

From Vegas Showroom to Political Powerhouse: The Extraordinary Legacy of Lorraine Hunt Bono

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A Living Legend's Journey Through Entertainment, Business, and Politics – And What Every Woman in Business Can Learn

In the heart of Las Vegas, where dreams are born and legends are made, stands a woman whose extraordinary journey embodies the very spirit of this remarkable city. **Lorraine Hunt Bono** represents more than just another success story – she is a living testament to what becomes possible when vision, determination, and unwavering authenticity converge to create something truly exceptional. As a fellow woman in business building a global brand, I find myself continually inspired by her remarkable evolution from **Vegas showroom performer** to **Nevada Lieutenant Governor**, all while maintaining the heart and soul of a family business that has become synonymous with **Old Vegas charm**.

Her story resonates deeply with anyone who has ever dared to dream beyond conventional boundaries, particularly **women in business leadership** who understand that true success often requires navigating multiple industries, breaking barriers, and staying true to your roots while reaching for the impossible.

The Foundation: From Niagara Falls to Nevada Dreams

Lorraine's journey began far from the neon lights of the Strip. Born Lorraine Theresa Perry in Niagara Falls, New York, her family's 1943 move to Henderson, Nevada, was driven not by the allure of entertainment, but by necessity – seeking refuge from harsh weather due to health concerns. Sometimes our greatest destinies emerge from our most challenging circumstances, a lesson that resonates with every entrepreneur who has had to pivot, adapt, and find opportunity in unexpected places.

What strikes me most about Lorraine's early years is her **entrepreneurial foresight**. At just 19, while actively pursuing her entertainment career, she invested her first showbiz paycheck in a barren parcel of land at Tropicana and Eastern avenues. This wasn't just a real estate purchase – it was a strategic investment in her future, decades before that land would become the foundation of her family's restaurant empire. As someone building a **global luxury concierge business**, I recognize this type of long-term vision. It's the ability to see potential where others see emptiness, to invest in tomorrow while excelling in today.

The Entertainer: Building Credibility on the Strip

By age 18, Lorraine had embarked on her professional journey as a **Las Vegas Strip vocalist**, performing not only locally but in Reno and Lake Tahoe. Her talent quickly gained national recognition, leading to appearances on iconic shows like *The Ed Sullivan Show* and *The Red Skelton Show*. In the late 1960s, her distinctive voice became the soundtrack of Las Vegas itself, serving as the commercial voice for the Tropicana Hotel's Les Folies Bergere, The Desert Inn, and notably, the Landmark Hotel, which she helped open in 1969 with her group, "The Lauri Perry IV."

What's remarkable about this phase of her career is how she leveraged her **entertainment industry experience** to build credibility and connections that would serve her throughout her life. The entertainment world taught her presentation skills, timing, and how to connect with diverse audiences – abilities that would prove invaluable in boardrooms and political arenas. For **female entrepreneurs in the hospitality industry**, this demonstrates how every experience, even those that seem unrelated to your ultimate goals, can become powerful assets in your leadership toolkit.

The Visionary: Creating the Bootlegger Legacy

The **Bootlegger Italian Bistro** story begins with Lorraine's parents, Maria and Albert Perry, whose culinary expertise was honed at the celebrated Fiesta Villa Ristorante in the 1940s, where Hollywood legends like Howard Hughes, Clark Gable, and Jane Russell dined. This rich family heritage in hospitality provided the foundation for what would become a **Las Vegas institution**.

Building on her early land investment and her family's culinary tradition, Lorraine joined forces with her parents in 1972 to construct their restaurant. On June 9, 1973, the **Bootlegger Bistro** officially opened, named to honor her great-grandfather Luigi Zoia, an Italian immigrant who earned the nickname "The Bootlegger" during Prohibition for serving homemade wine from his Canadian boarding house.

The restaurant's evolution mirrors Las Vegas itself. In 2000, demonstrating the same strategic thinking that marked her early career, Lorraine made the bold decision to relocate the Bootlegger from its original location to South Las Vegas Boulevard. She recognized that "the neighborhoods were changing" and that the family's aspiration was "always to be on the Strip." Using land she and her father had purchased in 1983, the contemporary **Bootlegger Italian Bistro** opened in 2001 as a 24/7 establishment.

What makes the Bootlegger extraordinary isn't just its longevity – it's the **multi-generational family commitment** that has sustained it. Four generations have contributed to its success, from Lorraine's parents to her son Ron Mancuso, who joined as Chief

Operating Officer in 2003, to his son Roman, who became the fourth generation to join in 2012. This continuity creates something money can't buy: institutional knowledge, deeply ingrained hospitality culture, and employee loyalty that spans decades.

As someone building a luxury brand, I'm struck by how the Bootlegger redefines luxury itself. It's not about opulence or exclusivity – it's about authenticity, heritage, and genuine connection. The restaurant's walls, adorned with celebrity photos and family memories, tell the story of **Old Vegas entertainment legacy** in a way that feels both intimate and historically significant. This is luxury rooted in substance, not superficiality.

