connection, creativity, and community. Her journey, marked by chance and choice, is a testament to the power of embracing both the unknown and the opportunities that come with it.

"It's a lot of work, but I love it," she says. "And as long as I'm learning and creating, I'm exactly where I want to be."





# Brittainy Klein



## MARKETING DIRECTOR

*Heritage Pool  
Supply Group*

Brittainy Klein, now the marketing director at Heritage Pool Supply Group, never expected to find herself in the pool industry. "My goal was to be on the LPGA Tour, living it up playing golf, but God had other plans," she says with a laugh.

Klein's career began on the lush fairways of Florida, where her passion for golf drove her to pursue a dream of joining the LPGA Tour. Armed with a degree in healthcare administration and radiation therapy, she moved from her hometown in Kentucky to Florida to give her golfing ambitions a shot. Klein played on the mini-circuit for several years, immersing herself in the sport she loved while also working at a local golf club, teaching lessons, and managing the pro shop.

Before her professional golf career, Klein played Division I golf at Eastern Kentucky University, where she made a name for herself as a standout in her sport. "I never thought about the pool industry until I met my former boss, who played frequently at my club," she recalls. "I got to know him over time, and one day, he mentioned he was looking for a sales representative for the Orlando area. I was at a crossroads and ready for a change."

### A NEW CHAPTER

Klein took the plunge and found herself navigating the unfamiliar waters of pool supply sales almost a decade ago. Her adaptability and drive quickly paid off. "I did sales for two years, and then I transitioned into marketing," she says. Today, Klein oversees the marketing team for Heritage Pool Supply Group, the fastest-growing pool supplies distributor in the country, boasting over 125 locations in 34 states. Her days are a whirlwind of meetings, strategic planning, and creative problem-solving.



"If I'm not traveling, my day is filled with meetings—one-on-ones with my team, discussions with our leaders, vendors and branches, and staying aligned with what's going on in the field," Klein explains. "It's all about keeping projects moving forward and making sure everyone is on the same page."

Klein leads a small but mighty team, which includes a project manager and a marketing manager, overseeing all marketing efforts for the company's pool vertical. "My team handles everything from trade shows and branch events to marketing collateral and promotions," she says. "We're also cross-functional with other departments, helping to communicate digital initiatives to the field and our customer base."

### **FROM THE FAIRWAY TO THE FAST LANE OF POOL SUPPLY MARKETING**

Despite the hectic pace of her life, Klein thrives on the challenge and loves the creative aspect of her role. "I love my job," she shares. "Heritage has been great, and I feel blessed to be part of this organization. The people I work with make it a great experience."

But Klein's transition from the golf course to the boardroom wasn't without its challenges. As a woman in a predominantly male industry, she has learned to navigate unique obstacles with grace and resilience. "You have to set boundaries," Klein emphasizes. "Defining personal and professional boundaries helps manage work-life balance and maintain well-being. It's important to communicate these boundaries clearly and stick to them."

Her journey in the pool industry has been marked by her ability to get things done efficiently and effectively. "My unique perspective as a woman in the industry has given me the clarity and resilience to drive projects to successful outcomes," she says. "Even in the face of challenges, I focus on results, not just the process."

While Klein is proud of her accomplishments, she remains humble and acknowledges that there is always room for growth.

Klein also advocates for work-life balance, a concept she continues to refine. "I've struggled with it for years," she confesses. "I'm learning that it's okay to focus a lot of time and energy on my job, but it's also important to focus on my well-being. There have been recent events that have been eye-openers for me, and it's becoming clear that I need to have that balance."

Her drive and determination, honed on the fairways of Florida, have served her well in her new arena. She remains committed to growing Heritage Pool Supply Group's marketing footprint and helping to lead the company into a more digital future. "I'm excited about how far we've come in the digital world," she says. "At Heritage, we strive to make the customer experience seamless."

For Klein, every day is another round—another opportunity to learn, grow, and drive her team to success. And while her office may no longer overlook a golf course, her career continues to be guided by the same principles she honed on the green: focus, resilience, and a relentless pursuit of excellence.





