



A leap of faith: running Painted Prairie (Krista Kopperud, Class X)

“To be outstanding, get comfortable with being uncomfortable.” –Alrik Koudenburg

This past March, MARL Class X (the best class in history) spent three days in Crookston. On the night of the banquet, CEO of American Crystal Sugar, Tom Astrup, shared his leadership journey with our group and emphasized the importance of taking risks and being uncomfortable to grow as a leader. This powerful message resonated with me. Why? Two weeks earlier, I had taken a leap of faith and stepped away from a 17-year career path in the human services/public health field to run our winery and vineyard full-time.

I was not entirely new to the winery world when I took the leap of faith. Five years earlier, Andy (my husband) and I decided to purchase a beautiful piece of property which just happened to have 1 ½ acres of grapes and a functioning winery. We looked at this as our hobby and juggled this amongst full-time jobs and our family of three girls.

One month after we “reopened” our doors as new owners of Painted Prairie in 2015, we found out there were big regulation changes to the winery industry in Minnesota and to stay open, we would have to make some larger improvements to our facility to stay open. In the end, we made the decision to take the leap and construct a new place on our property. Two years and a few more grey hairs later, we opened our new tasting room/production facility in late December 2018.

All along this journey, Andy and I have divided the responsibilities of running the business based on strengths and capacity. My job always had more flexibility, thus more responsibility landed on my shoulders. I coordinated the construction of our new facility and am proud of this huge accomplishment.

The reality check of building and opening a year-around winery and then growing our business to a sustainable model was weighing heavily on our shoulders. In order to make this happen, it was going to take a full-time person. My husband, who is a full-time physician, was not going to be quitting his day-time job, which either meant either I would take this leap or we would hire someone to run the business. Both supportive in each others’ career paths, Andy encouraged me to apply for MARL; he also supported my decision (one way or the other) with changing my career to full-time winery owner. On a cold (and more-than-likely snowy) day in February, I made the decision to put in my notice.

No doubt, my husband and family fully supported my decision but those “golden nuggets” and little extra discussions with MARL colleagues was instrumental in my career change. I can not think of a better network behind me to make this new adventure successful! Is it scary? Yes! This winter was a true test. But, I am connecting and building a network of experts around me to help build a strong foundation. Being in MARL has given me the confidence to be more engaged in winery-related opportunities I would have otherwise shied away from in prior years. This new adventure is exciting, scary, and uncomfortable but I am forever grateful for this incredible opportunity!