



That Staffing Spark

By Glenn Cook

She could have let any of the challenges throughout her life discourage her from pursuing personal happiness—but she didn't. Even when things looked bleak, she held out hope that she could find gainful employment and make her American dream happen. What finally sparked her success? An attentive recruiter at a standout staffing company that recognized her drive, ambition, and potential. Meet Violeta "Shaya" De Oleo Medina, this year's ASA National Staffing Employee of the Year.

The first thing you notice about Violeta "Shaya" De Oleo Medina is that she smiles—a lot.

It's a hard-earned smile, one that has fought a lifetime of obstacles and heartbreak that many would not be resilient enough to overcome. Her story is a tribute to persistence, maintaining a positive attitude, and

having a desire to learn and grow, no matter what it takes.

"I didn't know I was a warrior," says De Oleo Medina. "I didn't know how much I could fight or how much I could have to give. For a long time, I didn't believe in me, but now I know I can do anything I set out in my mind to do. I know that anything is possible." >>>

Photos by Courtney Shapiro Photography



The National Staffing Employee of the Year program is sponsored by CareerBuilder, an ASA corporate partner.



Earning High Praise

In October, De Oleo Medina was the center of celebration at Staffing World® 2018, the ASA annual convention and expo. There she was named 2019 ASA National Staffing Employee of the Year as part of an awards program sponsored by CareerBuilder, an ASA corporate partner. Each year, the association honors outstanding temporary and contract employees nominated by member staffing companies in each of five staffing industry sectors—engineering, IT, and scientific; health care; industrial; office-clerical and administrative; and professional-managerial. One of those All-Stars is then named to the top spot as ASA National Staffing Employee of the Year. (Learn more at americanstaffing.net/awards.

Nominations are due May 1.)

De Oleo Medina's journey—from a difficult upbringing in the Dominican Republic, to a long-term relationship that dissolved months after arriving in the U.S., to a temporary assignment that led to a permanent job—is one that leaves you inspired.

"She is so humble and so gracious, just an individual trying to succeed and create a better life for herself," says Joanie Courtney, president of the professional division at RemX, part of Atlanta-

based EmployBridge. The RemX team operating in Orlando, FL, nominated De Oleo Medina for the ASA award. Courtney beams when she describes her: "Shaya has never asked for anything, never looked for a handout, and always worked to improve in everything she does. It's truly an honor to even know her."

Overcoming Obstacles

Moving to a new country, especially when you don't know the laws or understand the language, is daunting for anyone. But De Oleo Medina has faced challenge after challenge from a young age.

Her mother was murdered when she was nine, something she didn't learn until she was a teenager. Her parents had divorced when she was in elementary school, leaving De Oleo Medina and her siblings in the care of her grandmother.

"The only place I remember is my grandma's," she says. "My dad wasn't very responsible. He wasn't a good dad. My grandma is the one who raised me."

While De Oleo Medina was in high school, a knee injury derailed her hopes of getting a basketball scholarship. Soon she was managing an in-home day care to help her family make ends meet. It was

that experience that inspired her dream to become a neonatal nurse—a dream that still looms in her mind. After high school, De Oleo Medina worked toward a degree in business administration but did not finish.

Thinking back on that phase in her life, she says with her signature smile: "I love babies, so I started taking care of them in the neighborhood when I was a teenager. I still want to be a neonatal nurse. It's still my dream."

When she was 20, De Oleo Medina began dating her now former partner, an American with Dominican parents. They wanted to get married, but same-sex marriage is not legal in the Dominican Republic, so they decided to move to the U.S.

"She proposed and said she was leaving to find out what the process was, so she could take me with her," says De Oleo Medina, who knew no English when she moved to New York City in May 2016. "We had to get a fiancée visa—which meant that when we arrived here, we had three months to get married."

The marriage occurred less than three weeks after De Oleo Medina arrived in the U.S. The couple moved to Florida soon after, but within months, the relationship soured.

"She decided to break up the marriage, and that put me in a bad position. I was alone here, really alone," De Oleo Medina explains. "I didn't know anyone here in Florida, and we were still in the middle of the immigration process. I'd spent \$5,000 on the process, for the fees and forms, and I had taken out a loan to do it. I didn't know what I was going to do."

Working Toward Success

De Oleo Medina says she found her way thanks to hard work, determination, and the grace of people who believed in her ability to succeed. "I can't tell you how much I needed that," she says.

The first person was a fellow Dominican, Eustacia Casillas, whom she now calls "Mama." Casillas provided her with room and board after the separation. "She gave me a place to live and put food in my belly without knowing me because she felt empathy for my situation," De Oleo Medina explains. "She opened the doors to her house as if I was a daughter. I will never forget that."

In debt and waiting for her green card that would allow her to work, De Oleo Medina started learning English by watching "Grey's Anatomy" on Netflix.

