

## Women Success Stories



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# Reflections of a Mompreneur who became a Franchisor: Leadership and Humanity in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

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This past summer, my publisher invited me to contribute a chapter to her upcoming anthology titled Legacy. I remember pausing—grateful, but unsure. I figured; I am still in the thick of it. Raising my boys, building my business, and navigating the ever-evolving landscape of entrepreneurship. Legacy? That felt like something you reflect on at the end of our lives or later years in life, not in the middle-aged years.

So, I graciously declined.

Before I left the event, she pulled me aside and said, “I will scholarship your contribution.” I thanked her, still unsure, and left without affirming or declining.

Four months have passed.

Then last week, I received word from WEL Conferences, an international leadership forum, that they’re compiling a journal - a composition of my work across all my books. They proposed a title: **Reflections of an Author: Leadership and Humanity in the 21st Century.**

And suddenly, it clicked.

With that title, I realized—I do have something to say.

It’s true; as a woman, I am proud to be part of the 2%. Maybe not the 1% that people often reference, but the 2% of women who have founded a business and scaled it to seven figures. That number isn’t just a statistic—it’s a story. One of grit, grace, and divine purpose. And it’s a story I am ready to tell.

So, what does it take to become part of that 2%? What does it mean to lead with humanity in a world that often forgets it?

I suppose I do have some reflections to share. Especially because the fact that such

a small statistic is further echoed by the percentage of venture capital that goes to women-owned businesses. Two statistics that must change drastically when we look to those of us leading now—and the next generation rising behind us.

### **The Accidental Entrepreneur**

We just celebrated our 15th year in business—2025. When I look back to the beginning, I often call myself the accidental entrepreneur. I never intended to build a company. I simply wanted to consult.

In 2010, I founded HRBoost®, not as a startup dream but as a way to continue doing meaningful work while raising my firstborn son. I used to call HRBoost my second baby, because my son was the catalyst for leaving corporate—a story many women know well.

I resigned from my position when I learned I was pregnant. My boss asked me what I wanted in response, I told him I wanted to get in touch with kids, to learn how to become a mother. That meant volunteering at St. Martin De Porres Cristo Rey school and would be working with students at risk of expulsion. I only wanted to come into the office one day a week.

His response? “Nicole, you’re a workaholic! Can you manage your team? Can you keep us winning Best & Brightest Companies to Work For with our culture wins?”

My answer: “Yes.”

He smiled and said, “Well then get out of my office. I’ll see you next week.”

That arrangement worked for 15 months. I became a mother in 2009, and we all remember the recession that hit manufacturing hard. I found myself helping him unwind the business well into 2010. As my hormones balanced and my child

stopped nursing, I found myself... bored.

At the same time, my love was unwinding his own family business of 50 years. He came home. I went to a silent retreat and wrote one question on a piece of paper: *Who am I?*

Not my job title. Not my degrees, credentials, or roles as wife, mother, daughter, sister, friend. I asked myself: *What makes me happy for free every day, when I wake up and choose?*

I wrote three things: Connect. Harmonize. Learn.

Then I asked: *How do these three things show up in my work? In the way I earn a living?*

That night, I told my love I was bored and thinking of leaving work to go into ministry. His reply, which made me sad at the time, became my truth:

“Honey, don’t do that. Your first sacrament is our family. My business might still be alive had we had HR—but we didn’t. You already do ministry work. You do workplace ministry.”

He was right.

Those of us in HR—when we do it right—we are doing workplace ministry. We lead

“What does he want?”

I learned that day not to talk with my husband about business. Instead,

I went on a journey—and overcame fear.

### **Leading with Humanity, Writing with Purpose**

Looking back, I realize that entrepreneurship was never just about building a business—it was about building a life aligned with my values. HRBoost may have started as a consulting practice, but it

people to joy and purpose through their God-given graces at work. We’re not the therapist’s office or the police department. We don’t tell. We advise. We guide.

The next day, July 2010, I told my boss I was bored but happy to help indefinitely. I also said I wanted to consult other companies to help them be their best.

