



## Women in Leadership Seminar Highlights

May 20, 2016

**Topic- May 20: “Building Bridges and Loving New Challenges: the road to a rewarding (and rather unpredictable) career”** featuring Julie Seitz, the Coca Cola Company’s Global Director of Global Workplace Strategy and Operations.



TLG and its WIL members and guests were indeed fortunate to have yet another amazing – and uniquely talented and experienced – leader as our speaker on May 20<sup>th</sup>. It was our 156<sup>th</sup> consecutive monthly WIL seminar and Julie Seitz helped us “celebrate” the end of our 13<sup>th</sup> year by inspiring, informing and invigorating all of us.

Julie started with a “caution” based on her own career journey since graduating with a mathematical science degree from Clemson University in the 80’s. Basically she said, “Stop so much planning, or worrying about having a detailed “career plan” or map of where you think you’re going.” She proceeded to share some “fun photos” and various fascinating and unplanned things that

have happened to her during her career. One example: the opportunity to organize and execute the Olympic Torch run across the USA for the Salt Lake City Olympics. More recently, with zero real estate, facilities or construction experience, she led Coca-Cola Company’s Workplace 2020 project - the complete re-imagining and renovation of the company’s global headquarters campus here in ATL. For that, she received accolades from the chairman and CEO, Muhtar Kent, AND – a brand new opportunity to lead a global service across the 207 countries in which the company operates.

Julie has revised the old saying, “If you fail to plan you plan to fail” – to – “If you fail to plan, fasten your seatbelt.” She also likes what Sheryl Sandberg says, “If you’re offered a seat on a rocket ship, you don’t ask what seat you’re sitting in! You just get on board!”

Reflecting on the beginning of her career after college, Julie actually started as a systems engineer with IBM – another iconic corporation known around the world. “I thought then,” she said, “that my career would follow a natural progression, like going up a staircase.” In a technical support role, she began to see that it was the sales people who were making the most money and moving ahead. So she determined, “I need to get into sales asap.”

To get ahead, she ended up doing the job of 2 people – taking advantage of a short term opening while someone in sales was on leave. While doing her old job and the new job, she worked many long hours and had to make sacrifices in her personal life. Fortunately at the time she was single and she put all her energy into work.

Later Julie also got into sales management at IBM and that was absolutely without any “crystal ball” as to what was coming. She just learned as she went, and she went with opportunities that she both pursued and that were made available.

IF Julie had had a crystal ball, it would have shown that in her future were travelling with the Olympic Torch, managing a call center, figuring out supply chain logistics for new consumer products, and managing a giant real estate construction project! Interestingly, it has been almost 20 years ago now that a new world opened up for her - the world of Coca-Cola. There her career has traversed all the roles just mentioned!

Early on at Coke, Julie was thrust into national sales – but it was retail and she had no experience in that arena. So what did she do? She worked her 90 day plan – a virtual fire drill – to learn everything she could as fast as possible. Important to her success, she had to build connections and her background at IBM helped her immensely.

As Julie continued her story she shared significant highlights from many of her past roles as well as some principles that continue to guide her decisions. She made it clear that some of these principles she wished she’d learned sooner.

- RE the Olympic Torch role: She was not the top choice for the job but she knew she wanted it and she asked for a meeting with the hiring manager. He came to her office and when he arrived, he saw that she’d plotted out a detailed strategy on the white board. She so impressed him with that – and the fact that she knew every bottler in the U.S. and how those relationships would help in this role – he HIRED her then and there.
- Julie also discussed the value of being open to lateral assignments – not just promotions. Those can be stepping stones as well.
- In other roles, she had to demonstrate that she could manage people. Julie knows that the ability to build a team is critical to success. She also loves that part of any job.
- While moving around a lot, Julie always has kept in touch with former managers from whom she’s often received sound advice and counsel throughout her career.
- Julie thinks it’s important to know your own “North Star” – your own passion, the skills that you most like to use, and what truly fulfills you. For her, when considering a job, she’s less concerned about the subject matter and more concerned about the challenge, and jobs that allow her to use soft skills like developing people. She has her own filter she runs a job description through and sometimes it’s a job nobody else wants to do and it’s not about job title etc.
- Taking risks is a major principle she shared. She also says big risks may have the biggest payoff. Take the opportunity to do something really different. Remember too to network internally as well as externally. Hanging out with the “guys” is another thing to risk spending time on. To be known, to have a recognized identity can help. Nobody’s immune to a layoff. Being a part of the community,

