



Terry S. Trout
Vice President, Customer Experience
Cbeyond Communications

Lessons in Innovative Leadership

There are many things that stand out about Terry Trout – e.g., her professionalism, discipline, intelligence, and warm personality. But spend one-on-one time with her and you discover even more unique qualities - qualities that make her who she really is.

Terry has an incredible ability to learn from her experiences, to adapt, and ultimately to apply what she’s learned in an innovative way. She also lives by a strong code of ethics and integrity and an equally strong respect and care for others. Couple this with a deep personal commitment to the success of her company and you have a leader who is truly special.

How it all began

Terry comes from a military family and like many such families, her dad was frequently reassigned. Born in California, Terry and her twin sister – along with three other siblings – lived and attended school in various places as they were growing up. For three years, Terry called Europe “home.” Eventually, her family returned to the U.S. and settled in Belleville, Illinois where Terry and her sister graduated from high school.

“Ours was a very achievement-oriented family,” Terry explained. “We were always expected to adapt and thrive...and we did. You would never say you can’t do something – you simply had to try.”

“You also never cried over friends you left behind. You just made new ones. Among the many valuable lessons I learned from my ‘perpetual motion’ experience moving around and growing up in different places was that you had to get used to ‘raising your hand’ in a new environment.”

“Another significant advantage to how I grew up was that you got to know people for who they were, not where they came from. Diversity was simply a part of our lives.” (Note: Terry’s early life experiences were clearly the building blocks - the solid foundation - for the development of her leadership character – the kind of character that that would guide her adult life.)

Turning points

There have been many turning points in Terry's life, including the pursuit of higher education which has helped ensure her future success. She received a B.A. degree in Business and Human Resources from Quincy University in Quincy, Illinois, and an MBA from Southern Illinois University. As a member of a family of high achievers – including four advanced degrees and a twin sister who graduated from medical school – Terry's educational accomplishments were not unexpected.

What happened next, however, might not have been so predictable. She went to work for a family-run, entrepreneurial company in a field where she really had no specific knowledge. The company was Marcone Appliance, the industry's largest distributor of repair parts.

Over the next few years, Terry would not only learn the business, she would become indispensable to it. In 1987, after serving as Director of Human Resources, she was promoted to Vice President for East Coast Operations and relocated to Florida along with her husband and twin daughters.

(Note: Terry is not only a twin herself, but she's also the mother of twins and her twin sister, an emergency physician, also has twin daughters!)

Over the next 14 years, Terry was responsible for \$65 million in revenues and directed sales, marketing, distribution, and warehousing operations for 20 locations across two U.S. regions. Simultaneously, Terry acted as the corporate marketing vice president organizing national programs for the wholesale and consumer markets. Overall, Marcone provided Terry with invaluable experience in strategic and operational leadership as well as an opportunity to exercise her passion for innovation and serving customers with excellence.

On the personal front, another turning point for Terry was becoming a divorced parent. Fortunately, this did not have a negative impact on her daughters as their mother and father remained close and jointly shared parenting responsibilities. "If I had to travel or work late," Terry said, "I did not have to worry about the girls. They had two parents that loved them and respected each other. Everything worked out very well."

Taking it to the next level

Call it providential or happenstance, but Terry's professional life took a significant turn in 1996 when she met Jim Geiger. Both were serving on a church committee in their local parish when they met. Recognizing her talent and leadership strength, Jim offered Terry a job at Intermedia Communications, a billion dollar integrated communications provider.

Sensing that Jim was the type of leader she wanted to work with and believing that it was time to move on in her career, Terry made the decision to leave Marcone and to accept the position of Vice President, Marketing Communications.

In 2001, Jim Geiger had a new idea and it involved Terry. He planned to start a brand new, state-of-the-art Voice over IP local telephone communications company and headquarter it in Atlanta. He asked Terry to join him in this start-up venture called Cbeyond Communications.

Terry agreed and signed on as VP of Marketing Communications for Cbeyond – willing to take a risk and put all of her skills and talents on the line for this new venture. “And,” she said, “it’s been an exciting ride ever since!”

Fast forward to 2006 - Terry is now Vice President, Customer Experience with responsibility for uniting Cbeyond’s passion for the entrepreneurial small business customer with the people, process and automation that delivers on its 99% customer retention rate. As part of the leadership team, Terry also helped Cbeyond execute an IPO in 2005 and Cbeyond is now a publicly traded company.

Terry is extremely proud of what Cbeyond has accomplished in a relatively short period of time, and although she is too humble to take the credit she deserves, others would say that she is a major factor in the company’s success thus far. Her exceptional leadership philosophy is clearly evident in every role she has played.

“I assume competence,” Terry says, “but I hire for character. Character, chemistry, and culture are the three C’s that I think are critical to any company’s success.”

“The great thing about Cbeyond is that ‘those who do – get to do more,’” she added, “and when I welcome new employees, I share some basic principles that I lead by. First, always assume ‘good’ – of our customers, our fellow employees and our leadership. Second, come with a solution and if there is a breakdown – be strong enough to declare it openly. And then – ‘always, always’ – do what you said you would do. Finally, I strongly encourage them to raise their hand...At Cbeyond, we are looking for ordinary people to do extraordinary things...simply by taking the chance. We’re not big on bureaucracy and we need everyone to step up to the plate. We believe in creating an environment that encourages risk-taking because it is ok to be vulnerable.”

Even though Terry has only been in the Atlanta business community for five years, her reputation as a strong leadership role model is growing rapidly. She is on the advisory board of the SBA Women’s Business Center / The Edge Connection in Cobb County, is an active associate of the Marist School Communications Committee, a volunteer with Dress for Success, member of Women in Technology, sits on the Holy Spirit Liturgy Committee and is a founder of the Cbeyond Women’s Network. Most recently, she was chosen as one of Atlanta Woman Magazine’s “Top 25 Power Women to Watch in 2006.”

Coming attractions

What’s next for this highly respected individual? Well, with a lot of “runway” ahead, you can count on many more accomplishments - both in her professional life as well as her personal life. As a devoted mom, she’s very proud of her daughters. She knows that

they are well on their way to finding their own paths in life - as college freshmen and having a great time.

As a leader, Terry has always earned the respect of her superiors, peers and subordinates alike. People look to her to pave the way, make things happen and to set the standard of performance at the highest possible level. Terry has what it takes to deliver results, to adapt to new challenges, and to build effective teams and organizations.

And finally, as a citizen...Terry is exactly the kind of person any community would be proud to have.

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