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Debbie Willmann celebrates 30 years at Index Fresh

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Just 21 years old and barely into college, Debbie Willmann started at Index Fresh Oct. 21, 1990, as an accounting temp with plans of pursuing a career as a CPA. Fast forward 30 years, and Willmann is now the director of sales and a key team member at Index Fresh, a leading California-based avocado company.

From accounts payable to receivables to an office manager for the accounting department, and then onward to sales, Willmann learned the ropes every step of the way. "Selling produce was not on my radar when I started, even though it's so big in California. I fell into the right place at the right time because I worked so hard and the industry grew so fast; I was allowed to grow at the same time as the company," she said.

Willmann considers her move into the sales department at Index Fresh as the most pivotal moment in her life. It brought about momentous growth, professionally and personally. “I was really shy, but you can’t be shy in this business. I blossomed tremendously and got comfortable with people and the business. I dug in and embraced it fully. It’s been up and up ever since,” she said.

Vice President of Sales and Marketing Todd Elder said that he couldn’t have picked a better person to work alongside for the past 26 years: “Debbie is committed to excellence every step of the way. She brings her vast knowledge, garnered from all departments, as she helps clients and colleagues looking for support or mentorship. Her tenacity to get the job done— whatever it takes—makes Debbie exceptional and an integral part of our team.”

Willmann said she thrives in this environment: “I’m highly competitive. I want to know everything about all parts of this business. I’ve been fortunate enough to work in sales, production, preconditioning, transportation, and all avenues of the business, which I think makes me a stronger salesperson and team member. I enjoy the fast-paced nature of the business. It suits my personality.”

Above all, Willmann puts people at the center of everything that drives her and says it’s the best part of her job.

Tony Melkonian, CEO of TM Summit Inc., a produce wholesaler based in the Bay Area and longtime client of Index Fresh, said Willmann’s strong insight on the market, her availability, and consistent support to his business have been meaningful to their partnership for over 15 years.

DeeAnn Ritzmann of Freshpoint Denver echoed these sentiments: “Debbie’s honesty is something I really value. She will always tell me how it is. Over the years, time and time again, she fills my order regardless of market conditions and availability.”

Tim Duerstock, procurement manager for Caito Foods, said Willmann’s attention to detail, industry knowledge, and overall performance sets the bar that he judges all other suppliers by. “You can’t do the job any better than what Debbie does. I thought I knew avocados until I started working with Debbie. I consider her a business partner, teacher, and most of all, a friend,” he said.

Willmann’s passion and all-in attitude are a common thread through all parts of her work. “I don’t do anything halfway once I commit,” she said. Her commitment to Index Fresh, the industry, customers, and colleagues is evident in her work and shapes her successes.

“Debbie’s commitment for Index Fresh and the avocado industry is infectious and has a huge impact on the organization,” said Steve Roodzant, president and CEO of Index Fresh.

Willmann credits Index Fresh with providing her the stability and opportunity to thrive in life. Her three decades with the company have allowed her to carry that stability forward as a single mother to her 22-year-old daughter. “The company and the industry are constantly growing and changing, and there’s no room to be bored. You’re always going to learn and grow. Even after 30 years, there’s nothing stale about this. I would have never imagined this as a child or even a young adult — it has been incredible,” she said.

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