

## Women in Leadership Seminar Highlights

August 23, 2013

**Topic:** "Technology with a Soul: Leading for Profit and a Purpose"



**Karstin Bodell**, Vice-President of General Business Marketing at IBM, joined us this month at Women in Leadership to share her journey and lead a discussion on corporate social responsibility in the modern era. Karstin left her first job at Arthur Anderson to take on a new role at IBM, where quickly moved into line management roles. Along the way, she had many different bosses. One particular boss was the impetus for her to begin golfing with her girlfriends. She learned from him that "you need to stand your ground, but do so gracefully."

With the help of her boss, who was both a sponsor and a mentor to her, Karstin was able to climb the corporate ladder and achieve executive status by the age of 40. She noted that this transition requires one to be ready for the responsibilities that follow. Shortly thereafter, Karstin took on assignments which led her to France and several other international destinations. She pointed out, "A global mentality is critical for today's workforce."

In 2005, Karstin settled back in the USA and began to stay in some of her roles longer. Her focus became national marketing and organizational transformation. When making lateral moves in the organization, Karstin said, "It's important to bring something you know to the job, but also add something along the way to build your skillset."

Karstin also shared some of her personal reflections on her past experience. Her desire to work on an international assignment and her self-motivating personality allowed her to keep going and accomplish her goals. She had to make several tough decisions along the way, including a move to Atlanta in a dual career household and "declaring a major" in marketing. She also faced many opportunities where she had to decide whether to compete for a job that would require relocation. She wishes she could have spent more time engaging with mentors and mentees along the way, as well as networking externally.

As for the best advice she ever received, Karstin said, "It was to take time to think." Her boss would take 30 minutes each day to think and reflect in order to get things done right up front. Karstin also stressed the importance of knowing yourself and developing your own brand. She notes that it's critical to be in an area that matters to the business. Also, do not be afraid to get mad sometimes. Karstin strives to stay current and keep up with modern trends. She also understands the value of external visibility.

Karstin shared several reasons that she has decided to stay at IBM for over 29 years. The company boasts an incredible history of diversity and inclusion, dating back to the 1930s. The caliber of Karstin's coworkers, despite many acquisitions, has also contributed to her lengthy tenure. While at IBM, Karstin has had the chance to explore a variety of opportunities. Workplace flexibility and IBM's "Thoughtful Citizenship Program" have also encouraged her to stay with IBM for such a lengthy career.

IBM has several programs in place that contribute to employee engagement and community betterment. IBM's Corporate Service Corps is a program in which high potential employees are sent abroad on work tasks in order to develop leadership skills. This also allows for IBM to get a good name early in new countries and markets. IBM's PLUS program focuses on STEM education, and the company's Smarter City Challenge allows employees to work on specific

programs in the US for 3-4 weeks at a time to enrich cities across the country. IBM is also committed to creating more jobs in small businesses and corporate social responsibility (CSR). In fact, IBM has won CR Magazine's 100 Best Corporate Citizens Award. The company's commitment to CSR has led to better retention rates and has increased innovation and brand value.

## Q&A

**Q:** What are the differences in business to B2B and B2C "ig data"?

Business to business focuses on supply chain. As a B2B marketer, you want to know individuals and their roles. It is crucial to keep up with clients in a meaningful way. You must be attuned to social listening.

**Q:** How do you have a marketing perspective that is both individualized and consistent?

It should be personalized, but must reflect the brand. It's a hard problem that's not yet solved. You must bring provocative ideas forward.

**Q:** Are there any special programs for women or diversity groups at IBM?

Yes, we have business diversity groups, both localized and national. We conduct regular research to determine where we stand. We try to engage with diverse suppliers (i.e. women-owned businesses).

**Q:** What core competencies do you encourage young women to develop in order to advance their career?

You must have a base knowledge of technology. Writing skills are also critical. You must be clear about your values. Balancing emotional intelligence and vulnerability are also key. Making mistakes makes you human. No one is perfect. You must communicate your value proposition through collaboration in work. Know how to research the company you're looking to work for.

**Q:** How do you deal with moves in Leadership and how others view you?

You have to communicate their value and earn their trust. You must engage in open listening and get to know your direct reports as people. It is also critical to know who in the matrix you need in order to get work done. Relationship building is critical.

**Q:** Can you talk more about CHRO transparency?

We do a good job with our high potentials, but we don't make it transparent. We deliberately do this through internal collaboration tools and succession planning.

**Q:** How did you transition from one field to another?

You have to have some skill that you can bring to the table. I went from Sales to Marketing – there is a lot of overlap there. You also must engage in both internal and external collaboration. IBM gives each employee 40 hours per year to invest in individual education.