"I didn't understand anything because the subtitles were in English, so I would watch it once and then watch it again with the subtitles in Spanish," she says. "That helped a lot, and I started to pick up

"I didn't know I was a warrior. I didn't know how much I could fight or how much I could have to give. For a long time, I didn't believe in me, but now I know I can do anything I set out in my mind to do. I know that anything is possible."

words here and there. After I started working and speaking English every day, I got used to it.”

Soon De Oleo Medina found work at a nursing home, Savannah Court, where she forged valuable relationships, including one with a mentor who gave her some simple but inspiring advice that has always stuck with her: Never stop. Even though her English was still shaky, she persisted, continued to learn all she could, and did the best job she could.

“It was hard, but it didn’t stop me, because I had people who believed in me,” she says. “I was very determined.” (As she occasionally does when she’s conversing in English, De Oleo Medina pauses and asks, “Is that the word? Yes. *Determined.*”)

“I decided to learn, and I learned. When I got the job at Savannah Court, I would learn different words, and how to pronounce them, and how to write them down. It was a lot, but I could do it. I made it.”

But with drive and determination comes the desire for improvement. De Oleo Medina was still living in another person’s house, riding a bicycle or walking to work, and deeply in debt. She started looking for a second job and faced more rejection until she found RemX and another mentor who chose to believe in her abilities.

Believing in Potential

Karla Bartlett, market manager for RemX in Orlando, was looking to fill a customer service position at client company Secure Transportation that required both English and Spanish skills. A mutual acquaintance sent De Oleo Medina’s résumé to Bartlett.

“I decided to prescreen her and see if she would be a good fit,” Bartlett recalls. “She warned me ahead of time that her English was not that great, but I was surprised at how well she spoke. When we did the prescreen, she was nervous and asked if she could have her phone out because it had a dictionary on it. That impressed me.”

Bartlett says De Oleo Medina’s eagerness to learn and attitude about work also were strong selling points. “Someone who is eager to learn and wants to learn usually will succeed in a position, and she’s so positive about everything,” says Bartlett. “A lot of what we do here requires soft skills. They’re always what we’re looking for and they’re hard to find. Excel, typing, Outlook—you can test on that. But you can’t test on soft skills, and personality to me is huge. You have to make sure that the people you hire will have a personality that people enjoy speaking to.”

Bartlett hired De Oleo Medina, who left the RemX office in tears.

“I cried that day. Karla was the only person who gave me the opportunity that I was asking for. I’d been told a bunch of times, ‘You don’t have English. You don’t have experience.’ I know what I don’t have, but can you give me a chance? They gave me that chance.”

For several months, De Oleo Medina pulled double duty, working for RemX and for the nursing home. After 10 months of working long hours, seven days a week, she paid off her debts and bought a car. Throughout that time, she and Bartlett talked every week, sometimes just to check in, sometimes to share life experience and lessons.

“Her desire to continue to learn is what makes her unique in terms of a lot of the other workforce out there,” Bartlett says. “She always has such a positive attitude, and given everything she went through, that says something about her character.”

Achieving Life Goals

De Oleo Medina excelled, learned, and worked hard throughout her assignment with Secure Transportation, which provides nonemergency and executive service vehicles for businesses as well as student transportation solutions. It’s a fast-paced environment for the company’s 120 call center agents, who are managed by office administrator Alexandra Rodriguez.

At the end of De Oleo Medina’s temporary assignment, the client company transitioned the role to a permanent job opening. Rodriguez says the decision was an easy call.

“You don’t come across a lot of people like Shaya,” Rodriguez says. “When she came to work for the company under RemX, there was still a language barrier, but she was learning and didn’t get down on herself about it.”

“For so many people, things in life become obstacles. They don’t know how to get around it or are defeated by it. Shaya is just not that way at all,” Rodriguez adds.

Since joining Secure Transportation as a permanent employee, De Oleo Medina has been promoted from call center representative to an agent who works with special projects. As her English has improved, she is now taking on more complicated reservations for the company’s CSI division, which requires her to work with confidential financial information, Rodriguez says.

“She’s definitely a go-getter,” Rodriguez says. “And yet she’s so humble. She’s very sweet and always willing to help others. She works with us when we have new agents coming onto the floor and is constantly growing as an agent. She’s truly inspirational.” >>>

Soon after landing the job with Secure Transportation, De Oleo Medina left the position at the nursing home, which means her schedule has become more manageable. She says she still dreams of going back to school, however. “I think I still have a nurse inside of me,” she says.

If anyone knows how to succeed, it’s her—and De Oleo Medina knows there’s time to accomplish all that she wants. She’s working to get a second green card that will allow her to travel as needed.

“This whole experience has taught me a lot,” she says. “I’m not afraid of anything. That’s the truth.”

Surprising Celebrations

Courtney met De Oleo Medina in person for the first time in January 2018. The RemX executive was on the committee that honored De Oleo Medina as the company’s associate of the year. The committee decided to nominate her for the ASA National Staffing Employee of the Year award.

