



CFP 003: Candice Quarles – City Councilwoman, DeSoto, TX

Show Notes at: <http://www.rebeccamthompson.com/candice-quarles/>

Rebecca Thompson: Hello and welcome to The Changing the Face of Power the Podcast. I'm Rebecca Thompson and I am so excited to chat with our featured guest today Candice Quarles. Candice, thank you so much for being on the show.

Candice Quarles: Thank you, thank you for having me.

Rebecca Thompson: So Candice was recently elected to the DeSoto City Council in a special election just actually a few months ago. She's a wife, a mother, a social entrepreneur, and super involved in her community. We'll include her full bio in the show notes. But Candice, why don't you tell us a little bit more about yourself and your position?

Candice Quarles: Okay, so I was elected just maybe in what two to three months ago now in a special election meaning that we had someone vacated the seat. And then I ran for her unexpired term and then the person who vacated the seat ran for mayor, so was the rest of her ... we have three year terms and I ran for the rest of her three year term. So my term will end in two years of the three year term.

DeSoto resident, I'm actually from Saint Louis originally, I've been in Texas about eight years now. And once I got here immediately just got involved in everything in the metroplex. So I lived in Dallas, lived in Fort Worth, I lived in Arlington, kind of lived all over but I was always involved in an urban league, I'm a Delta so I've been involved in my Delta Chapter, just involved civically and really didn't have a

plan to run for office just kind of, just seeing a lot of things going on in politics and I was always engaged.

So I think people should definitely pay attention to what have their attention and if you're constantly reading on the politics, it's probably a natural interest for you even though a lot of people say that they're not interested in politics, they are just not in the typical way. A lot of times you just want to see change and then you realize you have energy to make changes happen.

Rebecca Thompson: That's right. Most people sort of hate politics but really do care about what happens in their community. So it's a great way to sort of think about this as a vehicle for creating change in your community. So I'm really interested in the fact that you talked about being from Saint Louis, my dad is actually from Saint Louis.

Candice Quarles: Oh, wow.

Rebecca Thompson: But not actually being from Texas and I meet a lot of woman who struggle because they are from one place and want to run somewhere else or vice versa. So what was it like to run in Texas when you're not from there? Do people sort of push back about that?

Candice Quarles: Yeah, it was probably more on my head than actually the push back that happened. So those one of those things that held me back why didn't I run sooner, because Texas is a big place very connected its very familiar. So this new person coming out of town and she thinks she's going to run a part of our city, who does she think she is? And this probably in my head. No one really ever say it to me but I have people say, what have you done since you've been in Texas?

But and then my resume is legit. I have been involved in several organizations. I've been involved in more things than most Texans who've been there their whole life. So I have to reiterate that and tell myself that my resume - it has some weight on it. It's okay if they don't vote you in because you're not from Texas, that's something you can't change. So to the women I think that's a barrier. It actually might be ... it's just a different perspective you bring me here.

I tell a lot of people that I chose to be in Texas, the difference between me and the other person I want to be here, I didn't grow up here, I chose this place on the map and I set my feet on the ground. So I think it just usually ... just tell your story of why you're here and be bold, and if they want to harp on that and then let them do that. But it's a bonus to me I have a different perspective I've lived in the Midwest and I know how great it is to be in the state like Texas.

Rebecca Thompson: Oh, I really, really love that because as somebody who grew up in Detroit moved to Washington D.C. and felt like that was home too and

really question whether I wanted to run for office there I ultimately made the choice to come back home but that's exactly right, like making a choice to live somewhere and run there is really different. Tell me a little bit about how you got into politics. So as I was doing my homework on you I was like where did she find the time like you're involved in so many things but how that all start?

Candice Quarles: So actually I just think it kind of, just kind of the path that led me to that way. I never thought I would be a city council person. I wasn't interested as a kid in politics or anything like that. I just been involved, so when I was in the urban league and I was the president of the young professional chapter here. So, about 150 to 200 young people engaged, seriously engaged like we talk about voter registration.