# Jeanette Horn

Becoming a pool company owner and technician was never on Jeanette Horn's radar. If she had it her way, she would have become a librarian. As a military child, Horn was born in England and lived there until she was 11, with a brief stint in Germany. After that, she moved to the United States, where a series of relocations eventually led her to Arlington, Texas.

Jeanette's upbringing taught her to adapt quickly and embrace new challenges—traits that would later become invaluable in her professional life.

"I consider Arlington, Texas, my hometown because I went to school there for about four years, which was the most consistent place I lived until I moved to East Texas as an adult," Horn said with a smile during an interview at the 2024 Pool Nation Women's Summit.

Her upbringing, filled with constant change, taught her to adapt quickly and embrace new challenges—traits that would later prove invaluable in her professional life. One of those unexpected turns came when she met her husband, Jason, almost 30 years ago.

"Jason has been in the pool industry since he was 16, and he taught me a lot," Horn said. "When he transitioned from the service side, I took over and ran with it while he went back into distribution. I was a stay-at-home mom for a bit, so there's a bit of a gap in between, but it just evolved naturally."

Together, the couple founded Horn Family Pools, LLC, in Mabank, Texas, a thriving business that has grown to include their son, J.D., who now plays an integral role in the company. Today, Jeanette is more than just the owner of Horn Family Pools—she's the heart and soul of the operation. "I do everything," she says, her tone a mix of pride and exhaustion. "From handling all the administrative work to running a service route, doing repairs, and even managing payroll for my employee, J.D., who is also my son."



## BUSINESS OWNER

***Horn Family Pools,  
LLC***



Jeanette cleans pools, does filter cleanings, performs repairs, and handles pump and motor replacements. "I also quote jobs, meet with customers, handle complaints, and answer the phones," she shared.

Reviews from customers speak volumes, with one customer raving, "Jeanette is very quick to respond and follows on everything she says she will do! I would recommend them to others, they did a great job!"

Jeanette loves how each day on the job brings new challenges and opportunities for growth. She considers being a woman an advantage in the pool industry, believing that women are often more detail-oriented—something her customers appreciate. "Women are often seen as less intimidating, which can make clients, especially women, feel more comfortable," Jeanette said. "It helps build trust and makes it easier to connect, particularly with female customers who are often the decision-makers."

It hasn't always been easy, either. Despite her experience, training, certifications and licenses, she still faces uphill battles as a woman in an industry often dominated by men.

Jeanette recounts moments when her expertise was questioned or outright dismissed simply because of her gender. "I once had a man take tools out of my hands while I was making repairs," she remembers. "It was scary at first, but I've learned to stand up for myself. I had to assert my authority and remind them that if they could do the work themselves, they wouldn't have called me." These experiences have only strengthened Jeanette's resolve.

## RETHINKING WORK-LIFE BALANCE IN THE POOL INDUSTRY

For Jeanette Horn, the idea of a perfect work-life balance is a myth. Instead, she champions a more fluid approach to juggling the demands of running a business and maintaining a personal life.



"I don't believe in work-life balance; I believe in work-life synergy," Horn explained. "You can't perfectly balance everything—you just have to decide when to give more to one side and less to another. It's about integrating different aspects of your life throughout the day."

Horn's philosophy reflects the reality many women face in the pool industry, where long hours, physical labor, and customer demands can make it challenging to maintain clear boundaries between work and home life. For Horn, it's not about trying to keep everything equal but rather finding ways to make the various parts of her life work together.



"Some days, the business needs more of my attention, and other days, it's my family," she said. "It's about being okay with that give-and-take and finding moments throughout the day to fit in what matters most."

When she's not managing Horn Family Pools, Jeanette loves spending time with her granddaughter, Victoria, "who's my favorite person on the planet—just don't tell J.D.," she said with a laugh. "I also enjoy genealogy when I have some free time, but I work a lot."

