

Women in Leadership Seminar Highlights

April 25th, 2014



Topic: *“Integrity, Respect, and Responsibility – Building a Culture to Exceed Customer and Employee Expectations”* featuring Marci McCarthy, President and CEO of T.E.N. (Tech Exec Networks, Inc.).

Marci McCarthy walked into Women in Leadership with her head held high and a smile on her face the morning of March 25th. Her excitement and good nature led to an insightful conversation around building a company culture to exceed expectations of customers and employees. As Marci took us through her personal and professional journey, it became clear that integrity, respect, and responsibility are three values she lives by.

Marci, a native of Massachusetts, decided to venture to Atlanta after getting stuck in a terrible blizzard in Boston, where she was working at her first job after graduating from college. Marci chose Atlanta because of the lack of snow and the presence of a growing technology industry. After moving to Atlanta, Marci found a job at a company called UserTech and continued her career in technology from there.

Throughout her presentation, Marci attributed her successes to having great mentors in her career. One of these mentors was a woman by the name of Betsy Cagle. Betsy introduced Marci to Women in Technology, a group dedicated to networking and growing women in the technology field. Through this group, Marci met many incredible women who took her under their wing. She learned that her true passion in business was bringing people together, especially through face-to-face recognition programs and executive-oriented programs. After learning so much from these women, Marci chaired the Women in Technology Award and raised money through Women in Technology organizations to fund this award program.

Through her work in technology, Marci became passionate about the Information Security industry. To focus her time on her passions, she decided to launch her own company. T.E.N. is a company that focuses on national technology and security executive networking, marketing and events. The company was launched with Marci as the sole owner, in a down economy. She very proudly stated that in about one and a half years, her company became cash flow-positive and profitable.

Marci built T.E.N. on a foundation of integrity, respect and transparency. She wanted to create a company with the values of bringing people together and working together well. The company has an employee base of mostly women, and Marci said that she believes T.E.N.’s attitude and spirit is what differentiates it from other companies. Her team has a “get it done” spirit, and they have a culture of learning from past mistakes and focusing on future success.

To build a culture that exceeds customer and employee expectations, Marci focused on three things. Integrity is to be a priority for every employee, respect is to be earned and is not guaranteed, and all of her employees must assume personal responsibility.

T.E.N. is faced with unique client situations that challenge their integrity. As a company that works in marketing and events, it is not uncommon for them to work with companies who compete with one another. T.E.N.’s employees are faced with the challenges of keeping information confidential and

creating level playing fields for all of their clients. To maintain integrity in an organization, Marci recommended training your employees and yourself to always take the high road. Rise above a bad situation, move forward, and do the right thing, and this will keep your work life professional. Standing by your principles is always a good idea, but picking your battles is equally important.

Respect is an important topic for Marci and how she runs her business. First and foremost, you must give respect to get respect. Integrity and respect go hand in hand, and you must value honesty, transparency and respect in order to gain respect with your team and customers. Respect is earned through truth. Marci values engaging with clients and being a sounding board for those in her personal and professional life. Being helpful is also a sure sign of respect for her. Connecting people and making the time to help someone is a way to both gain and give respect.

Seeing as Marci runs a mostly female office, it is not surprising that she believes respect through empowerment is important to her office. Marci believes that if you empower your staff with purpose, responsibility, and authority, you are sure to have a collaborative and productive work environment. The T.E.N. office is built on the principle that mistakes can also be empowering. Mistakes are expected, but for them to be empowering, you must learn from them!

Finally, responsibility is crucial to a positive work environment. Marci looks for employees who will accept responsibility and hold others accountable. She stated that there are no victims of circumstance – you make your own bed, and you can either lie in it or change it. It is important in your personal and professional life to follow through on your commitments and promises. Marci said that one of the most important things that made her successful was asking for help. There is never any shame in asking for help; it is a sure fire way to learn and encourage collaboration.

To finish up her presentation, Marci left us with her “Top TEN for Building a Culture to Exceed Expectations.” They are:

- A “no” is never a “no.” Find another way.
- You don’t build a business, you build people, and then people build the business.
- KISS: Keep It Simple Stupid.
- It all comes down to relationships...
- Be authentic.
- Learn fast. Fail quickly. Move on.
- Never judge someone by the opinion of another.
- Find your passion, and then it doesn’t become work.
- The internet is unforgiving. There is no undo button.
- Never look back. If Cinderella went back to pick up her shoe, she wouldn’t have become a princess.
- Bonus: Everything happens for a reason!

Q&A

● **How would you recommend breaking into the conversation with a male oriented group?**

I never have a fear of going up to a group. Introduce yourself and participate in the conversation. Don't have a fear of going up to people. When I've walked up to a group of people at predominately male conferences and such, I've had them ask me to get them coffee, and I actually do it. Then, I ask them what else I can get them and say, "Great, here's my business card." I have fun with it and go along with the ride! I also always wear color when I'm out, then you don't blend in. Stand out in the crowd in a really positive way.

● **I'm curious about how you started your business. Did you have a plan or did you just jump in?**

Well, TEN was my second business I started. I had a partner in a previous business, so I had a good knowledge base of what it meant to start a business. Also, by the time I started TEN, I had started the Information Security Executive of the Year Award. TEN was a napkin idea built from Women in Technology, because it is hard for women to break that glass ceiling. I started noticing that it was the same in the security industry too, hard to break that glass ceiling and hard to get recognition. I modeled the business off of marketing ideas, and I had a great following of people who wanted me to succeed. The idea came from the Women in Technology awards, and I honestly didn't put a business plan together. I started building the idea on a napkin, and it's been a rocket ride since then.

● **What is a professional challenge you've had to deal with?**

I had a parting of ways with my previous business partner. We met through Women in Technology and formed our own company which ended with a lawsuit. It was emotional and we both had equal parts in the business. Unfortunately, we both thought we were right about our ideas for the business, but our ideas didn't work together. In the end, I learned that

- You always have to take the high road
- Don't ever speak negatively in a public setting about another person
- Don't split a business 50/50 because it ends up being very difficult to resolve issues
- Purely legal bylaws may not work for your business – you have to figure out what works for you
- Get everything in writing and in contracts – going through the legal process is very expensive
- And finally, success is the best revenge

● **When you're hiring staff and looking for specific skills, how do you find integrity in the people you hire?**

When you are in the hiring process, you start to pick up on things, like if someone is creating an unfair advantage. If you observe something off, you do need to go with your instinct. Create an environment that meets your business needs.

● **How do you balance life with work? What keeps you up at night?**

To be fair, I didn't have children. I met my husband when we were both consultants. Now, I'm the road warrior and my husband stays home more. The best way I found to balance my work and personal life was to figure out how to pack easily! It saves a lot of time. Also, I try to do things for myself. I get a manicure and pedicure every other week, and I try to take travel and build something into it every time. Have treats along the way!

As far as what keeps me up at night, I actually sleep pretty well. My husband snores, so that may keep me up, but I sleep well because I don't lie to anybody – I don't have that to stress me out!