



Ava Smith

I'm Here To Serve

By Terry L. Watson
Photos Provided by Latisha Miles

She is known for her unceasing devotion to serving others, an attribute the Upstate area of South Carolina has grown to cherish and appreciate. Without hesitancy, she eagerly answers the call to assist in any way, whether in business or from a personal perspective.

In addition to leading and serving, Ava Smith is also an accomplished entrepreneur. She is the owner of Flat Fee Recruiting and Ava Smith & Associates. Flat Fee Recruiting is a permanent placement recruiting firm that provides quality employees at affordable rates. It also assists companies in various industries and with all types of vacancies.

Ava Smith & Associates is a full-cycle HR Consulting firm that operates as an outsourced HR Manager or Director for small businesses, non-profits, and ministries throughout the United States. Some offered services include onboarding, compliance, benefits, risk management, wellness, and training.

The New Jersey native holds a Bachelors of Science Degree in Human Resource Management from Limestone University and is a Lifetime Member of the Sigma Beta Delta Honor Society. She has over 25 years of experience as a Human Resources Professional. That includes employee relations, compliance, recruitment, retention, and training. Ava began her career in the non-profit sector and shifted into manufacturing, the corporate arena, and staffing.

Throughout her career, Ava progressively moved upward in her positions, serving in various roles from HR Assistant to HR Director. In August 2002, Ava began her own firm, HR Specialties, which specialized in providing HR services, training, and recruiting. She later expanded this firm by adding additional experts and rebranded it into what is now widely known as Ava Smith & Associates. In 2010, she formed a permanent placement agency called Flat Fee Recruiting. Her agency received the Minority Business of the Year Award in 2013 through the Greenville Chamber of Commerce. Ava is also a noted Diversity Trainer and has delivered hundreds of sessions throughout the Southeast since 2005. Her clientele involves corporations, manufacturers, non-profits, service organizations, government officials, municipalities, universities, hospital systems, local chambers, and faith-based organizations.

Ava is known for her unique style and approach that captures her audience's attention, allowing them to discuss diverse topics easily. Even more, she was the Recipient of the 2015 Excellence in Diversity Award, given by the Greenville, SC Chapter of SHRM.





Ava has served the Upstate of South Carolina in various roles, including current Board Member with the Simpsonville Area Chamber of Commerce, current Board Member with The University Center of Greenville, Board Member with Greenville Technical Charter High School, Board Member with Junior Achievement (Greenville, SC), Diversity Director of the SC Society of Human Resource Management State Council, Advisory Board Member with the Greenville Chamber of Commerce, Small Business Steering Committee Member with the Greenville Chamber of Commerce, Advisor with Greenville Chamber of Commerce CAPACITY Builders program, Chair with Greenville Chamber of Commerce's Greenville Women at Work (GW@W) initiative, Advisory Board Member for Virginia College, Advisory Board Member for ECPI School of Technology, Board Member for the Greenville Society of Human Resource Management (GSHRM), Chair of the Diversity/Inclusion Committee for GSHRM, President of the Board of Directors for the YWCA of Greenville, Board Member of Fostering Great Ideas, Advisory Board Member for Clemson Small Business Development Center, Steering Committee Member for MLK Dream Weekend, a member of the Clemson CU-ICAR Diversity Committee, and member of the Greenville Technical College Multicultural Advisory Board. These accomplishments and contributions have resulted in her being honored extensively.

How did Ava get to where she is now? She says, "I originally started my career in accounting. After obtaining a two-year certificate, I became a bookkeeper for a large finance company. I thought I was destined to have a 10-key calculator under my hand until I retired. However, a restructure left me without a position. As a single mom, I had no choice but to pursue any vacancy I could find to make ends meet. After searching for several weeks, I found a position at a local non-profit that would change the trajectory of my life."

Her career in HR began when Ava was only 24 years old. "At that time, the industry called it the "Personnel Department". My job description had two line items. I was to pass out applications and answer the phone. I was unsatisfied with those simple tasks and began asking for more responsibility. A year-and-a-half later, I was the HR Manager of a facility with 400 employees. As my career continued, I would eventually hold HR roles in various industries," she says.

Ava says while serving in her previous HR roles, she realized a common need for employees accompanied by the inability of their small budgets to cover the cost of staffing. To address this, in 2009, she launched Flat Fee Recruiting.

When asked what she loves most about what she does, Ava shares how she loves bringing solutions. "I am a problem solver for businesses that need HR support without having the workload that requires a full-time position. I also love being a part of their business strategy team. My clients include me in their vision and long-term plans, and I assist them with walking it out," she says.

Ava shares how she finds inspiration in her children and grandchildren. "I always want to be their role model, and knowing they look to me as an example pushes me not to give up. I am also inspired by my father, who recently passed away. He left such a feeling of "legacy" that it has shown me that I am not only working for what is in front of me, I am also working for what I plan to leave behind," she says.

Becoming an entrepreneur, Ava says, was not something she had planned to do. "I was not prepared, and I had to identify training and learning opportunities to gain knowledge on how to be successful. I was challenged by having to build a network with other business owners and people that could support me on this journey. Being open-minded and believing that failing could still be a form of winning helps me overcome challenges on a daily basis."

For anyone who is considering starting a business, Ava offers some advice that may be of assistance. "Knowledge is power. If you are pursuing entrepreneurship, take business courses, be aware of what your legal and financial obligations will be so that you will be prepared. If you are currently in business, continuously find ways to stay innovative and an expert in your field. Choose yourself even when you feel like no one else will." Please visit her website to learn more about Ava Smith and her companies. 

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