Horn's passion extends beyond her own business. She serves as the secretary of the North Texas Chapter of the Pool and Hot Tub Alliance (PHTA) and is an active member of the International Pool and Spa Service Association (IPSA). Both organizations focus on education, water safety, and supporting professionals in the industry.

In 2021, Jeanette was named "Pool Girl of the Year" at the inaugural Pool Nation Awards show. "These organizations gave to me when I needed help," Horn said. "Now, I want to give back to others in the same way."

### **Embracing Innovation and Empowerment For Women in the Industry**

As the pool industry evolves, Jeanette Horn is enthusiastic about the innovative collaborations and technologies reshaping the field.

"I'm excited about the partnerships, like Skimmer's collaboration with Orenda and Heritage," Horn said. "It allows for a more streamlined process with fewer apps. And carbon fiber poles—those are a game changer for reducing shoulder strain."

But for Horn, embracing innovation isn't just about adopting new tools—it's also about building a supportive community. She recognizes the importance of spaces where women can connect, learn, and grow together. Attending events like the Pool Nation Women's Summit has been a crucial part of her journey.

"These summits help foster both professional growth and personal empowerment," Horn said. "You see women from all different levels in the industry, from newbies to veterans like me, to those in distribution and manufacturing. These summits provide great networking opportunities and a chance to learn from and connect with other women in the field."

Jeanette's life and career journey has been anything but typical. From a military child moving across continents to a pool industry leader in East Texas, her path has been marked by unexpected twists and turns. But through it all, she has remained steadfast, driven by a desire to excel and make a difference in the world.

When asked what advice she would give to other women entering the pool industry, Jeanette is clear: "Don't be afraid to ask questions and take all the training you can. Don't shy away from opportunities to learn. And remember, every challenge is an opportunity to grow."

As Jeanette Horn continues to navigate the waters of the pool industry, she is not only breaking the surface—she is charting a new course, proving that with perseverance, passion, and a little bit of grit, there's no limit to what a woman can achieve.





# Laci Davis



**CO-FOUNDER AND  
MARKETING CEO**  
*The Grit Game*

Laci Davis is a dynamic force, brimming with energy, charisma, and visionary insight that has established her as an industry leader even before turning 40. Her diverse background has given her a wealth of strengths in numerous areas, from creativity to strategic planning. Whether managing operations for the largest chocolate festival on the East Coast, orchestrating events at Disney, or leading public relations for an anti-human trafficking organization in Ireland, Laci has proven time and again that she can adapt and thrive in any environment.

Each role she has taken on has equipped her with unique skills and perspectives, culminating in her current position as President and co-founder of The Grit Game, where she partners with her husband, Johnny Davis, to use unique, custom-built tools to help pool industry professionals thrive.

For Laci, entrepreneurship runs in the blood. Raised in Florida, her parents were both entrepreneurs who ingrained in her two critical life lessons: "You really can do anything you want, and if it's not fun, why would you want to do it?" This outlook shaped her diverse career path and her approach to business leadership.

"That ended up translating in some kind of weird ways in my career path," she laughs, reflecting on her eclectic resume. In her short life, Davis has lived in 40 different places, but now calls Florida home. Moving so frequently has made her quick, adaptable, and unafraid to take on new challenges—a mindset that has shaped her unique approach to business. "When I was at Corporate Disney, I ended up meeting this really cute boy," Laci recalls with a smile.



"He was in the pool industry, and about a month into dating, he said, 'You know, I really like your writing. I need a writer. You should come work for me.' I told him, 'No, I like you, and I want to keep liking you.'"

Johnny was persistent and it won her over. "He spent the next three months saying, 'Let's build our empire. Trust me, it's going to be great,'" Laci continues. Four months into their relationship, she took a leap of faith and left her corporate career at Disney. Her first job in the pool industry was to write a DIY manual for homeowners considering installing a vinyl liner in-ground swimming pool.

"So, four months into dating, my boyfriend became my boss", she mused.

