

New Board Member Connie Rinaldi, Founder and Director of Project Recruit, has been an entrepreneur since childhood. She grew up in Oceanside, New York, where she loved to ride her bike and read. But, most importantly, she learned how to be an entrepreneur by going to work with her dad who owned a chain of retail 1-hour photo stores (before digital photography). Connie also knew from childhood that she wanted to be a lawyer. When in the 6th grade, she was involved in a personal injury lawsuit and fell in love with the justice system. Her career has incorporated the two themes of entrepreneurship and law.

Connie attended NYU where she enjoyed having the city as her campus and majored in political science with a double minor in Spanish and Italian. While attending Saint John's University School of Law's evening program, Connie worked full time as a court agent for the Lefrak Organization representing landlords in small claims court and administrative and mediation hearings. She felt it was important to get practical legal experience while attending school. But that wasn't enough for Connie. Ever the entrepreneur, she also created, owned, and operated Miracle Mixers which offered bartender and wait staff services for private parties on Long Island. She closed Miracle Mixers to pursue her career in law full time.

After graduating from law school, Connie worked at a few firms practicing insurance defense and commercial litigation and real estate and, in 2008, she opened up her own law firm, Zuniga & Rinaldi LLP. Several years later, after realizing that her heart was not in the practice of law but that she loved business and really enjoyed connecting with clients and building relationships, Connie started ZR Per Diem, a for-the-day court and deposition service for lawyers.

Connie believes that legal recruiting is very close to per diem services and always wanted to add permanent lawyer placement to the services the company offered, but her former partner did not agree. So, when COVID hit and the business at ZR Per Diem plummeted due to the courts' closing, she took it as an opportunity to explore becoming a legal recruiter. Being the proactive entrepreneur that she is, Connie took a class at Cornell in Talent Acquisition and networked with other recruiters. From there, Project Recruit was born. While her firm recruits nationwide, Project Recruit's small team focuses mainly on the East Coast. They specialize in mid-sized firms of between 50-350 attorneys, offering partner and associate placement, with the occasional placement of non-attorney law firm professionals such as paralegals and managers.

Connie enjoys the high stakes nature of recruiting. She says that, for every 20 disappointments, there's the feeling of extreme satisfaction in a perfect placement, and that's what drives her. She believes that being an eternal optimist is a necessary component of legal recruitment. It's ok to feel disappointed but you must move on. Connie has learned to deal with the inevitable setbacks that are part of the business by looking at the hundreds of job orders that need to be filled, the endless opportunities that await. That always makes her feel better and motivates her to keep going.

"The best advice Connie ever received about recruiting is: YOU NEVER KNOW."

Board Member Profile: Connie Rinaldi, Esq. Founder and Director of Project Recruit



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The best advice Connie ever received about recruiting is: YOU NEVER KNOW. If you're not sure about a candidate, talk to the client, explore it, and see if it could work. Recently, she had a candidate who after two interviews was rejected because the firm was not sure it could hire a fully remote attorney even though the position had recently been advertised as such due to the talent shortage in that specialty. The candidate and Connie devised a creative solution for the candidate to be in the office a few times a month, which they presented to the client, and which ultimately resulted in an accepted offer. If she were to start her recruiting career today, Connie says she would take more classes on AI and technology. She also would focus more on messaging and content at the outset.

Fun fact: Connie played professional poker part time for two years while she started her businesses. In 2004, she won a trip to Paris, France, and an entry to a \$10K event. In that event, she was the last woman standing and came in 24th out of 205 entrants. She says she uses many of the skills she learned as a professional poker player to succeed in business today.

When not working or dreaming up new pathways to success, Connie enjoys watching *Rounders*, a 1998 American drama film about the underground world of high-stakes poker, and any romcom and criminal/crime solving shows. The book Connie found most influential is *The E Myth: Why Most Businesses Don't Work and What to Do About It* by Michael E. Gerber (about entrepreneurial success—no surprise), and she enjoys any Patrick Lencioni book about teamwork, management, and leadership.

But Connie isn't all work and no play. She and her partner Andrea just bought a home in Oyster Bay NY and they, along with their children, Lila (10) and Robin (5), are loving it.