

Women in Leadership Seminar Highlights



July 27, 2012

Topic: "Leadership in Support of Our Troops & Our Allies" featuring Shan Cooper, General Manager, Lockheed Martin



Shan Cooper joined us in July to share her leadership experience at Lockheed Martin as well as her career journey. As a leader, she's naturally concerned with what's going on with the defense budget and she spends a lot of time in Washington representing her company. She also expressed concern about an aging workforce. The average age of employees at Lockheed Martin is 55. "Clearly," she said, "with this being the case, workforce development and

knowledge continuity are critical factors that weigh on my mind."

Shan has held many positions at Lockheed Martin. Through a diversity initiative, she started Lockheed Martin's Women's Forum. This was put in place to see why women were not being promoted. Today, three out of four divisions in the corporation are run by women, but she's the only female plant General Manager in a 61 year history.

Background

Shan's father, a pastor, always told her that she was going to college and she would be the first in her family to graduate. Accepted at Emory University (the only place she actually applied), she completed both her undergraduate degree and her MBA there. "Emory," she said, "was a wonderful experience for me. It really opened my eyes to many different things."

After college, Shan began her career in banking, and later, transitioned into a consulting position. Interestingly, throughout her entire career, she never actually interviewed for a position until she was offered her current role. Through networking and following up with contacts, she was able to get each one of her preceding jobs.

One tip she shared regarding job searching is "Don't think the sky is always falling; you just have to learn how to navigate it."

More good advice

Shan also offered some advice to those transitioning to new roles without all the necessary previous experience. First, you must request the opportunity to build certain skills in your current position in order to compete for the job. Once in the role, find people who are smarter than you and put them on your team.

When asked about work-life balance, Shan mentioned that she likes to talk about this subject as it pertains to both men and women. She and her husband, an attorney, decided her career would lead when they married. As a strong partner, "He also tells me when I'm off-balance."

Shan does not carry her Blackberry on Saturdays and her team knows this. "This is a personal choice," she says, "but I believe it's important to set boundaries and stick to them."

Another subject Shan commented on was a "pet peeve" re women in the workplace. "Women sometimes act like they can't do certain things -- while men are quick to agree that they are capable of doing any task asked of them," she said. "Women hesitate more than men, and don't give themselves enough credit. We just need to say, "yes!"

Also important in Shan's career success was her willingness and ability to relocate. "By gaining experience in different areas of the company, I was able to grow and move up in the company," she said. (NOTE: While this is a matter of individual choice, and may not be possible for everyone, it clearly is good advice for anyone who aspires to top leadership roles.)

Q & A & Discussion:

➤ *What is the biggest challenge you have faced in a male-dominated field?*

"You have to have both mentors and coaches. Mentors help you maneuver land mines and coaches help you know how to do things."

"You can't tell smart, grown people what to do. You have to ask questions that help others understand your thought process. You also need to find a 'trusted advisor' to whom you can ask 'stupid' questions. Most people are willing to help you, you just have to pick and choose and take initiative."

"None of the things that will derail your career is in the employee handbook. Again, you need to have a coach and a mentor. For example, I wore a red suit when briefing the board for the first time. Not the best idea – when everyone else had on a black suit! This type of incident may cause people to question one's judgment. Believe me, I quickly learned my lesson on what color suit to wear at board meetings!"

"Re sponsors, your sponsor chooses you. I sponsor people who have a good reputation and get results. A good way to get sponsors is to attend networking events."

"My view is that women do not do a good enough job at mentoring. I am big on supporting other women in the workplace. I write notes to any woman in the company who is promoted to say, 'Congratulations, let me know how I can help you be successful.'"

➤ *How did you get to a great team?*

"Do more listening than talking and get a sense for issues. I respectfully give very direct, hard feedback. When a team member knows that something has happened, I say to them, 'Help me understand how that happened.'"

"I also try to ensure that my team members have our business interests at heart. Equally important, anyone that works for me must have integrity and good judgment."

" I try to tackle issues head on so that they do not fester and I can avoid drama and...some I opt to ignore."

"Talent really does drive your business. Having people smarter than you on your team is the way to go."

"I spend at least four hours each week on the plant floors and eat lunch with the employees. I think it's very important to be visible and upfront."

In closing, Shan offered extra advice to the group that she wishes she had had sooner.

- "Do YOU in a way that you're always comfortable. (In other words, be your authentic self.)"
- "Make sure that your company values align with your personal values."
- "Don't allow other people to label you."
- "Voice your values – speak up when something is wrong."
- "Don't bring emotions to work." (Learn to compartmentalize.)
- "Have fun at work - take work seriously, but not yourself!"