We are registering people to vote in the hood, we talk about civic engagement we talk about house and health and those things. So I kind of put myself in that environment and those things are political issues, so I was impressed on it not really trying to be, just want to be an informed member for chapter. And then also I'm a Deltan, Deltas do social action, like that's what we're about. So that was naturally easy way to just be in the world of politics. And then when I started my company, my co-founder and I started nine happy people it was all about trying to get people jobs and this dream of how we're going to employ everybody that needs a job.

So I now looked and talked to my mom, she would probably say, "Oh, her whole life, she was interested in this." But I didn't see the things I definitely thought I'd be a corporate HR executive and that is the path that I would be on. So this is kind a surprise to me as well.

Rebecca Thompson: Yeah and it sounds like it was sort of always there which is something that I'm always saying to women is like to listen to that, right? Like some people do wake up one day and all of a sudden they're in politics, but usually you're involved in your community or there's an issue that you're fighting for which leads you down that path and sometimes we don't always make the connection. I'm glad that you brought up the part about your company, because tell me if your elective position is paid and if so or if not like how do you pay your bills?

Candice Quarles: Yes, so we're in the small city. So DeSoto is 52,000 residents, we're about eight mile south of Dallas. So it is not a paid position, not by any means, and so most of us are entrepreneurs or retired on city council. Because it is, it does take up time in the day time but they are very flexible with your schedule that we have, community meetings at night but ... so it needs to be some flexibility in day time. Once I became an entrepreneur I knew I have that flexibility. Before then I used to work for the lawyers, consultants, so not a lot of time in the day time to go and spend time in a city council meeting.

But our city council meeting start at 6:00PM, if we have a meeting before that, it starts at 4. So I have enough flexibility, your schedule definitely helps to be elected and then with the company it's e-commerce, so it's most online. So lots of things are on the way of side, now we're getting to a point where everything is automated and there are very few things that I actually have to go and do unless there is a problem. So we're getting to a point where it's completely automated so you can't step out and focus on the business unless about t-shirts.

Rebecca Thompson: I actually really appreciate you're saying that because as somebody who run for office and worked full time it was so brutal and it's actually why I started my own company because I knew that I was going to run again and I didn't want to have to ask permission from a job or a boss and I didn't want to have to juggle working full time, but I know that something that a lot of women struggle with.

And so I'm sure a lot's of folks will probably be reaching out to you about how you started your business. But I think entrepreneurship really does go hand and hand with being a candidate because it's one of the barriers that I think that keep people from running for office. So thank you for sharing that.

So let's talk a little bit about what the rest of your life looks like. So you're a mom, you're a wife women are the only ones that are asking these questions around how they balance family and running for office but what is that look like for you and how has your husband sort of been supportive on this journey and what's it like to sort of be juggling the balls of being a mom and entrepreneur and an elected official?

Candice Quarles: Well I'm very blessed that I have this amazing husband like he is just a machine so it's one of those things where we talked about a plan of, "Hey, I want to do this or hey we're going to start this." We have a conversation of where could we put this on the schedule, what can we move off, and we make it happen. But he completely gets it. I met him through the urban league so we work just ... he was (Promentarian?) and I was a member and just kind of kept on through. So he understood civic engagement way before I ran for office.

He understands on a Saturday morning that is not weird for me or him to get up and do public community service. And I think that's the key because I see a lot of women, they're talking about their husbands giving them a hard time and it's hard if you have that person in your same household that doesn't get why it's important to do voter registration drives on a Saturday morning.

So my husband gets it we talked about it actively, we have a two year old, she's going to be two next month. How do we make sure if she has everything she needs and she understands that we bring her to events, we want her to understand that this is a part of your life, you will be involved in your community, whatever level you want to be understand that that's part of your responsibility.

