

# KIM SWEERS

MANAGING PARTNER/OWNER, FB MARINE GROUP

In 2001, Kim Sweers was at the top of her game as vice president of a data company that built large global networks. When the dot.com bubble burst, however, she shifted gears and launched a new career heading operations at FB Marine Group in Fort Lauderdale, Fla., which was owned by her



BY WANDA  
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boyfriend, Randy Sweers. Having already financially invested in the company a year before, she had perceived great potential for the organization and shared the vision of building the dealership into one of America's top retailers.

Twenty years later, FB Marine Group has emerged as a repeat *Boating Industry* Top 100 dealership. With 30 employees, it offers new boat sales including Contender, Intrepid and Statement Marine lines; pre-owned and brokerage services; yacht management; service featuring certified Mercury, Yamaha and Suzuki technicians; fiberglass and paint repair; and custom engine builds and rigging.

As managing partner, Kim is the chief promoter and face of the retailer, with responsibility for overall operations, team management, internal policies, processes and procedures.

However, her work today extends far beyond the dealership walls. She has engaged herself in key industry initiatives, while enjoying a wave of recent notoriety as the popular social media icon known as #BoatBoss.



The Boat Boss and some of her fans.

**Boating Industry (BI): Besides your dealership duties, what other marine industry initiatives are you involved in?**

**KIM SWEERS (KS):** I've served on the MIAASF as an anchor member and on the boards of the Broward Workshop, the Winterfest Boat Parade and Junior Achievement of South Florida.

Most recently, I worked closely with Mercury Marine, Junior Achievement, Marine Industries Association of South Florida, MarineMax and the Department of Education to create a workforce initiative which rolled out March 2022. The pre-apprenticeship-/journeyman program addresses the shortage of certified technicians needed to service the massive increase in boat owners in South Florida and nationwide.

Currently, the most common ethnicity of marine mechanics is white 80.8%; Latino 12.3%; black or African-American 2.8%. The gender ratio of marine mechanics is 6.6% women and 91.2% men.

The solution to this workforce shortage is to eliminate the barriers of entry for minorities and those with financial limitations and create opportunities that will lead to well-paying careers in the marine industry.

It is my mission to create a more diverse and inclusive workforce in the marine industry and a model for other industries to follow.

**BI: You've created a memorable brand and heated up social media with the launch of the BOAT BOSS podcast. Tell us more.**

**KS:** I created a platform called BOAT BOSS at the onset of the pandemic to help bring awareness to the boating industry, its players, and the freedom that a lifestyle on the water affords you during a lockdown. Little did I realize the success it would have. People have forgotten my name and just call me "The Boat Boss!"

The BOAT BOSS has been a great platform to promote myself in the industry by highlighting what I do every day and telling the story of other movers and shakers in our industry. I've interviewed some of my competitors such as Chuck Cashman from MarineMax and Bob Denison from Denison Yachting. I believe what's good for the industry is good for business. We all share the same interests. We're all in the same boat rowing together.

I had tons of people stop me recently at the Miami International Boat Show and thank me for the work I am doing in the marine industry. BOAT BOSS has given me a platform to be creative, push the needle of change and share success stories as well as the challenges we are facing.

I sign off each BOAT BOSS episode saying, "Whether you live, work or play on the water, just get on the water, because there is nothing better than a lifestyle on the water!" And I truly believe it and live it every day.

**BI: As you consider your 20 years in the boating business, what's been the biggest challenges you've faced ... and how did you respond to these issues?**



Kim Sweers finds time to be on the water as often as she can.

**KS:** In our 28 years, we've faced 9/11, the 2008 recession, my personal battle with cancer, the pandemic and now, workforce and supply chain issues.

To be an effective leader, I defined who I wanted to be and focused most of my efforts on my character. The best way to overcome adversity is to have a strong foundational character and integrity.

Having a thriving and healthy company culture has also helped us overcome challenges. Our people and our culture are our greatest assets, and during the pandemic, I created a collage of all our employees' children, which motivated me to see us through the darkest days during COVID. I still have that picture in my office as a reminder of "my why" and what puts my feet on the floor each day.

We have worked really hard to create a diverse and inclusive workforce. I try to hire people from all walks of life who bring their very best ideas and not agree with me all the time. It makes for GREAT conversations at work!

I love change. Not many people do! As a leader I've been flexible and agile to pivot quickly. Every business is in constant flux and I believe if you wait, you are going to be left behind. I hate losing!

**BI: Seeing how you're promoting a diverse new workforce initiative, what would you tell young people considering an industry career?**

**KS:** Be an exemplary role model for current and future generations. Constantly demonstrate business excellence, be a forward thinker, an inspiration and, most importantly, have community mindfulness by making a difference in the community you serve.

**BI: Any specific advice for women looking to drop anchor in the boating business?**

**KS:** First and foremost, you MUST love yourself. Be brave and don't be afraid to take space in an industry that doesn't have many women. Always push your limits.

Educate yourself as much as possible. I don't agree with the saying, "Fake it til you make it." If you want a seat at the table, you must work hard at keeping that seat at the table! Knowledge is power. Learn as much as you can about what you do and keep abreast of happenings within the marine industry. Become an expert. Stay engaged. Be persistent about what you want to achieve in life.

And lastly, if you're not uncomfortable, you're not growing. Live outside your comfort zone, do things that others don't want to do, be a role model ... and watch how your life transforms!

**BI: What leadership traits are most needed in the marine industry today?**

**KS:** Show up every day with your game face on, saying "Put me in the game, coach!" I look for team members I can count on, who arrive on time, finish their tasks, take responsibility for their assignments and meet deadlines.

I look for people who want to be part of the solution, not the problem. Rather than being told what to do, I urge my team to be proactive and look for opportunities to contribute. Be curious and ask questions.

If you're not a team player, find another profession. I look for people who engage with teammates, customers and vendors. They must be supportive, respectful and, most importantly, inclusive.

This quote hangs in my office: "Your life is 100% your responsibility." I look for people who can resolve conflict, communicate clearly - early and often. Strong communication skills and being a good listener are vital to success.

**BI: Who inspires you ... who are your marine industry mentors?**

**KS:** There are several! Bill Yeargin, President and CEO Correct Craft, taught me the most about positive leadership, about leaving your title at the door and focusing on impact, influence, and inspiration in both your personal and professional life.

Ken Clinton, President of Intrepid Powerboats, exemplifies grit and perseverance. He started his career making minimum wage on the assembly line, worked his way up over the last 30 years to Intrepid's oval office as its president for the last 10 years. He's the poster child for success stories and the goal of our workforce initiative program. By eliminating barriers of entry in the marine industry, we can have more success stories like Ken's.

David Foulkes, CEO Brunswick Corporation, taught me to be the "Great Disruptor" and motivator. He and his team consistently disrupt the status quo and set new standards in our industry. I constantly ask anyone that works underneath him, "Is it really that good?!"

**BI: Finally, any life mantras or words you live by?**

**KS:** My professional mantra is "Little goals lead to big goals. Dream Big, Work Hard, and MOST IMPORTANTLY stay humble!"

My personal mantra is "Never take anything for granted. Learn to appreciate what you have before it's no longer there."

Also, "Look at the bright side of every situation. Find the good, even the negative ones. Search for the message. Learn from it. Pay it forward and leave a legacy." ●