After spending much of her career building brands and launching products globally with Fortune 500 companies, Nathalie Doobin decided to build her own company. “My first exposure to the building service contracting industry was in 2010, after I attended a BSCAI conference,” she said. “I found the industry interesting, especially the concern for the health and safety of people and the environment. In 2012, I acquired Harvard Cleaning Services, and renamed it Harvard Services Group. Today, Harvard Services Group is a 100 percent women-owned and led, Women’s Business Enterprise National Council (WBENC) certified company, doing business in multiple states.” Read on to see what Nathalie brought to her company from her Fortune 500 experience as well as her take on what makes a great company culture.

“We firmly believe that a great company culture starts with the leadership’s ability to define and communicate the core values from which the culture, brand and business strategies are developed.”

How does your career experience working with Fortune 500 companies compare to your experience in the BSC industry? What lessons did you take into your BSC business?

One of the main lessons was related to the value of process. Because margins in the building service industry are competitive, it is critical to have solid processes in place. Another lesson is the importance of innovation; the latter part of my Fortune 500 career was spent around innovation and lifecycle management. Lastly, the importance of corporate culture — employees want to work for socially responsible companies that promote diversity and career opportunities.
What are some key trends you are noticing in the industry?
An important trend is increased accountability of service delivery, which lends itself to the use of technology to assess service performance. Technology has the ability to increase our clients’ visibility to the services received, and our visibility to the work performed. Sustainability continues to be a positive trend for a growing segment of clients. With Harvard Services Group’s Green Seal GS-42 and ISSA’s CIMS-Green Building with Honors certifications, we are ready to address our clients’ sustainability needs.

What has been the most challenging experience in your career and why?
The most challenging experience was when the company I worked for was acquired by a larger player in the industry, and the two company cultures were very different from one another. Companies often focus so intently on cutting costs following mergers that they neglect day-to-day business, thereby prompting nervous clients and employees to flee — this loss of revenue momentum is one reason so many mergers fail to create value. One of my responsibilities was to nurture a global brand team, as well as European distributors, to reassure them of their value to the new combined entity and the importance of their role in the merger.

How would you describe your management style?
My management style is what they call in business school a “Permissive Democrat,” where decisions are made in a participative manner and latitude is given. All the Doobin Family companies operate according to the Inverted Pyramid® management philosophy — it supports the idea that our managers’ main responsibility is to provide the support necessary to empower our employees, so they provide quality service for our clients. Through this unique management approach, I’ve witnessed firsthand the heroic efforts of our employees and their sense of satisfaction and accomplishment.

What are some tips you have for employee retention?
Hiring according to your company’s core values is of the utmost importance. It doesn’t matter how good someone is, if they behave in a manner that is contrary to what the company stands for, they should not be part of the team. Our culture is based on the old adage of “treat people how you want to be treated.” We have found that one of the main reasons our turnover is low compared to industry rates is because of the connection employees feel to our company culture. Creating a culture of openness and support will nurture a workforce that feels valued, which translates into loyalty.

How do you work to create a great company culture for your employees and team members?
We firmly believe that a great company culture starts with the leadership’s ability to define and communicate the core values from which the culture, brand and business strategies are developed. These are communicated and reinforced through our actions, policies and behaviors. Harvard Services Group’s culture is one of diversity and empowerment within the workplace. We are creating a workplace that respects and includes differences, recognizing the unique contributions that a diverse group of individuals can make, creating an environment that maximizes the potential of all employees.

What has been the greatest takeaway from your membership in BSCAI?
Being a member of BSCAI has provided me access to a network of high-quality BSCs — a network that would have otherwise taken years to build on my own. BSCAI is a great resource for keeping ahead of the challenges affecting the industry, and it has a purchasing program worth every penny of the membership fee.

Why is it important for you to give back to the community?
My husband and I are passionate about paying it forward. I’m a high-level contributor to Step Up Women’s Network, which builds programs for underserved teen girls. I am a member of the Innovation Board for XPrize as well as the Enterprising Women Advisory Board, and I have served on nonprofit board of directors’ such as New Destiny Housing. We contribute to multiple charitable causes around the country, such as Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center, American Heart Association, Big Brothers Big Sisters and the Diabetes Research Institute.
What is the best piece of professional advice you’ve received in your career?
That you should never stop learning, to have a mindset that stays fluid and facilitates personal growth. It is the “learners” — those willing to open their minds and augment their skillsets — who will be poised to succeed in the future.

What book are you currently reading??
I am reading “Abundance: The Future is Better than you Think,” by Peter H. Diamandis and Steven Kotler. In “Abundance,” space entrepreneur-turned-innovation pioneer Peter Diamandis and award-winning science writer Steven Kotler document how progress in artificial intelligence, robotics, digital manufacturing, synthetic biology and other exponentially growing technologies will enable us to make greater gains in the next two decades than we have in the previous 200 years.