Their professional collaboration proved successful. "My boss eventually became my husband, so now I'm the boss. That's how that works, right?" Laci jokes, but there's truth in her lightheartedness. Less than two years ago, Laci and Johnny took a leap of faith and broke away from their previous organization to launch two sister companies within the pool industry: The Grit Game and Grit Game Marketing. They've never looked back.

### AN INDUSTRY GAME-CHANGER

As Co-Founder and President, Laci plays a critical role in shaping the company's future. She describes herself as "the lifeguard of our company's strategy," ensuring that operations flow smoothly and effectively, much like a well-maintained pool. "I get to steer the vision and direction of the overall company," she explains, "while my amazing team goes and makes magic happen."

The Grit Game goes beyond the traditional role of simply representing manufacturers. It offers a wide range of services designed to help pool and spa businesses thrive in an increasingly competitive market. Despite her professional achievements, Laci's life isn't all about the boardroom.



At home, she balances her demanding role with her responsibilities as a wife and step mother to a 13-year-old daughter and 15-year-old son.

She emphasizes the importance of being present, even when work demands late nights. "There are so many nights where I'm staying up late and working from home, and my child is next to me. I'm still working, but I'm 100 percent present with them, sharing with them, 'This is what I'm working on. What are your thoughts?' It's a learning moment," she shares.

Laci also makes it clear that as a business owner, she can't expect her employees to work the same hours she does. "We have a core value of embodying an entrepreneurial spirit, but we also want to ensure they have a healthy work-life balance," she notes. The company offers unlimited paid time off, encouraging employees to take time for mental health or personal needs.



### DAVIS: 'YOU HAVE TO BE BOLD'

Today, The Grit Game is a powerhouse in the pool industry, representing and promoting products across the United States and Canada while providing comprehensive business consulting services. "At The Grit Game, we're not just playing the game - we're changing it," Laci says proudly. The company also offers services beyond product representation, including Netsuite administration, website design, hosting, and full marketing services for businesses in the backyard leisure space.

Reflecting on her journey, Laci acknowledges that stepping into the male-dominated pool industry came with its challenges. "I've been in countless situations where I was dismissed based on my gender," she admits. At one trade show, she recalls, "When I mentioned I was the owner, the demeanor changed completely." Yet, these experiences have only strengthened her resolve. "You have to be bold. You have to not shy away from those situations and look for the opportunity to come back into the conversations that you were meant to be in," she advises.

Her advice to women entering the pool industry or any male-dominated field is simple but powerful: "Prepare the field. Do the work, whatever it takes to be one of the best in your chosen field. That way, when moments come where you are dismissed for your gender, you have a strong foundation in knowledge and experience that allows you to confidently step back into the conversation."

Laci also highlights the importance of events like the Pool Nation Women's Summit in fostering both professional growth and personal empowerment. "When we started The Grit Game, my experience in the pool industry wasn't always encouraging. Every time I tried to step up, I'd get knocked down," she shares. However, attending the summit last year was a turning point for her. "It helped me realize I had so much more to give. I stopped hiding behind marketing and social media and leaned into all my gifts and experience."





# Lindsey Lawless

Lindsey Lawless has always been drawn to water. Growing up in sunny San Diego, California, she spent her childhood in and around the pool in her backyard, a fitting setting for someone who would later dive headfirst into the pool industry. Yet, Lawless's journey to becoming the Director of Digital Marketing at Hayward Industries wasn't straightforward. It was a winding road that spanned continents, challenged norms, and took her across multiple male-dominated industries.

Lawless developed a love for swimming at an early age and became a competitive swimmer by the time she was six and a half. Her passion for the water continued through high school, but when it came time to choose between a swimming scholarship and adventure abroad, she chose the latter. Lawless attended Victoria University of Wellington in New Zealand, seeking a broader perspective on the world.

"I've always loved being around water," Lawless recalls. "But I wanted to experience something different, which is why I chose to study in New Zealand instead of taking the scholarship."

Upon returning to the United States, was determined to make her mark on the world. She began her career in tools, working for Stanley Black & Decker before moving to Lowe's Home Improvement, Sherwin-Williams, and Samsung. Each of these experiences helped shape her understanding of consumer needs and sharpen her strategic thinking.