So I think having that conversation early and then Jeremiah is one of those, that was honestly my more motivating factor because my husband is so amazing at what he does that I can't slack off. Well, I don't want to make him look bad, but definitely I stepped my game up. So I have a good husband, he is supportive, but he gets it and have dinner conversation, we could easily talk about things that are going on in voter registration world or in Texas politics and it's common and I appreciate that.

Rebecca Thompson: So it sounds like a key ingredient is finding a partner who gets it. Actually when I started dating my partner our dates and quality time was canvassing, like that's how we got to spend time together. So, it's a really important piece of the puzzle. So Candice, let's about your campaign, so you run in a special election which I'm really curious to hear about because it sounds like you probably had even less time than maybe if you are running for an open seats. So how much time did you have and what was that process like of getting your campaign started?

Candice Quarles: So time that I have ... so realistically I probably looked at the dates of when the seat is going to be up, when you're going to file probably when I first move to DeSoto three years ago. So I looked and found my council member and I do that in every city I lived in. I found my council member, make sure they know me, we have relationship, and then I saw the time and I said, "Oh, okay so this seat is not going to be up until 2018."

So even if I did have an inkling it's not going to happen for me, something I pushed up and kind of was looking for a reason not to be involved and then after she announces she was running for mayor I said, "Wow, okay so this might be a deal." So honestly maybe two months before I filed I knew that I was going to run and then after that happen I filed and then it was to maybe February and then May was the election, so maybe three or four months of campaigning before the election date.

So it was very quick but it was one of those things where I already I would say I made a decision I'm going to run it wasn't foreign to me, it wasn't completely off my radar like there's any person really know in their council seat, I mean council rep seats is going to be up. The average who does it, the person who does probably is interested in politics.

So I kind of had an idea and then once I had more reasons, once I got other things cleared and made sure I had no more reasons to say no then now it was up to me and looking for the support of my family and friends and once I shared it with them, and that's kind of how I started the campaign is I sent text messages, emails, phone calls, and said, "Hey, I think I'm about to run, would you support me?" So before I announce it publicly I had a circle of support of my closest friends that knew, okay all hands on deck Candice is running we need to be

ready. So that was good to know that was definitely good to know I had that support.

Rebecca Thompson: Oh, that's really great and I think you're an example that you don't need a whole lot of time, like sometimes I hear from women who say, "Well, maybe I'll run in five years or ten years." But what it sounds like is you were ready when the opportunity presented itself and ...

Candice Quarles: I guess that would be a nice way to put it, the opportunity present itself. Yes, I was prepared for an opportunity whether it came now or five years from now. And I thought it honestly would be five years from now since I do have a little one. But I do hear a lot of women say that, they'll say, "Wait for the kids to get out of school." Well I have a two year old, like she's not going to be out of a school for a long time, so that's not a reason not to and we need more women in politics right now. The country is hurting and I really truly think it's because we just don't have enough women being represented.

We're just not representing overwhelmingly and black women especially. And black women, we put people in the office. I don't think people truly feel our power yet. We put people in office. When we vote they get elected. So once other people realize that and a lot of them have they'll come and court us because we come out and vote overwhelmingly more in our peers. So if you wait long enough you'll find excuse not to do it.

Rebecca Thompson: I am over here nodding my head because that is so, so, so true and it's often times why ... I mean we're already at the table, we're registering people to vote in our community, we're fighting on issues that we care about.

Candice Quarles: We're at the church, we register right in advance.

Rebecca Thompson: The church, that's right.

Candice Quarles: We know how to organize. Yes, we're already doing it, but we won't run for ourselves, so yes.

Rebecca Thompson: Oh God, somebody needed to hear that so I'm so, so glad that you said that. So you talk about having a few months to run, how much money did you raise for your campaign and how did you raise it?

