



Women in Leadership Seminar Highlights

September 26th, 2014

Topic: “Learning from My Daughter, the Gen Xer - Learning from My Mother, the Baby-Boomer” featuring Veronica Biggins, Managing Director of Diversified Search / Board Practice Leader, and Kenzie Biggins, CEO & Co-Founder of Uniquely Virtual LLC, a virtual executive assistant service.



Veronica Biggins and Kenzie Biggins, mother and daughter, presented a dynamic dialogue about excelling as women leaders despite generational differences. They each shared their stories and how they grew from a mother-daughter relationship to building a friendship, amidst the occasional bumping of heads. Veronica Biggins is a graduate of Spelman College and received her M.A. from Georgia State University in Counseling. Veronica is the Managing Director of Diversified Search and she also worked with Bill Clinton during his presidency. As Kenzie proclaimed, Veronica always wanted her daughter to follow in her footsteps and attend Spelman College as well. However, Kenzie attended Florida State University for her undergraduate career as she was determined to leave Georgia. After working in Washington D.C. at the corporate offices of Target and Bank of America she returned to Atlanta to attend Savannah College of Art and Design for a M.A. in Luxury and Fashion Management.

Kenzie explained that this was a big transition as she went from living on her own in D.C. and working in corporate America, to moving into her mom’s basement in order to attend school. Veronica did not initially understand why her daughter was leaving her career to “Get a degree in what?” as Kenzie described her mother’s reaction. The different thought processes of generations is apparent in this scenario as Veronica explained that even her mother’s generation’s main career goals were to get a good education, get a good job with great insurance, and stay in the job. Although Veronica was surprised by Kenzie’s decision to leave her initial career, she also stated that she, too, switched jobs and her parents were surprised. An interesting generational difference was noted in that Gen Xers do not stay in one job for too long. As Veronica Biggins stated, it is almost taboo for a Gen Xer to stay in one job for more than five years.

Although Veronica and Kenzie were raised in different generations, they have been able to learn a lot from each other. Veronica told the story of when she and Kenzie went backpacking through Europe and how that was a key moment in not only bonding but learning. Kenzie taught her mother to be adventurous through different activities while they were both challenged with fitting all their belongings in one carry-on bag and running to catch trains. For Kenzie, this trip was a defining moment in building a friendship with her mother. Kenzie also mentioned key things she learned from her mom while growing up, such as building relationships, being a leader, and having respect. As a current entrepreneur, Kenzie is able to use the tools she received from her mother in order to lead her own business. Kenzie explained the critical component of building relationships as a leader and making your team feel valued. Every day when she walks into the office, Kenzie sits down with each of her team members and gets to know them personally while understanding how she can help them with their needs. Kenzie described her leadership style as creating a “community of selflessness.” While she may be busy, she is sure to put others first by

sitting down and taking the time to listen. Kenzie stated, "Being a manager does not make you a leader," it is in fact how you treat others that will determine your leadership ability.

On the other hand, Veronica has been able to learn a lot from her daughter, Kenzie. One thing for sure Veronica learned from Kenzie is the power of social media. Veronica is now well-versed in the social media age of Facebook and Twitter. Kenzie also helped her mother in the fashion arena, keeping her in style. Veronica stated that, "What you wear says a lot about you." It is important to make a great first impression and not only will your appearance have an impact but also your body language. Keeping eye-contact, maintaining proper posture, having a firm handshake, all while being confident are the key ingredients Veronica described to making a lasting first impression. In terms of generational differences, Veronica admitted that Gen Xers do tend to be more confident. As Kenzie pointed out, Gen Xers are very direct in their communication and will quickly get to the point even if they have to challenge others. However, as Veronica mentioned, Gen Xers are not great at taking advice from previous generations. Gen Xers tend to think that they do not need to listen to outdated advice. To add to the conversation, Kenzie added that millennials are more likely to take advice from an elder if they have established a relationship with them. Otherwise, millennials believe that everything they need to know can be accessed with the click of a mouse, or rather, the swipe of a touchscreen. Baby-Boomers do have many valuable stories to tell, but it is important to have effective communication between generations.

Veronica watched her independent, strong daughter ask thought provoking questions and challenge others and was able to learn from her in that way. They both recollected a time when they attended a panel discussion and one of the speakers said that women who stay at home and start their own businesses are lazy. The audience at Women in Leadership let out a vast gasp of disbelief in reaction to that critical statement. Veronica remembered during that moment where she had to grab Kenzie, a wonderful entrepreneur, and calmly remind her to not challenge the speaker. Although Kenzie will usually challenge others and stick up for herself, she kept her composure, as something she would describe as staying fabulous. Kenzie's personal motto is "Be fabulous all the time," which is great advice that the Women in Leadership audience took with them. Being fabulous is not merely how you look or the way you dress, but it is the way you carry yourself. Although Kenzie loves fashion, her purpose in staying fabulous is being graceful and confident at all times. Staying fabulous is the secret to Kenzie's success as a woman leader and entrepreneur.

The dynamic duo kept the audience engaged with their discussion-based presentation about thriving in the workplace through relationship building, fabulous composure, and being a woman leader. They played off of each other very well, as if they were the only two in the room having a conversation. Their points were well thought out, and with such meaningful examples, that their talk could have easily been scripted, but instead was obviously natural and spontaneous. Near the end of the discussion, Veronica stressed the importance of not being too attached to technology despite the age that we live in. Kenzie agreed as well as she stated, "Although I own a tech company, I know when to put my phone down." She does not even expect her team members to constantly be attached to technology. Kenzie described that although she may send an email at night, she starts off by saying "Good morning" because she does not expect for them to read it until the next day. She values the importance of taking time for yourself and not being stuck completely in a virtual world. When Veronica was asked about the traits of individuals she has interviewed that impressed her the most, she indicated that she remembers the people who sent her a hand written thank you note rather than an email. There is power in technology but also power in not being consumed by it. They each also concluded with words of advice: Kenzie stated the importance of "Knowing how to tell your story," while Veronica echoed the principle of staying fabulous in reminding the audience to "Praise publicly, criticize privately." These two phenomenal leaders were a fabulous asset to the Women in Leadership Series. They told their stories in a fun, captivating way and demonstrated their ability to make a great duo and learn from each other, despite their generational differences.