"I've worked in male-dominated industries my entire career," she explains. "It taught me resilience and how to advocate for myself and my customers. It's not always about being the loudest voice in the room, but the most prepared and thoughtful one."



**DIRECTOR OF DIGITAL  
MARKETING**

***Hayward Holdings***



## A FULL CIRCLE MOMENT

Lawless's transition to Hayward, a leading manufacturer of pool equipment, was not just a natural fit but an unexpected full circle back to her childhood love of the water.

"I don't think I ever thought of the pool industry as a career option," she says, laughing. "But when the opportunity arose at Hayward, it just felt right. It was like everything had come full circle."

Joining Hayward as they relocated from New Jersey to Charlotte, North Carolina, Lawless was presented with a rare opportunity: to build a new digital marketing team from the ground up. For her, the challenge was not just about starting fresh but about redefining what digital marketing could mean in an industry often considered slow to adopt new technologies.

"Our industry is lagging behind many others in digital adoption," she notes. "We still have customers who prefer paper invoices or want to register warranties by mail. But we also have a new generation of pool owners, millennials, who want to do everything digitally. We need to meet them where they are."



Under her leadership, Hayward's digital marketing team expanded rapidly, growing from zero, to a team of seven. Lawless has focused on digital transformation and integrating new technologies, such as the replatform and redesign of hayward.com from an old, outdated platform to a new modern technology stack.

"Our apps are one of the most exciting parts of what Hayward is working on" she says. "Millennials want to be able to control their pool settings from their phones without stepping outside. And our ProApp helps pool professionals work more efficiently, allowing them to diagnose and fix problems remotely."

As the Director of Digital Marketing at Hayward, Lawless leads a dynamic team on a mission to introduce innovative digital strategies to an industry long overdue for a makeover. It's a role that perfectly combines her love for water with her passion for growth and innovation.

"I've had the chance to really build something here," she reflects. "It's not just about marketing—it's about pushing boundaries and showing people what's possible."

She manages a department that includes web developers, social media specialist, and a product information specialist. Her day-to-day responsibilities involve understanding all of the company's digital needs, from developing product pages and content strategies to planning paid media and social content.

Despite the challenges of working in a male-dominated field, Lawless has never felt sidelined. Instead, she feels her perspective as a woman has been a valuable asset, particularly in understanding customer needs from different viewpoints. "I think being able to provide a female perspective, especially in discussions about what families want in a pool, is incredibly helpful," she reflects.



"For example, while a husband might want a waterfall and waterslide, the wife may prioritize a safer play area for the kids. Understanding both sides helps us market more effectively."

Lawless also emphasizes the importance of resilience and self-confidence in her career journey, recounting a memorable experience in her early days in the power tools sector. She was hired to replace a male colleague, and her performance was directly compared to his.

"I was constantly beating his numbers by double digits," she recalls with a smile. "It became a running joke between us. But it also showed that it didn't matter if you were male or female – performance speaks for itself."

## EMBRACING A CAREER AND MOTHERHOOD

Recently, Lawless became a mother, a role that has only deepened her commitment to balancing work and life effectively.

Being a mom has definitely changed my perspective," she admits. "It's made me more passionate about advocating for better parental leave policies in manufacturing industries. We need to support our employees better, not just to hire them, but to keep them."

Looking ahead, Lawless is excited about the future of digital marketing at Hayward. She is focused on continuously improving the company's digital footprint and creating content that makes doing business with Hayward easier and more efficient.

"There's always more to do," she says. "But it's about prioritizing and knowing where to make the biggest impact."

As she continues to build her career, Lawless offers advice to other women considering entering male-dominated fields:

"Take your seat at the table," she urges. "Don't be afraid that your opinion isn't wanted. You'll find that people will listen and respect you. You just have to be willing to step up and take that space." For Lawless, stepping up has never been an issue. Her life and career is a testament to what can be achieved with tenacity, a willingness to embrace new opportunities, and an unwavering commitment to growth and innovation.