Candice Quarles: So I raise 10,000. So we're a small city, so I just raised \$10,000. And I think that was probably enough. I definitely didn't feel like, "Oh, I should have raised 20,000." So I don't have that case. But how did I raise it? I said so I had one day over a course of a week and I have all these contacts in my phone and I said, "If run all these contacts of people I've known, I've registered people for office, I've worked on other people's campaign, gave to

other people's campaigns. If all those people gave me a 100 bucks I'll have my goal, right?"

So I said there in my phone and I can't even send them a text message or an e-mail, I don't feel comfortable asking them to support me as a candidate they're probably not my friend anyway. And they probably don't need to be on my phone anymore.

So all you had to do is say, all you had to say was no, and I didn't press it and say, "Oh, really." I'm definitely not that candidate yet where I'm pressing people for money. It was more immediate and comfortable asking for money. And then once the first wave came in, more and more people gave and I was like, "Oh, I thought that will be the hardest part and honestly it was the easiest part."

Rebecca Thompson: Yeah, well and also it sounds like it's easy to raise money when people ... first of all they believe in you, they know you, they like you, they trust you, and they say that you've been doing this work. It is probably one of the biggest things that keep women from running for office, but actually you've been helping other people raise money. So if like you said if the people on your phone give you a \$100 you could reach your goals. So it is so nowhere near as hard as people make it out to be.

Candice Quarles: Very true, very true.

Rebecca Thompson: So let's talk about how you actually reached your voters, so you live in a small community, but you're a mom, you are working. How did you knock doors and how did you reach to your voters?

Candice Quarles: So I went through one of the other things that helped, I went through ... the summer before I went through this program called Battleground Texas. And it was a program to teach local elected officials I mean people who want to run for a local office how to run on a state level and county level.

But I went to that program thing and I wanted to be a campaign manager. So I went to the program, it was six months long, but that really helped me to see, "Oh these tools are out here to teach you how to canvass to voters." And then while I was actually campaigning this project, it was called project LIFT, Local Investment in the Future of Texas and it's a program by the Democratic Party in Texas to help win seats at the local level because they are seeing it's a pipeline of course, something that republicans have already picked up on.

So what I did as being part of those two programs I have seen, so they taught us how to campaign, they taught us how to raise money, they taught us how to make an e-mail and ask, they taught us about coloring and messaging and what to pick on your signs, like it was one of things in theory is good information but

when you're going through it, you're like oh my God, where are my notes? Where is my notes?

So that was really helpful to just go through the process and learn how to run and you just go and you talk to people the whole time and then you get inklings, you get little that was good this didn't worked out, that didn't worked out like I taught, this was awesome let's do more of that. So that was very helpful to get, to be trained in that way. But again you need a refresher by the time it's actually time to run because it's all different once you're a candidate.

Rebecca Thompson: It is true and it makes me think about no matter how many training programs you do or campaigns schools it is different running your own campaign. And the best way to learn is by doing. So I was one of those people, I spent years doing every campaign trying to get my hands on and then when it was time to run my own race I had to figure out how to put all of that stuff into action.

So for a women who are thinking about how to do this it really is by just doing it. So you're elected now, I know it's only been a few months, but the whole purpose of this podcast is to demystify what it means to be an elected official. I think people think of them as like not real people and I would love to hear from you like what are some things that you've struggled with now that you either as you're running or now that you've been elected?

Candice Quarles: Struggle with while I was running, yes, so many things since I was running as a candidate. There's candidate forums, so people want to hear what you plan to do for that city, what things you want to implement, or how you going to make a difference especially if they were upset with the current, with the previous leadership.

And a lot of times people wanted to know you the individual, like they see candidates as people who bicker around TV. So then when you step out and I'm 34 so they were like, "Well, what you made you want to run? You're so young." And I'm thinking I'm 34 I should have been in office 10 years now, but I didn't give myself credit for being at my age. I thought that was a deficit, I thought that would have been something they'd used against me. But honestly it was, they didn't see it as a negative.

