



Women in Leadership Seminar Highlights

February 19, 2016

Topic- January 29: February 19: “Building Trust through Vulnerability” featuring Maggie DeCan, President & COO, HoneyBaked .



Maggie DeCan gave an emotional and powerful talk at Women in Leadership on “Building Trust Through Vulnerability.” Maggie is the Chief Executive Officer and Chief Operations Officer of Honey Baked, formerly known as Honey Baked Ham. Maggie is not just a leader in the business world, but also in the community. She is a strong educational advocate and was honored by the Georgia Diversity Council. Maggie shared stories of her experiences and passed along the wisdom she has gained from her time at Honey Baked and in leadership roles.

Maggie has been with Honey Baked for 13 years. She began her career with Honey Baked in Human Resources and was able to later transfer cross functionally because of a great mentor who pushed her into uncharted professional waters. Maggie transferred to Operations (despite reservations she had about working in Operations), and she worked her way up the ladder to eventually become the Chief Operations Officer. After working in that role for a time, she also assumed the role of Chief Executive Officer.

Maggie emphasized that the reason she loves working at Honey Baked is that first and foremost, it is a values driven company. Maggie stated, “We talk to each other and not about each other, address the right person first, admit when we make mistakes, respect each other’s time and point of view. This is the kind of company I want to work for.”

Maggie stated that her favorite business buzzword is authenticity. She added, “We’re all unique, and only when we’re authentic does all of our uniqueness show.” Maggie believes that while we need to be authentic, that doesn’t mean we can’t always be working on ourselves. We want to have confidence in ourselves and be brave but balance that with humility.

In her experience, Maggie found that another incredibly valuable trait in leaders is resilience. However, you can’t be resilient unless you’ve been down. Resilience is the ability to pick yourself back up when you’re down and keep moving forward.

Maggie spoke multiple times about the impact one book had on her - *Lean In* by Sheryl Sandberg. Maggie stated that two main points have stuck with her from the book, and she wanted to pass those on to us. First, there are stereotypes that people will assume of you just because you're a woman. If a

woman leads in a similar manner to how a man would lead, she will get much less laudable reviews than her male counterpart. Second, however, Maggie pointed out that it does no good to dwell on how you'll be perceived as a female leader. Move on, and do what you can with what you have. If you're acting like something you're not, then it will come across as inauthentic and untrustworthy. So be yourself, but make a point to be the best version of you.

Maggie wrapped up her talk by sharing a moment of authenticity and vulnerability with us. At the Honey Baked Ham 2012 National Conference, Maggie decided to tell the entire group of people who were there (store managers, regional managers, etc.) her personal story. Maggie's story of her childhood is a tragic one, and when she shared her honest story, she quickly gained the support of others. When she wasn't worried about hiding parts of who she was, she became so much more of an effective leader, and authenticity became an integral part of who she is today.

Maggie ended by saying, "I encourage you to make your mess part of your message."

Q&A

How's the best way to help people understand that other than you telling your own story, vulnerability does build trust?

- I think people are starting to talk about vulnerability more and more and understand the value of showing your weaknesses. Leaders need to be more transparent and talk about how they come to their decisions. We get high leadership trust and have a highly engaged workforce. I don't think you can turn it on, but somebody has to go first in building that transparency.

Was your environment always a "we need to talk to each other and not about each other"? And how do we turn our environment into that?

- We didn't always have a talk to each other honestly conversation. Until the day I retire, I'll believe that the biggest challenge in business is having clear and difficult conversations. A lot of Human Resource's job is translating what people are trying to say across levels. If you care about people and want them to succeed, you have to be honest with them. Not telling people how they can grow and be better isn't the kinder path. "Tell people the truth while maintaining their self-esteem" is not an impossible goal to follow.

When it comes to diversity, how does your company foster that within when it comes to maintaining a diverse environment?

- We are on the smallish side with 1,500 employees, and to be honest, we just accept each other. We try to promote from within which adds to a lot of diversity in the culture. We always try to be better about it, and we do make an active effort to always be more diverse.

You spoke on women not acting like men to get ahead in business but what about women who are more naturally more masculine in their traits – what is your advice to them on how to be authentic and not be accused of inauthenticity?

- I don't think it's about being more feminine. Women in the majority tend to behave a certain way, but you still should be authentic. You have to always be striving to be the best version of your authentic self. Sometimes knowing yourself best means understanding when to curve your tendencies and be able to adapt to situations – this is what it means to be a part of your best self.

How do you seek out a mentor and what value does that bring in?

- You have to earn that place as a mentee. Just asking someone to be your mentor doesn't get you a place as a mentee. If you prove yourself as a high potential, then there will be more opportunities to gain a mentor. It is sometimes even better to ask for help or guidance on a small project or skill – mentorship doesn't have to be a lifelong thing.

What do you recommend in order for women to build a more significant network? And what recommendations do you have on being more present?

- The best thing you can do is build support systems that allow you to make choices. Networking isn't about having a safety net to find your next job, it's about building a community to gather new skills and be invested in each other's success. I'm likely not the one to talk about being present, but mindfulness and being where you are is just so much more challenging now. At work, I really have to work at being present. There's just always so much going on, you have to balance that.

How can people who are ego-centric balance humility with self-confidence?

- I think humility is easier for women in some ways. But we do have to deal with that, and the best way to deal with the ego is the balance, absolutely.

What do you look for in hiring?

- One of the things that makes Human Resource people successful in going into Operations is that we understand talent. I have more conviction around the importance of people in talent since I've moved to Operations than when I did in HR. I tend to like quick people – smart people who demonstrate that they understand and can process quickly. Cultural fit is also a huge piece of the equation for me. Sometimes we know right away if someone won't fit, but we try to have honest conversations as people transition.

What were your key takeaways from jumping around various positions?

- I started in Operations Management in retail. I didn't like it, not because of the job but because the buyers were so rude to me. Human Resources was not a planned thing but happened as a result of me being unhappy with my job. What I learned is – it's all about talent. You don't have to know everything about everything if you hire people who are able to exceed in those fields. You want to be able to gain that cross-functional experience to be able to speak of the department languages.

What are the values of Honey Baked?

- When we were developing the values, we decided they needed to be lasting and relevant. These were the four we settled on:
 - Treat Customers Like Gold.
 - Treat Everybody with Respect.
 - Make a Difference, and Have Some Fun.
 - Do the Right Thing.

How were the values developed?

- We did an engagement study in 2010 after we made a bunch of cuts. One of the things they said was that they didn't know the mission of the company. It took us about two weeks per word, and our mission is "Celebrating Life – One Meal at a Time." We developed values first as a leadership team and sent them out. Then we went through our data and worked on refining the values. It was a two-way kind of communication, and we blended the two ways to make them values everyone identified with.