



# UNDERCOVER BOSS

*Build-A-Bear Workshop*



# ABOUT BUILD-A-BEAR WORKSHOP

Build-A-Bear Workshop is a global retail chain where customers create their own stuffed toys. The company is based in St. Louis, MO and has almost 400 stores, more than 3,000 employees, and makes \$400 million in revenue annually. Build-A-Bear was founded in 1997 by Maxine Clark and mostly operates stores in shopping mall locations.







# ABOUT THE EPISODE

Build-A-Bear Workshop is featured on Season 8, Episode 1 of Undercover Boss. In the episode, the company's President and CEO, Sharon Price John, goes undercover inside Build-A-Bear as Jessie, a contestant on a different reality show. With glasses and a brunette wig for a disguise, Sharon works first at a newly remodeled store in Northridge, CA where she learns to host an in-store birthday party with employee Leney. Then she travels to an older model store in Whitehall, PA where she learns the bear building process and how to run the store registers from employee Nick. She works with warehouse employee Solomon at the company's distribution center in Columbus, OH before finishing up in Alpharetta, GA where Assistant Store Manager Kendall trains her on how to interact with and help customers.

Empathy maps in this project will show how CEO Sharon Price John and Assistant Store Manager Kendell compare in their experiences of Build-A-Bear.





# SHARON PRICE JOHN

## *President and Chief Executive Officer*

Sharon Price John became President and CEO of Build-A-Bear Workshop in 2013, following a 4 year decline in the company's sales. She has a degree in advertising from the University of Tennessee and an MBA from Columbia University. She has worked primarily in toy and children-focused companies and developed a reputation for fixing businesses and turning around struggling brands, a reason she believes she was chosen for Build-A-Bear. She is a first time CEO and the first CEO of Build-A-Bear following the retirement of its founder, Maxine Clarke. As a result, she feels pressure to help the company succeed. One of her initiatives has been a revamped store model dubbed the Discovery store. She thinks this is a good time to go undercover because the company is in the middle of changing its trajectory. She feels the Build-A-Bear brand fits her personality well because they are both fun, engaging, kid-focused, and want to stay young. She is married with 3 children and lives in St Louis, MO.

## THE BOSS

# EMPATHY MAP: SHARON PRICE JOHN

## THINK AND FEEL

- Feels pressure to succeed because of reputation of being boss who fixes struggling brands and as a first time CEO
- Nervous about trying to work at stores and in warehouse
- Touched and impressed by her employees' care for customers and the brand in spite of their personal life challenges
- Inspired by spirit of company to be the best leader she can be

## HEAR

- New Discovery store model's replacement of Fluff Me station with Smile for Me station may not support goal of kids bonding with bears
- Employees consider the company to be like a family and a positive place to work
- Employees' personal stories of adversity
- Lifelong love for the brand and nostalgia for old store model

## SEE

- Employees being happy and enthusiastic with customers
- Excitement of kids during the bear making experience
- Annoyance of adults when stores don't run smoothly
- How employees create a supportive work environment
- Inefficiency in warehouse operations

## SAY AND DO

- Cries at seeing how much employees care despite personal challenges
- Says she wants to know how her new store model is working
- Struggles to use store register, bear stuffer machine, and to confidently greet and guide customers
- Says it's her responsibility to fix obstacles employees have in their jobs

## PAIN

- Her new Discovery store model might need some adjusting to get the right customer experience
- New employees may not be being trained in the best way
- Employees are not given enough guidance by company on the details of the bear building process (how many stitches, etc.)

## GAIN

- She needs to open up the exuberant and joyful part of herself she's held back in previous jobs in order to help the company
- Realized being herself has professional value
- Evidence the company is in good hands with passionate employees and headed in the right direction



## THE EMPLOYEE

# KENDALL

### *Assistant Manager: Alpharetta, GA store*

Kendell has worked at Build-A-Bear for 8 years. She has extensive experience training new employees, including over 60 in the summer previous to the episode. As a result, she has seen that the style of the current company training manual doesn't always help all people learn. She created a Cliff Notes style version of the manual in order to help on-board employees better. She has a 5-year-old, a 3-year-old, and a 7-month old as well as a 5-year-old stepdaughter. Her fiancé is in the Air Force and is often away from home, leaving Kendell to take care of their family alone. Family is very important to Kendell. Her father is retired and lives close by, but her mother died of cancer when she was 10 years old. She is so busy she barely has time to brush her hair and doesn't sleep some nights. Manicures are the only time and money she spends on herself regularly. Her future goals are to advance at Build-A-Bear and have a wedding with her fiancé.

# EMPATHY MAP: KENDALL

## THINK AND FEEL

- Thinks everyone learns differently and that employee training materials should support them better
- Feels busy and pressured to take care of her family on her own and do her job well at the same time
- Feels the company is a very welcoming place

## HEAR

- Story of how her excellent care of child customer with autism had a memorable and positive impact on them and their parents
- Sharon question whether using her own employee training manual will get them in trouble with the company
- Sharon say she also lost her mom to cancer

## SEE

- Sees customers with families that remind her of the family she has lost and wishes to have again
- Sees Sharon struggle to be confident with customers
- Sees Sharon succeed at helping her first customer and try to hold back tears from feeling proud of herself and supported

## SAY AND DO

- Trains many new employees and has created her own quick reference version of the company training manual
- Committed to the company and wants to advance within it
- Walks Sharon through training step by step patiently, encourages her, and cheers her on

## PAIN

- Doesn't get time to self or even sleep on some nights
- Working mom with 4 kids
- Misses fiancé who is in the Air Force and often away from home
- Worried may not be able to have wedding because of financial problems

## GAIN

- Wants to keep giving every customer excellent, personalized service that makes them and herself feel good
- Wants to stay and grow with the company beyond her current role
- Wants to find more time to take care of herself and relax
- Hopes to have a wedding with her fiancé soon



# USER EXPERIENCE SUMMARY



## Sharon Price John

- Wants to innovate while keeping the spirit and tradition of the brand
- Cares about the experience of both customers and employees
- Has hidden parts of her true self in order to succeed professionally
- Learns opening up and being herself as a leader is what company needs



## Kendall

- Cares about how she can impact customers positively in her job
- Supports the spirit of the company and creates a positive workplace
- Works hard and sacrifices her own comfort and needs for her family
- Wants to advance with the company and marry her fiancé



# CONCLUSIONS



During her Undercover Boss experience, Sharon Price John observed how the warmth and openness of her employees was what generated the positive spirit of the company. By being their passionate and caring selves they created memorable experiences for customers and a supportive work environment. This inspired Sharon to change her leadership style. Like many other female leaders, she had always held back showing parts of herself in the professional world in order to succeed. She realized, though, that for Build-A-Bear to be successful it needed her to be her true self and show her joyful, enthusiastic, and emotional sides the way her employees do. She was thankful, to the point of tears, to have been taught this by her employees.

When Sharon revealed her identity to Kendall at the end of the episode, Kendall feared she was in trouble for making her own training manual. Sharon, though, showed appreciation for her recognition of the problem and effort to fix it. She asked Kendall to help create a quick reference version to be used company-wide, work for which Kendall will be compensated. Sharon also empathized with how Kendall sacrificed to work hard and care for her family. Sharon thanked Kendall for her dedication and selflessness by giving her manicures for a year, \$10,000 for her wedding, and \$40,000 in a college fund for her kids.