I thought coming in that's what it would have been, they are like, "No. You have a new perspective, you have new ideas. I want to hear them." So just learning what they want, that was definitely, I had it all wrong. What I thought they will use against or I think that it was a negative, it completely wasn't. But challenges on the cam and just not knowing basic stuff that people know. People think a lot of times a city council person does something and then that's really the county or that's really a state level, so educating the voter on this is what a city council

person does, like they have a lot of complains about, "Well my kid went to school and enrolment didn't it happen." And I'm like, "Yeah, that's not city council."

Rebecca Thompson: That's not my job.

Candice Quarles: So it was a lot of times the things that you wanted to help them on and you're like, "That's great. I can point you to the right person. But what I can help you with on city council." And they're like, "Yeah, nothing. That's not what I want." So helping with that, trying to get people to understand that, but challenges during ... Right now I'm the newest person in the city council, I am the youngest currently on the council.

So just a lot of things had been emotion and place and I'm trying to catch up. So I'm trying to figure out ... last night we just had council meeting, so we have all these things that we're voting on and we're doing the budget for the next year. So right now we're wrap it up our fiscal. So things like that where money is already accounted for or this project is emotion and we already paid this much of it.

So just keeping up and seeing where we are and then kind of seeing where you can push or talk about some of the things that ... it wasn't just redirect when I was running. I really want to do those things, I really want to see more jobs in my community, I really want to see our city be branded and marketed in the metroplex. So I'm coming in with those ideas and then also it's not just me, there's six other people, how are we dealing together to make sure that we're being effective for our community. So I'm yeah still learning and tons of notes and I'm in the orientations all the time with every department and they're great people so they're very patient with me.

Rebecca Thompson: Oh, that's so great and what I hope that our listeners will take from that is that you don't have to have it all figure out and a lot of times people think that they have to be experts or they've got to get more degrees or they've got to have all of these experience and as somebody who is also the same age as you like you can do this as a young woman and you can learn in the process. So you're showing us that, that's completely possible and you have everything that you need right now to do this. So, what is something that you wish you knew when you were running? So something that you know now that you wish you knew then when you were starting this process.

Candice Quarles: Something I wish I knew then ... so many things so there is a voter registration network of people who registered to vote. I thought that, silly me I thought that you talk to everyone that you wanted to vote for you to get elected. I didn't know that they ... I knew they kept track of how to vote but I didn't know how much emphasis was kept on the voter and the profile. So I was talking to everybody in the community about getting me elected.

Yeah that is not even saying it's a waste of time, you want them to come vote us one day, but some people won't vote for you. We had maybe a 4% turn on and our 52,000 residents, so yeah that's not a lot of people. That's definitely not 52,000 people, that's not even 25,000 people.

So I spent time, I wish I knew that. I didn't know that there is a targeted list of people that you should target to get to vote for you because those people consistently vote. So you want to target the people that consistently vote. You don't want to target people who have never voted, because they probably won't come out for a city election.

Rebecca Thompson: They probably won't come out and I don't care how awesome of a candidate you are or how hard of a campaign you're going to run. This is one of those top of the list things for candidates where it's so important to know that you talked to likely register voters and there's lists and there are places that you can go to get those list of people. And so they're all sorts of different ways to get that information. But overwhelmingly in your community of 50,000 plus voters you only really need to talk to 4%.

And so I'm really glad you shared that because so many candidates men and woman. I see them going to knock on every single door and it is such a waste of time. So as somebody who was also a community organizer by day, we want to reach those folks, we want to engage people who probably haven't voted. But as a candidate you have to wear a different hat, like you have to ... I always say you can come back for those folks when you're on the city council and then you can get those people register to vote.

Candice Quarles: Very true, very true.

Rebecca Thompson: So what advice or words of wisdom would you share with a woman who is thinking about running but doesn't feel ready, what would you tell her that might push her over the edge?