The Trailblazer: Breaking Political Barriers

Lorraine's transition from entertainment and business to politics wasn't accidental – it was the natural evolution of someone who had always been building community and creating opportunities for others. In 1994, she was elected Clark County Commissioner, defeating the incumbent and marking her entry into public service.

The following year brought a historic achievement: she became the **first woman Chairperson of the Las Vegas Convention & Visitors Authority (LVCVA) Board**. In a male-dominated industry, this wasn't just a personal victory – it was a breakthrough that opened doors for future **women in business leadership** throughout Nevada's crucial tourism sector.

Her most significant political role came when she was elected as Nevada's 32nd Lieutenant Governor in 1998, serving from 1999 to 2007. During this tenure, she simultaneously held the position of President of the Nevada State Senate and served as a key member of Governor Kenny Guinn's cabinet. What set her apart wasn't just her political acumen, but her unique background that combined entertainment charisma, business expertise, and a deep understanding of Nevada's economic drivers.

The Global Visionary: Pioneering International Expansion

Perhaps Lorraine's most forward-thinking achievement was her **groundbreaking work with China**. In 2003, she led Nevada's first Trade and Tourism delegation to China, becoming the first Nevada state official to formally visit the country. The following year, she secured an exclusive license to market Nevada in China – a remarkable achievement that positioned the state to tap into a market of 1.3 billion people.

Her success in opening the first approved state tourism office in the People's Republic of China (one of only 14 licenses granted worldwide) demonstrates the kind of **global business vision** that resonates with anyone building an international brand. She

recognized China as an emerging superpower long before it became conventional wisdom, positioning Nevada strategically for unprecedented growth in international tourism.

This global perspective extended beyond tourism. Lorraine championed **economic diversification initiatives**, understanding that while tourism remained Nevada's backbone, the state needed a more robust and varied economic foundation. She established the Nevada Technology Partnership and led The Nevada Entrepreneurship Team, strategic moves toward reducing the state's over-reliance on a single industry.

The Heart of Leadership: Values That Inspire Loyalty

Beyond her remarkable professional achievements, Lorraine Hunt Bono is also a devoted wife and loving mother. Her marriage to **Dennis Bono**, a acclaimed vocalist known for his interpretations of the Great American Songbook, represents another beautiful chapter in her multifaceted life. Dennis, who has been performing for over four decades and gained recognition through his association with Frank Sinatra, shares Lorraine's deep connection to Las Vegas entertainment legacy.

Their love story began as a friendship, with Dennis eventually asking Lorraine if they were dating after she attended one of his shows. When he invited her to a movie, she had one memorable stipulation: "Do you have pictures in your house of Frank Sinatra and the Pope? Well, I'll go to the movie with you," she said, laughing. This playful moment perfectly captures the blend of humor and shared values that would define their relationship.

When Dennis proposed, he did so with characteristic humor and romance: "I got down on one knee and I said 'I have two questions for you.' I had the diamond ring open and I said, 'will you marry me?' and she said 'oh my gosh yes ... what's the second question?' and I said, 'will you help me up?'"

Their wedding at the Las Vegas Hilton (now Westgate) took place in the Elvis Suite, the 5,000-square-foot room where Elvis Presley resided during his legendary show series from 1969 to 1976. They describe it as "a big Italian wedding," with hundreds of guests, music, laughter, and celebrity friends performing. As Lorraine beautifully expressed it, "Where else would you want to go to get married, where it's the epitome of 24/7 love, romance. I mean, everything you can think about is right here in Las Vegas."

Today, Dennis and Lorraine continue sharing their lives through Las Vegas culture, with Dennis noting that "the essence at this stage of our lives is to find something every day that we look at each other and we find something to laugh at. I know that when I make my wife laugh, it makes her happy."

This personal dimension of Lorraine's life – as a devoted wife and mother – adds depth to her already remarkable story. It demonstrates that true success isn't just about professional achievements, but about building meaningful relationships and maintaining the connections that matter most.

What truly sets Lorraine apart – and what every **woman in business** can learn from her journey – is her approach to leadership that prioritizes people over profit. The fact that she has employees who have worked with her for years speaks volumes about her character and management philosophy. In the high-turnover hospitality industry, this kind of loyalty is both rare and invaluable.

Her extensive community involvement reflects this commitment to service beyond self. She serves on the Education Foundation of the Nevada Restaurant Association, as an Ex-Officio Board Member for the Nevada Ballet Theater, and as an Honorary Member of the Las Vegas Rotary Club and Las Vegas Jazz Society. Her past service includes St. Rose Dominican Hospital Community Board and serving as past president and trustee of St. Jude's Ranch for Children.

