



***Rebecca (Becky) Blalock  
Senior Vice President/  
Chief Information Officer  
Southern Company***

***A Power Leader***

It's no pun that Becky Blalock is a power leader in the power industry. She's widely recognized for her corporate success, especially her contributions to economic development in Georgia. Her many honors being named a 2003 Diva by *Business to Business Magazine*, one of the "Woman Making a Mark on Atlanta" by *Atlanta Magazine*, and a "Woman of Achievement" by the Cobb County YWCA.

Recently, another honor elevated Blalock to an even higher level of recognition. Among a select few women in the world, Blalock was named a Fellow of the International Women's Leadership Foundation (IWF). This distinction afforded her the opportunity to meet and share experiences with inspiring women leaders from around the world.

Yet, for all her honors and achievements, what really stands out is Blalock's down-to-earth attitude, her ability to make things happen, and her energizing leadership style. These same attributes are often used to describe another inspiring leader, Dr. Betty Siegel, president of Kennesaw University. Coincidentally, Blalock considers "Dr. Betty" a mentor and role model; many see Becky as a "Dr. Betty" in the making.

Blalock's current role as Chief Information Officer is another case-in-point of her dynamic leadership, because – surprisingly enough -- Blalock doesn't have an IT background. Most of her experience has been in finance, marketing, corporate communications, external affairs and customer service. What helps her be successful in IT is her extensive knowledge of the electric utility industry, because in any industry, the CIO role is about applying technology to improve business performance.

***On the personal side***

Long before Blalock became a corporate leader for Georgia Power and Southern Company, she was acquiring skills that would lead to success. She was born in Greenville, SC and grew up a self-described "military brat." With a father in the Air Force, family relocation was a way of life.

“I had to make new friends every time we moved. Now I see that as a key skill that actually helped me in my career. Also, as a young girl I found out that people energize me, and that hasn’t changed,” Blalock recounted.

Blalock received her undergraduate degree in business administration from the State University of West Georgia, where she now serves on the board of trustees. West Georgia also played a bigger role in her life than just providing a college education. Blalock met her husband at West Georgia, and she was recruited from the school’s placement center into Georgia Power’s accounting management training program, where she spent the first year of her career getting an excellent overview of the electric utility business.

Fast forwarding a few years, as Blalock’s career took off, her fresh approach to problem-solving helped her handle the critical issue of quality childcare for her daughter. Now on her 10<sup>th</sup> nanny whom she found through an ad in the *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, Blalock knows how to find good caregivers.

“It is so important to find quality childcare,” she says. “If you are worried about your child, issues at work seem to pale in comparison.”

While there were a few other women executives, Blalock was the first officer of Georgia Power who was also a mother.

“When I first started my career, there weren’t many women in senior positions who had children. But my advice to the next generation is not to put off child-bearing for your career. And if you do have one or more children, pay a premium for childcare because it makes all the difference. Personally, I’ve been blessed with a wonderfully supportive husband who helps a lot, but the peace of mind from top-quality childcare cannot be overstated,” Blalock stressed.

### *Making a difference*

It is apparent that Blalock’s leadership has a significant impact on her company, her organization as well as the community.

In her straight-forward manner, she defines leadership as “Starting with integrity and trust, and building on relationships. If you say you’re going to do something, do it!”

There are two questions Blalock asks herself each day: 1) Did I learn something new today and 2) Who did I help? She believes that with leadership comes responsibility to serve others, and to stay current with the world and what is happening around you.

Blalock also believes strongly in the principles of success espoused by Laura Liswood, founder of the Council of Women World Leaders:

- ◆ Challenging authority when needed
- ◆ Strive for excellent communications skills

- ◆ Travel Extensively / Learn from other cultures
- ◆ Be grounded spiritually

Perhaps one of the clearest examples of Blalock's concern about the world around her was demonstrated in the case study she completed as a part of her fellowship with the IWF. "Shadows over the Sunbelt" explored the unwed birth rate in the South and its high correlation to poverty. She continues to follow this alarming trend by pointing out that in 2003, one third of all births in the U.S. are to unwed mothers. A high percentage of these children go to school unprepared to learn. When they start out behind, they are rarely able to catch up, and this is a primary indicator for future poverty levels.

The unwed birth rate has increased 10 percent over the last decade and some women are making the choice to have a family without the support of a spouse. Blalock's concern is that we do not have the social and financial infrastructure in place to ensure that these children are able to attain the early learning needed to be successful academically. Research shows a strong link between education, employability and income.

Clearly, Blalock's passion and deep concern about issues such as the unwed birthrate are real, and that she could lead an initiative to do something about it is also quite obvious. This may or may not be her future calling, but one thing is certain: Blalock, one of the most exciting, to-the-point "power leaders" you'll ever meet, has only begun to make her mark.

By Susan B. Hitchcock, Creator of "The Age of SHEroes"  
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