

AST Private Company Solutions, Inc (PCS)

An Innovator

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It's easy being a leader when all goes well; when things don't go well, that's when leadership is closely observed and succeeds or fails.

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Carine M. Schneider

President

Carine M. Schneider still remembers the first conversation when she decided to build Astrella. “When they say “we drew it on a cocktail napkin,” I really did do that. I had a vision on how we could build an ownership tracking system while integrating services and solutions from other providers in our ecosystem,” she elucidates. “I knew that others in the private company community needed a complete solution and that by working together, we could all win while supporting our clients with a

strong network of quality providers.” For Carine, staying laser-focused on the strategy while listening to clients, partners, and team members has allowed the President of PCS to ensure every decision being made benefits the broader ecosystem.

When PCS first launched, they offered their software to new founders, and they also allowed a new company to track its first 10 shareholders at no charge. This was important to ensure new founders felt supported by PCS for financial reasons and to manage

their ownership data safely. As these companies grow, Carine frequently heard how appreciative these companies are to be part of the Astrella community. Watching these start-ups grow is one of the favorite parts of her job. “And nothing makes me happier than seeing a company led by a woman become a new client.”

Overcoming Challenges

It is challenging to be a woman in the financial services industry, especially regarding access to deals. There have

been several opportunities that Carine identified as a strategic driver to her business that was unavailable to her because the “deals” were done offline. She recalls a situation 10 or so years ago where she wanted to buy a “non-core” business from a large bank. After having numerous conversations with the Vice-Chair of the bank and his staff, explaining how this could benefit both organizations, spending time educating the bank’s team on the strategic value of how they could work together she was shocked to wake up and see that the bank had sold the business to her competitor without even allowing her to bid on the business. “When I asked the Vice Chair how this had happened and why we weren’t allowed to make a bid on a business we were obviously very keen to acquire, his response was “Well, we were out on the golf course with the other company, and they said they were interested in buying the division, so we made the deal right there and then. We didn’t want to spend the time in a formal bidding process.” This was not an isolated situation.” This hit Carine hard, and she made it a point to overcome these hardships with determination.

Influencing Women Globally

Carine provides official and unofficial mentoring to women founders and leaders, both informally and serving on the PBWC (Professional Business Women of California) Board of Directors. She actively participates in women-focused events, including recently speaking at London’s Women in Private Equity Conference. Their product Astrella has included reports that clients can easily access to help them understand if they are rewarding women equally in terms of stock plan distributions. “Our system is the only system in the industry to provide that kind of analysis at your fingertips. If you don’t know if you have a problem, how can you start to fix it? No longer can companies say “they don’t know.”

Carine also spends time mentoring

women founders or thinking of ways to support women working in start-ups. The inequity of fundraising by women-led start-ups is clear and has not seen much improvement in the past 10 years. Carine and her team were the first cap table software to offer a report to ensure they were rewarding their employees equally. Providing our clients tools to manage this information will hopefully inspire women to grow companies that reward everyone equally.”

Building A Dream

According to the steadfast leader, it’s hard to know when one finds success as it’s an ever-moving target. Still, she has been lucky to have a challenging and enjoyable career while raising two wonderful children and maintaining a happy marriage. “I went from being a receptionist to a partner at a Big Four accounting firm to being the CEO/founder of numerous businesses. I’ve traveled the world, met amazing people and set goals for myself that have been achieved. Always be calm,” she says. “During good times or bad, your team will always be looking to the leader for guidance. I like to celebrate the wins with the team, but I also make sure that I support the team during the losses.” It’s easy being a leader when all goes well; when things don’t go well, that’s when leadership is closely observed and succeeds or fails. Armed with such a unique mindset, Carine has taken the company to new heights.

Astellra provides real-time management of private shareholder ownership data through a blockchain-enabled platform that delivers automated resources for tracking ownership and performance in real-time. Astrella is the first cap table software that allows companies to benefit from an immutable ledger, ensuring that ownership data can be accessed without the danger of overwriting data. With their intuitive UI, new founders to experienced CEOs can easily use the system to manage their cap table employee stock plan

and access the sophisticated exit and next-round modeling. The system, which supports both corporations and LLCs, now supports companies in 23+ countries and ranges in size from 2 shareholders to 2000+ shareholders in brand new start-ups to well-established, multi-billion-dollar private companies. They have also incorporated AI (artificial intelligence) to assist clients with time-consuming administrative tasks.

Astellra was designed and built by experienced professionals. The team had built older, substandard solutions that were clunky, hard-to-use, and fraught with problems. Asking someone to take their experience and learn from their earlier mistakes is invaluable. “That’s what I did when I built our team – I brought on folks who knew exactly where we were heading. Our competitors haven’t invested in the same level of experience and it shows in their systems,” explains Carine. “Our solution is the newest in the market, utilizing AI, predictive analytics and blockchain technology. Combining leading technology with an amazing clients service team and you have a recipe for a market-leading solution. It’s no wonder that our clients rave about our client service team.”

Carine launched Astrella right at the beginning of the pandemic, and she must say, there were days when she wasn’t sure how they were going to grow the client base. Traditional ways of selling, like in-person meetings, conferences, seminars, etc., weren’t available at the time. The sales and marketing team had to adapt, utilize their network, and remain focused when many people had to learn how to work from home, homeschool their children, and care for family members. “Because of our intuitive user experience, prospective clients could understand how easy Astrella is to use (via web conferences) and because of the strong reputation of the team, we found the loss of in-person meetings did not significantly impact our ability to close deals.”