This dedication to community service isn't separate from her business success – it's integral to it. By building genuine relationships and contributing meaningfully to her community, she created a network of trust and mutual support that has sustained her through multiple career transitions.

Lessons for the Modern Female Entrepreneur

As the founder of Suite Life Privé, a **global luxury concierge and lifestyle management company**, I find Lorraine's journey particularly relevant to today's ambitious women. Her story provides a tangible blueprint for achieving what might seem impossible:

Strategic Long-term Vision: From her early real estate investments to her international expansion initiatives, Lorraine consistently thought decades ahead. She didn't just respond to change – she anticipated it and positioned herself advantageously.

Leverage Your Unique Background: Rather than abandoning her entertainment roots when entering business and politics, Lorraine leveraged the skills she developed – presentation ability, audience connection, and performance confidence – as leadership assets.

Build Authentic Relationships: Her success across industries stems from genuine relationship-building rather than transactional networking. The loyalty she inspires creates a sustainable competitive advantage that can't be easily replicated.

Embrace Multi-generational Thinking: The Bootlegger's success across four generations demonstrates the power of building something bigger than yourself. True legacy businesses consider not just immediate profitability but long-term sustainability and family involvement.

Stay Grounded in Values: Throughout her remarkable career, Lorraine has maintained her commitment to family, faith, and community service. These aren't impediments to success – they're the foundation that makes success meaningful and sustainable.

The Continuing Legacy

Today, the **Bootlegger Italian Bistro** continues to feature "Mama Maria" Perry's original recipes (Maria passed peacefully at age 102 in 2019), maintaining its classic Vegas atmosphere with authentic celebrity photos, a piano room, wine room, and the Copa Club. Its recognition on Anthony Bourdain's "Parts Unknown" and by Playboy magazine as one of America's top bars speaks to its enduring appeal.

But the restaurant is more than a business – it's a living museum of **Las Vegas history**, a tangible connection to the city's golden era. In a place known for constant reinvention and dramatic implosions, the Bootlegger stands as a counter-narrative of stability, tradition, and authentic connection.

A Personal Reflection on Inspiration

As someone with aspirations to grow a luxury brand into a truly global infrastructure, I find profound motivation in Lorraine's journey. Her story demonstrates that with faith, determination, and strategic thinking, it is possible to achieve what others might consider impossible. She didn't just succeed in one field – she excelled across entertainment, real estate, hospitality, and politics, leaving an indelible mark on each.

What inspires me most is how she's maintained her authenticity throughout this remarkable evolution. Whether performing on stage, serving in the Lieutenant Governor's office, or welcoming guests at the Bootlegger, she's remained true to her core values while continuously growing and adapting.

Her emphasis on family, loyalty, and community service reminds us that true success isn't just about personal achievement – it's about the positive impact we have on others and the legacy we create for future generations.

The Enduring Power of Old Vegas Values

In our rapidly changing business landscape, Lorraine Hunt Bono and the Bootlegger represent something increasingly precious: the enduring power of **Old Vegas values**.

Authenticity over artifice. Personal connection over digital interaction. Loyalty earned through consistent character rather than flashy marketing campaigns.

These values haven't become obsolete – they've become more valuable than ever. In a world of increasing automation and impersonal service, businesses that prioritize genuine human connection and community building stand out dramatically. This is the kind of luxury that discerning clients increasingly seek: experiences rooted in history, relationships, and authentic care.

Conclusion: An Invitation to Excellence

Lorraine Hunt Bono's extraordinary journey from **Vegas showroom to political powerhouse** offers timeless lessons for anyone with ambitious dreams. Her story reminds us that success isn't just about reaching the top – it's about how you climb, who you bring with you, and what you build along the way.

For **women in business** facing seemingly impossible challenges, her legacy provides both inspiration and practical guidance. She shows us that it's possible to honor your past while embracing your future, to achieve personal success while serving your community, and to build something that outlasts your own lifetime.

As you reflect on your own business journey, consider visiting the **Bootlegger Italian Bistro** on South Las Vegas Boulevard. Experience firsthand the atmosphere that has welcomed everyone from Hollywood legends to local families for over five decades. Let the stories on those walls and the warmth of that hospitality inspire your own vision of what's possible.

Most importantly, remember that your unique background – whatever it may be – isn't an obstacle to overcome but an asset to leverage. Like Lorraine, you have experiences, perspectives, and relationships that no one else possesses. The question isn't whether you can achieve the impossible – it's whether you'll have the courage to try, the wisdom to persist, and the heart to do it with integrity.

In Las Vegas, a city built on believing in long odds, Lorraine Hunt Bono stands as living proof that with vision, determination, and unwavering authenticity, there truly are no limits to what one remarkable woman can achieve.

What seemingly impossible dream are you ready to pursue?

Sources:

- Wedding story details and quotes courtesy of "Our Love Story: Dennis Bono and Lorraine Hunt-Bono," Clark County Clerk, weddings.vegas

