

Women in Leadership Highlights October 28, 2011



Lisa McVey

Leading the Way for Women in Science, Technology, Engineering & Math (STEM) with Lisa McVey, VP/CIO, McKesson Technology Solutions, and Margaret Loper, Ph.D., Principal Research Scientist, Georgia Tech Research Institute



Margaret Loper, Ph.D.

Lisa McVey and Margaret Loper, Ph.D. are both outstanding leaders in the technology arena and former winners of the Women in Technology Women of the Year Award. Ms. McVey is the VP/CIO at McKesson Technology Solutions, and Dr. Loper is the Principal Research Scientist at Georgia Tech Research Institute (GTRI) and chief scientist of the Information Technology & Telecommunications Laboratory. Both shared experiences in their lives and careers that brought them to where they are today.

Dr. Margaret Loper

Margaret Loper grew as the third of four children – a “middle child.” As a middle child and a “southern girl,” she was accustomed to following directions but wasn’t really taught to stand up for herself. “Not speaking up for myself is something that I had to overcome later in my career,” she explained.

The impetus for Margaret’s interest in engineering was a math teacher who inspired her love of math. When it came time for college, she decided to go to Clemson where she majored in electrical engineering. As an indication of the balance between education, family, and career that would define her early career, Margaret graduated, got married, and started her first job, all within three weeks!

Her first job was with a defense contractor working in missile design. Although she quickly learned that missile design was not where she wanted to be, she did learn that she was interested in simulations (i.e., computational representations of real world scenarios). Margaret decided to pursue a master’s degree in order to learn much more about simulations. She also took a job at the Institute for Simulation and Training at University of Central Florida, where she worked on networking simulations when it was a new concept (e.g., virtual battlefields like World of War Craft). As a kind of pioneer in an emerging technology, Margaret worked for the group that set the standards for network simulations.

After five years at the Institute, Margaret decided to pursue her Ph.D. She knew that if she was going to put her family through that process, it needed to be a high quality program. Fortunately she landed at Georgia Tech, which was almost like returning to her roots in South Carolina. She

also began working at GTRI throughout her Ph.D. process. Six years later, she became “Dr.” Margaret Loper. But completing her doctoral work left her feeling a little lost and looking for someone to tell her what to do next. Everything up to that point had been structured, one level to another; but now nothing was exactly falling in her lap. However, as luck or destiny would have it, after some time, Dr. Loper was offered the role as Chief Scientist.

“I felt this was a great role for me,” she said. “After all, I knew I was very interested in strategy, abstract concepts, and determining what new areas should be researched. The role also gave me the opportunity to teach new researchers how to do research – and teaching is something that I also love.”

Dr. Loper described some of her most meaningful work as the work that she does to get young students – especially girls – interested in science. She encourages girls, who are often not as innately interested in science as boys, that technology is better when girls design it. “We think about how we’re going to use the end product,” she explained. As additional encouragement to girls, she adds, “When you’re involved in technology, you can actually change lives. It’s more than video games!”

Lisa McVey

Ms. McVey began her story by describing how some of her childhood experiences shaped her career. She grew up in Akron, Ohio. Her father was a Senior Vice President of BF Goodrich, and her mother held degrees in Biology and Chemistry. She also had three older brothers. When she was 10 years old, her father suffered a sudden heart attack and passed away. Her mother later remarried, but tragedy struck the family again. On the one-year anniversary of his marriage to Lisa’s mother, her step-father suffered a fatal heart attack.

Lisa said, “Despite the losses she had suffered, my mother was very strong, and she always reminded me that ‘pretty is as pretty does.’” With her mother’s support, Lisa went on to become a successful athlete and played in the orchestra. Later she went to Gettysburg to attend college. Her goal was to be a heart surgeon, but, unfortunately, her mother’s illness precluded Lisa from finishing her degree. Instead, she put her heart and soul into a career.

Lisa started working in healthcare and realized that she could contribute to this field without being a doctor. She also got married and became pregnant. Her marriage was not healthy, though, and she became a single mother. She continued her career working in insurance and successfully worked her way up in the industry.

In time, Lisa met a man who would later become her husband after a long period of dating. Six months after their marriage, her husband was diagnosed with Multiple Myeloma, a rare type of cancer. Sadly, he was told he didn’t have long to live. Lisa moved swiftly to help gain permission for his children to move in with them so they could spend time with their father. During her husband’s illness, Lisa took an individual contributor role to allow her to travel with him for his treatments. Barely 2 ½ years after their marriage, her husband passed away.

“I felt like I lost my husband and his children too, as they went back to live with their mother,” Lisa said. One of the children was the same age she was when she lost her dad, and Lisa was grateful to be able to help him through the experience. Fortunately, she has been able to remain a part of their lives and is friends with their mother.

Lisa continued with her career and that included a stint in I.T. for McKesson. The CIO of the organization has been her champion and when the time was right, she moved into the CIO role of a business unit where she's been for past two years. She happens to be the only female CIO within the 11 business units.

Being a strategic thinker and a strong collaborator, Lisa realized that she and her peers needed to be engaging in more future thinking for the company as a whole. Therefore together they decided to merge the entities and create one McKesson I.T.

In sharing how she made decisions throughout her life and career, Lisa demonstrated her incredible empathy and her constant focus on doing the right thing. Understanding Lisa's leadership style and the life experiences from which she has learned so much makes it clear why she's known as the people's CIO.