



# Bridgette Bennett

Groveland, Florida



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## *Learn about Florida Entrepreneur Bridgette Bennett:*

Before launching her law firm on November 11, 2011, Bridgette M. Bennett, Esq. worked in corporate America for a financial services research company. She spent six years in Washington D.C. where she assisted big banks and executives in small business banking and wealth management. Following a move to the Sunshine State in January 2006 to be closer to family, Bennett spent two years with SunTrust Bank before a situation involving her husband dramatically changed her career path.

“My husband is also an immigrant,” Bennett said. “He came to the U.S. on an entertainment visa in 1997. We met and fell in love and, when his visa expired, he didn’t want to leave. It was a bad decision that eventually took 10 years, over \$30,000 in legal fees, three lawyers and

mountains of paperwork to resolve. That experience had a profound impact on me and my future in banking. I didn't want other people to have to go through that. It was time to go in a different direction."

Bennett left SunTrust and enrolled in law school full time. She put a steady paycheck and a comfortable lifestyle on hold for three years to learn the law. It wasn't easy, but Bennett was determined and driven to helping immigrant families navigate the complex immigration system.

"It was a difficult time," she said. "I had no income through law school, but I prayed to God and knew I was on the right track despite our financial woes. Towards the end of law school, I prayed about finding a job so that I could have a stable income again. However, this was right around the recession, so no one was hiring. The lack of job offers was my cue to start my own firm. I remember thinking, 'If we're going to eat, I have to do something about it'."

Bennett, who's originally from Jamaica, decided to open a law firm entirely focused on immigration law. She felt equipped to provide compassionate counsel as she was personally drawn to the struggles many law-abiding immigrants face when trying to become U.S. citizens.

"With my experience, I feel like I represent the American dream," she said. "I always had to work twice as hard as other people, but that taught me the importance of good education and a strong work ethic. Growing up, my family always stressed the value of education. That had a profound impact on me. In fact, growing up, my nickname was 'nerd of the century' because I was always reading and asking questions."

Upon launching her business in November 2011, Bennett experienced

the usual challenges faced by most entrepreneurs. However, rather than taking her eye off her craft and focusing on the business, she took the opposite route. In the end, that helped with growth.

“Since I didn’t have any experience practicing law, I knew I had to become an excellent technician of the law,” she said. “Rather than focusing on the business itself, I spent the first few years focused on becoming a great lawyer. I got really good at immigration law and that helped propel the business forward. Eventually I reached the point where I had to focus on the business and things like staff, hiring and management. Today, I have a staff of 15 amazing employees that all contribute to the success of Bennett Law Center. Putting in place a solid team has allowed me to focus on training, talent management and managing staff as they manage the bulk of cases.”

According to Bennett, much of the growth of Bennett Law Center was organically driven. She got active in the community and visited churches, daycare centers, farms and did free seminars all over Florida. Eventually she joined the Chamber and attended networking events. She also reached out to existing attorneys in Lake County and asked for startup advice. Along the way, she picked up mentors and became very active in the American Immigration Lawyers Association.

Bennett is driven by her own immigration journey and a love for helping people. “I think diversity is a beautiful thing,” she said. “I love to help people immigrate to this country and to watch them grow as citizens. Last week, one of my clients became a U.S. citizen. I met him and his wife when he was younger and got to see them go from having no papers to getting married, starting a family and now, watching him study

to become a General Contractor while managing a very successful painting company. My clients are opening businesses and contributing to society! I love this journey. It's not always easy, but it's always worth it. I get to do something that really changes people's destiny and for that, I am eternally grateful. My work is so rewarding that it doesn't feel like work."

Looking ahead, Bennett is excited about several major milestones on the horizon. She's months away from renovating her existing space in Groveland and building a much bigger office to house her growing team.

She also has plans to provide business immigration services and is currently in the process of building an immigration app. Lastly, Bennett is focused on entering "Phase 3" of her management strategy. She wants to spend more time working on the business rather than in it.

What advice does Bennett have for aspiring entrepreneurs? "First and foremost, know thy self," she said. "Entrepreneurship is not for everyone. It's attractive to a lot of people but you have to want to do this and you have to want to run a business. It's important to understand that you might be an amazing attorney, but that doesn't mean you can run a law firm. Do you get excited about things like payroll, taxes and dealing with staff? If the answer is no, then don't do it. Lastly, you don't need to have it all together to get started. Have faith and trust God's will for your life. That worked for me. Prayer works. I knew that this is what God wanted me to do. I live by my firm's motto: All things are possible with God."

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