seeking volunteer leadership roles is another thing to consider. You can meet lots of new people and contribute to something worthwhile at the same time.

- Did you know that your boss can't read your mind?? Her experience says that mind reading is NOT a characteristic of any boss and as a leader herself, she expects people who work with her to let her know what their interests and goals are. You need to advocate for yourself. Speak up and fight for it if it really matters to you.
- Another important principle is "KNOW THYSELF." Socrates said that a long time ago and it's still valid today. Know your strengths, your weak areas, the type environment you thrive in. What boxes a job needs to check off if it's the right one for you, etc. For Julie her "must haves" are a fast-paced environment; totally new challenges with huge potential for growth and learning; the need for her skill set (overseeing complex initiatives, leading teams, logistics and planning); and the opportunity to make a significant impact on the business.
- Confidence is king – or QUEEN – says Julie. It's not arrogance – but rather the ability to demonstrate you believe in yourself. It can make all the difference between you and someone else getting a particular position. Self - confidence needs to be backed up by COMPETENCE. Remember too that as the leader, you absolutely need the team with you. Try listening more, and even count to 10 before you speak when someone's trying to tell you something.
- In many instances, people don't see the big / bigger picture in the role they're in. Make it as big as you can, see what else it can impact. At Coke, her role in the Workplace 2020 project was basically to paint, carpet and do a furniture make-over for the HQ campus. BUT Julie saw it in completely different terms. She envisioned what was really needed was a culture shift through much needed infrastructure and technology improvements. Eventually she convinced the senior leadership to go along with her vision and to up the budget significantly. In effect, Julie UPSIZED her role substantially - did the job extremely well - and as a result, an even bigger role came next.
- Julie actually put the business case together for her current job – a new service to impact Coke's offices around the world. She wanted the job – and - she got the job.

#### Q & A:

About networking: Many opportunities in this city, especially with non-profits and organizations like Leadership ATL. Get business done in many places (she does it while she works out in the gym!) Make yourself visible.

About mentoring: Julie has not had a formal mentoring relationship as such, but has had great support and advice from former managers. Best advice comes from people who know you the best.

About failures: Jobs she didn't get, for which she came in 2<sup>nd</sup>, or pursued several times. But that helped her be remembered! When going for a job, don't be afraid but be prepared, practice. She's also had experiences with bosses with whom she clashed. You can either escape or wait it out.

Handling stress: Girls weekend! Driving fast (she loves those types of cars!) Acupuncture, reading and airplane time when she can just relax and focus on whatever she needs to. Get ready for the week ahead on Sunday night.

Advice for women: Women should not say they're not ready for a job (men would say OH SURE, I can do this!) Jump into the deep end of the pool. In an interview, say I want this job and tell WHY. Have a 90 day plan - what you'd do in the first 90 days. That preparation takes the risk out.

Recommending reading: 'First Ninety Days' – at least read main chapters that apply. When she comes into a new job, she typically meets with all or as many stakeholders as possible in the first week. Next she listens a lot. Ask your manager what his / her goals are and agree on what needs to get done asap. Discipline yourself.

What keeps her up at night: She does a lot of processing while she sleeps. Most issues are related to people. She's made some hasty hiring decisions that have not worked out well. She knows that she should always hire for attitude and passion vs just an expert. If the person fits with the team, that is what matters.