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I THINK THE MOST IMPORTANT THING TO ME AS A WOMAN-OWNED COMPANY IS VALUING THE EMPLOYEES.

DANONE SIMPSON
Founder, Chief Executive
Montage Insurance Solutions

VALLEY200

SIMPSON OFFERS
CUSTOM OPTIONS

Montage Insurance's Danone Simpson discusses her career.

ANONYMOUS

By ZANE HILL | Photographed by DAVID SPRAGUE

A chance misunderstanding guided Danone Simpson to the insurance industry. Having spent 17 years as an actress, model and events planner, Simpson says she reached a crossroads where she wanted to work in a “have to have” business – an operation that provides an essential service. She settled on what she thought was an advertising agency she’d seen featured in a magazine. When she walked into the company, she found it was actually an insurance brokerage.

During the interview, she recalls being bothered by the files haphazardly stacked on the floor. So she offered to clean it up for the manager.

“I literally sorted his files for him and got the job, even though I didn’t have any experience,” she says.

Simpson hit the ground running with that job, working the phones and learning what the company’s clients truly needed. The firm handled both benefits as well as property and casualty, a relative rarity in the industry.

“I could shift to whatever the client needed,” she says.

Simpson learned enough to eventually form Montage Insurance Solutions in 2006, a firm that consistently ranks among the top in the San Fernando Valley area in terms of local premiums.

Her company’s success comes from a formula of offering highly customized plans, even among clients that seem at first glance to have a lot of overlap.

“I don’t care if two of our charter

schools do the same thing,” she says, as an example. “Basically, they’re very different the way they manage their employees or where they’re located.”

Among other areas, Montage also handles insurance brokerage for private schools, credit unions, nonprofits and manufacturing companies.

“It is really about making sure that they’re properly insured, and that they have the insurance coverages that they need,” she says. “The market is hardening right now, finally. They’ve been talking about it hardening for years, but it is finally happening. There are so many disasters all over the world, but here in the U.S., especially, so our carriers have been impacted greatly.”

CALIFORNIA IS UNDERINSURED

Such has been the case in California, a state known in the industry, Simpson says, to be largely underinsured. The number of natural disasters like wildfires and flooding that have hampered the state in recent years have made property insurers wary, to the point of freezing policy renewals or outright leaving the market. On the medical side, patients continue to make up for lost time after hospitals and medical centers needed to diverge non-urgent or elective procedures during the height of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Simpson started her company after varying experiences with other brokerages that left her discouraged. One company, she says, would tack on extra fees for clients and selectively disclose

available plans. She also took note at another agency, she recalls, when management suddenly laid off three women about when they turned 50.

“I think the most important thing to me as a woman-owned company is valuing the employees,” Simpson says. “They need to feel safe and cared for. That is really critical.”

Transparency is another key for Simpson, one she thinks makes her company successful. Montage agents present every available offer to potential clients and also disclose whatever commissions the company will receive from the provider. The company also requests denials in a letter or email so that it can provide them to prospective clients.

“A lot of brokers just go in and show them what they think the client might like,” she says. “I let the client make the decision. I show them everything.”

It seems to be a winning formula. Montage employs 27. Many of its employees have clocked in well over a decade with Montage, and Simpson says there is a similar loyalty from clients.

A sister company, Simplicity, works with employers with 50 and fewer employees. Simpson is also in the process of having an auditing software, to be titled Bene, developed to help companies audit various insurance bills.

“I’ve been doing auditing since I started the business, I thought it was really important to help our clients audit their bills,” she says. “So now we’re just creating a solution to help do it faster.”