“She has such a great story,” Courtney says. “She’s a dynamic, inspiring individual and I

thought she was absolutely worthy of winning the award. You see it immediately when you meet her in person.”

Courtney remembers De Oleo Medina’s reaction when she and the RemX team called her with the news. “We were talking through it and she said: ‘Joanie, I can’t believe that I’m winning these awards. I was just trying to survive.’”

“I will never forget those words,” says Courtney. “When she said that to me, it brought tears to my eyes.”

De Oleo Medina’s infectious smile seemed to go on for miles as she accepted the National Staffing Employee of the Year award at the ASA annual convention. In addition to the staffing and recruiting professionals who packed the ballroom for the ceremony, the RemX team—including Bartlett and Courtney—cheered her on and fought back tears during her acceptance remarks.

De Oleo Medina took in the entire experience and, as always, tried to learn all she could from every introduction and interaction. “I felt like a queen over there,” she recalls. “It was amazing—



Meet the 2019 National Staffing Employee of the Year All-Stars



ASA honors five National Staffing Employee of the Year All-Stars—one from each staffing industry sector: engineering, IT, and scientific; health care; industrial; office-clerical and administrative; and professional-managerial. These talented employees—each with his or her own inspiring staffing success story—serve as industry ambassadors alongside National Staffing Employee of the Year Violeta “Shaya” De Oleo Medina, who is the office-clerical and administrative sector All-Star.

“During the past year, nearly 15 million people contributed to our nation’s productivity by providing their talents and skills to businesses as employees of staffing companies,” says Richard Wahlquist, ASA president and chief executive officer. “ASA salutes Shaya De Oleo Medina and all of the National Staffing Employee of the Year All-Stars as shining examples of staffing success.”

Here’s a look at this year’s National Staffing Employee of the Year All-Stars. Learn more about this recognition program at americanstaffing.net/awards. Nominations are due May 1.

I had to pinch myself. I truly could not believe everything that happened to me.”

As part of the honor, the National Staffing Employee of the Year receives a \$5,000 gift card. De Oleo Medina knew exactly what to do next: put down the required deposit for a nice apartment and purchase furniture for her new home. And so begins the next chapter in her American dream—all thanks to determination, enthusiasm, hard work, and a staffing company relationship that sparked her success.

“I didn’t believe in me for the longest time,” says De Oleo Medina. “Now I do, and I know others do, too. That is the greatest feeling in the world.” ■

Glenn Cook is a professional writer who has covered a wide range of business and education topics. He also is a prolific photojournalist, having created award-winning article and photography packages for national publications. Learn more about his work at glenncook.virb.com.

Send feedback about this article to success@americanstaffing.net. Engage with ASA on social media—go to americanstaffing.net/social.

Do You Know the Next National Staffing Employee of the Year?

The National Staffing Employee of the Year is a temporary or contract employee who has an extraordinary staffing success story to share. Learn more about how to nominate one of your company’s temporary or contract employees at americanstaffing.net/awards. **Nominations are due May 1.**

The 2020 National Staffing Employee of the Year honoree will receive national recognition as well as an awards package, including:

- All-expenses-paid deluxe travel and hotel accommodations for Staffing World® 2019, Oct. 15–17 in Las Vegas
- A \$5,000 gift card
- Cover story in *Staffing Success*, the flagship magazine of ASA
- News release coverage as well as coverage in the *Staffing Today* newsletter and other ASA media
- Recognition during National Staffing Employee Week in September, which celebrates the contributions of the millions of temporary and contract employees on assignment each day

Watch video vignettes of past National Staffing Employee of the Year honorees at americanstaffing.net/faces.



Engineering, Information Technology, and Scientific Sector

Matthew Brennan
Rangam Consultants

Brennan, who is on the autism spectrum, worked with Rangam Consultants to successfully transition from a temporary assignment as a quality assurance tester for Comcast in Cherry Hill, NJ, to a permanent position as an IT analyst for the company.



Industrial Sector

Jalyn Anderson
Integrity Staffing Solutions

Anderson worked with Integrity Staffing Solutions in Las Vegas and thrived as a temporary employee, exuding leadership skills and enthusiasm. When a corporate position became available at Integrity, the company identified her as a top choice and hired her as a shift manager.



Health Care Sector
Jamie and Angie Harmon
OR Nurses Nationwide

The Harmons are a husband-and-wife emergency room nurse team with OR Nurses Nationwide and the award program’s first co-honorees. Working as a traveling team helped them in the aftermath of losing their daughter to domestic violence. They credit staffing for helping to save their family.



Professional—Managerial Sector

Nicolae Boariu
Kelly Educational Staffing

Boariu began his career as a substitute teacher with Kelly Educational Staffing after retiring from a 30-plus-year career in law enforcement. Today he continues to serve his community at Mohawk Elementary School in Bessemer, PA, where students fondly call him “Mr. B.”