Candice Quarles: I would say ... let's see ... to push her over the edge. I would say ... well, for me I need to know in a traditional classroom sense of how I learned things. So knowing how you learn things helps, if you need a structured program where they'll teach you how to walkthrough, how to make a campaign list and how to fundraise. If you need that, then find that and back into it from the date and get involved in some class.

But figure out a way that you learn, if you learn by talking to a bunch of people, a bunch of elected officials, set up meetings with these elected officials and ask them how did you run, what made you begin. If you know how you need information to do something or advanced, put a plan in place and back into it, because right now especially in our country we need qualified women candidates to run for office. It's that much of a need because what's going to happen is a lot

of times these seats are ... especially on a city election if it's smaller people are on opposed.

People and a lots of seats are vacated, they might had, there might be an open seat and then people are winning because they don't have an opponent not because they are the best candidates. So if anything throw your name in the hat just so people have to compete against you. Don't let one seat I mean if you're thinking about city council or school board, think about precinct chair before that, get involved and see that's a very easy seat and it helps you to know the players in the city.

But find out a way that you knew the information to move forward and then back into the plan. Say you're going to do it and then let's ... if we have three years to get you ready, what do you need to do in three years so you can feel comfortable?

Rebecca Thompson: Yeah, that's so true. And you talked about finding a program or a training, what are some programs or trainings that you've done that you would suggest to other people to look into?

Candice Quarles: Well, I know that in Texas we do have ... I'm a Democrat so, the Democratic Party should have programs if not they have a workshop, we have Andy's list where it's like Emily's list but it's for the local level, at the state level, but we're trying to get more programs in placed. But that's probably something out really out there. Yale has a campaign school which a lot of people go through. And if fundraising is your issue and that's your handicap is how will I get this money then Yale goes with campaign school and they'll teach how to ask.

If it's about the position, I was probably more prepared for the position that I was to run because I ran up everything on city council people. I looked at other city council people, I see how they voted, I saw their experience level, and I even made a chart and a graph because I'm a geek like that, and I ranked them against my ass, "Okay, this person has a degree, he don't have a degree, I have a master's degree. Okay, well they've been in they waited they were entrepreneur then they ran for office." like I came up with every reason why it's not going to work for me and I see the scenario in every other place. So it wasn't a way, it wasn't going to work for me.

But I think if that's what you need you need to know what's going in the landscape. I think November is going to a big year for women, you need to ride the wave and women will be elected in November so you need to ride the wave, get on the ballot and make sure it's all about timing. What I do know is if I waited six years from now which would have been ... we have two, three year terms as limits. If I waited six years from would I be elected, well I can't get bank on that, you need to do it now because it's this important right now.

Rebecca Thompson: Oh that's so great and that's it like you need to do it right now and we need to get out our own heads that like I'm not ready or I don't have the degree or the experience. And Candice, you're talking about the chart that you put together really does just show you that like even if you put yourself up against the other folks that are elected you will find that you usually have way more experience than you're giving yourself credit for.

Candice Quarles: Very true.

Rebecca Thompson: So it has been such a joy and a pleasure chatting with you and hearing more about your story. I'm sure we're going to have lots of folks wanting to reach out to you. So how can our listeners connect with you?

Candice Quarles: Well, let's see, a couple ways. So I was and something that help when and during my campaign is I was active on social media before I actually ran for office which I see a lot of people and then they say, "Oh, I want to run." And they started a Facebook page. I already have people I was friends with so I was comfortable with Facebook and live in Twitter and Instagram before I needed it. So I think that's key as well.

But definitely on social media it's Candice Quarles and that's the same name on Instagram and that's the same name on Twitter it's @candicequarles. In any of those you can e-mail me on the city website.

Rebecca Thompson: So we'll be sure to include your e-mail and your social media handles on the show notes. Candice, thank you so much, it was so great chatting with you and I actually I look forward to having chance to meet you in real life sometime soon.

Candice Quarles: Awesome definitely I would love to meet you as well.

Rebecca Thompson: Okay. Thank you. Okay so I'm going to go ahead push the stop now.