He said, “Nicole, you’ll do great at that.”

I flipped my W2 job into a 1099 Consultant role, which became a W-9, and within two weeks, HRBoost was born.

I stopped calling HRBoost my “second baby” in 2015. I was pregnant with my second son, had a team of nine employees, and my first retainer client had scaled from \$10M to \$28M—then sold for \$58M in just 36 months.

The president of that organization looked at me and said, “I’ll give you \$100K for 15% equity in your business.”

I replied, “I’m a consultant.”

He said, “No honey, you’re in business.”

I laughed, shrugged it off, and went home to my love. I asked him what I should do with that offer. He asked me one question:

became a platform for transformation. Not just for clients, but for me and the professionals that joined my mission.

21<sup>st</sup> century leadership requires more than strategy and metrics. It demands a soul. It asks us to show up with empathy, to listen deeply, and to lead with integrity even

when the path is unclear. It asks us to honor humanity in every decision, every conversation, every moment—to our own soul, our calling, our promise to God to serve, to do good, to make the world better in some small way.

As an author, I've found that writing is an extension of leadership. It's how I process, how I connect, and how I give voice to the lessons that shaped me. My books are not just business guides—they're reflections of a woman who dared to lead with heart, even when the world expected otherwise.

I write for the women who are still wondering if they're ready. For the leaders who feel unseen. For the entrepreneurs who never planned to be entrepreneurs. I am writing to remind them: your story matters. Your voice matters. And your legacy is being written every day—not at the end, but in the middle, in the messy, beautiful, transformative middle.

**So yes, I do have something to say.**

And I will keep saying it—for the 2%, for the next generation, and for every soul who believes that leadership and humanity are not separate paths, but one.

I now seek those with a calling—those ready to invest in themselves and bring an HRBoost® to their own backyard. Small business America needs us. You deserve the quality of life I've enjoyed, the passion I feel every day in my own intellectual playground. If you're a seasoned HR leader ready to build something of your own, don't just be a Consultant. Make the decision to invest in a model that's proven but can be uniquely yours. I am still raising kids with my husband thus the reason I chose to franchise my business and teach others they too can choose to live their joy and purpose

through their God given graces at work.

And I suppose, if I died today, this would be my legacy.

I've shown my boys how to live with passion. To love their work. To expect joy from it. To take big risks. To dare to feel alive.

Many people meet me, and what they remember long after is my ENERGY. I guess... that too will be my legacy.

### **Author Biography**

**Nicole Martin** is Chief Empowerment Officer and Founder of HRBoost® LLC, an HR Shared Services consulting firm based in Chicago, Illinois. HRBOOST® was recognized as Crain's Best Places to Work in 2023. The Positive Leadership Institute honored her globally with the Positive Leadership Award for championing forward-thinking management practices that help employees, teams, and organizations thrive.

Nicole was selected among 24 global recipients of the Positive Leadership Award in 2022, named one of Mirror Review's 10 Game Changing Women in 2019, and honored with the Business Excellence Award by the Chicago Daily Herald. She is a 2016 Enterprising Women of the Year Champion and a 2024 Enterprising Woman of the Year by *Enterprising Women Magazine*.

A sought-after expert, Nicole's insights have been featured in national publications. She hosts *HR in the Fast Lane* and contributes to the *Chicago Business Journal*. Her published works include *The Talent Emergency*, *The Human Side of Profitability*, *The Power of Joy & Purpose*, and *No Fear Negotiation for Women*. She has received an International Literary Award and Amazon Best Seller status and was awarded Best Speaker honors for keynotes in Japan and France.

Nicole resides in the northern suburbs of Illinois with her husband and two sons. She serves on multiple boards dedicated to Human Capital, Culture, and HR Excellence, including Best & Brightest® Companies to Work For, social service organizations, and Women in Business.

To learn more, visit [www.hrboost.com](http://www.hrboost.com) or [www.nicolemartin.live](http://www.nicolemartin.live).