

“Lessons learned on the Way to the Top: Two Top Executives, Two Leadership Journeys”

For the 159th consecutive monthly WIL seminar, we were fortunate to have not one but two amazing and highly accomplished executives sharing their own career stories and leadership insights – in addition to some personal background and individual interests as well. Marvy Moore, Vice President & General Manager, AT&T Mobility for GA & SC and Tracy Garner, Vice President – Internet & Entertainment Field Services – SE Mountain Shores Region could not have been more informative, inspiring or invigorating!!

In an interview format, each was asked to start by describing herself / her personality in a few words. Tracy said, “Loyal to a fault; driven & fun.” Marvy said “servant leader.”

Marvy’s background: Growing up in SC, she was the 4th of 6 children whose mother was a very non-traditional “shade-tree mechanic” and her father, a brick mason. She learned many valuable life lessons from both parents as well as her siblings, especially her sisters. Her parents encouraged her to believe she could do anything and with that mindset, she went on to graduate from college with a degree in English & Speech. While Marvy initially thought she’d become a journalist, and even tried that path for a short while, another path came into focus. She said, “My true career chose me – and I began in marketing in BellSouth.”

Tracy’s background: Tracy grew up in Georgia as the oldest of 3 including a set of twin siblings, a sister and brother. Her dad – Jack Garner, a long time, highly respected Southern Bell district manager - was a huge influence on her. “My dad told me not to focus on being a girl but to go for what I wanted to do.” Sports were another major influence, basketball especially for teamwork. After graduating from college with a degree in Industrial Engineering Technology, Tracy began her career in Southern Bell in Florida where her first boss had this to say: “Glad to have you, Tracy, but I have to tell you that I don’t think women will be successful in technology.” Fortunately, Tracy didn’t let that stop her or affect her performance or her confidence. She even said she learned a lot from that particular individual. Of course, as her career progressed, she’s thought many times about how wrong he was.

Commenting on some of her best learning experiences in many different roles, Marvy pointed out that teamwork is key to success. “I always reach out to others for their knowledge and share my own knowledge. Being able to work well with people has certainly helped me get promoted,” she said. Having recently relocated from Dallas, TX – the headquarters of AT&T – she’s happy to be back in Atlanta. She also shared a little about her phenomenal experience when she was asked to go to Florida to work on the AT&T – Disney client relationship. Clearly Marvy loves a challenge and the positive results she helped to achieve there is still evident today.

Tracy too has had numerous roles across many departments in her 33 years with the company. Referencing some of those roles, she said, “I’m definitely an operations person at heart but I’ve

had staff and field responsibilities – and in both, there’ve been good and bad experiences.” Thinking back to that first job after college, she recalled having to fire someone 2 days into her new job – something no manager should ‘like’ to do. However, Tracy said, “You don’t really fire someone, they fire themselves.” Over the years, she went from being heads down in some non-supervisory positions to becoming a manager of people – first very small teams and later extremely large, multi-state teams. “What I learned is that ultimately, while the bottom-line is important for the business, it’s really all about people – that’s how you get excellent results. Setting expectations and holding people accountable are my focus areas. In most positions I’ve held, men have represented 98% of the workforce but leading is not about being a woman or a man.”

Marvy, a very animated and engaging speaker, talked at length about her personal and leadership experience. “Is there racism and sexism in the workplace and the world at large? Of course there is. As a female and a woman of color, I’ve definitely had some experience with both. Whether at the golf course, or at an event where people assume you’re part of the ‘help’ or not the leader of the team, my reaction is simple. I often handle it with humor and I do NOT receive the message. It only has power if you give it power!” Continuing with more great advice she added, “Women are good at helping others succeed and doing what they need to do – ‘fixing other people’s plate’ as an example, but - we need to ‘fix our own plate too.’”

Like Tracy, Marvy is well known for mentoring others and both have literally mentored thousands during their extensive careers. Marvy says, “Be committed to others AND yourself. Commit yourself to relevancy and development.”

Tracy expanded on this advice. One thing she’d do differently in her career is to start networking much earlier. She’s certainly learned now that building your network inside and outside your company / organization is extremely important and can create opportunities you’d never have otherwise. She also said, “Don’t be afraid to ask for what you want. Men do this very well. Your manager or boss is not a mind-reader! The worst that can happen is to hear that you’re not ready and receive feedback on what you need to do to get ready.”

The interviewer interjected this: “Women need to show confidence. If you don’t have confidence in yourself, how can you expect others to have confidence in you!”

“Speak up,” Marvy said. “In meetings don’t just talk to be talking, but learn to leverage key points off the ideas others make. Add to it, say it in a different way.” She used a great example from the game of golf – a sport both she and Tracy love. “It’s a confidence building game. You can talk yourself into a positive state of mind.” (Marvy then demonstrated how she steps up to the tee, gets ready to swing, and all the while, is ‘thinking’ what a great shot she’s about to make!”)

Asked about life outside of work, both of these incredibly busy and talented women shared their own personal perspective on that subject. Tracy plays a lot of charity golf, works out, enjoys Georgia Tech football and pretty much all sports, loves the beach AND is very supportive

of family members who need or have needed her. While she leads her team in many community engagements, her most recent leadership role was with the Alpha Delta Pi Foundation and the biggest ever fundraiser for scholarships. They raised over \$10M!

As for Marvy, she delighted in talking about her daughter and her son; her recent relocation from Dallas; and her current and past involvement in various community organizations including the Board of Atlanta Technical College, Emory's Winship Cancer Institute, and Women in Golf Foundation. She also loves to travel.

Q & A:

On Balance: Marvy talked about bringing her kids into her workplace at times. She tries to demonstrate her values in her personal and professional life. "I also use the technique of 'blocking time' on my calendar – just like any business meeting – in order to have time to think, digest what's just happened, and to plan. I would tell you also to find 5 things you want to do and go do it." On this question, Tracy added, "My assistant knows that what I put on my calendar for personal time is just as important to honor as business meetings. Another point is that you cannot let everyone take up or ask for all your time. As a leader you need time to process things and to be your best self for the next thing. One commitment I make is to meet weekly with key people on my staff to review what's coming up next week which reduces stress of not being prepared."

On Confidence vs Humility: There's nothing wrong with showing your strength. But balance your humility and confidence; it's not about arrogance. "If you don't share your knowledge, you aren't helping others. That's different from self-promotion," Marvy explained. "Definitely use your access and influence to help others."

On Transitioning to Different Positions / Moving Up the Ladder: Tracy said, "As your job / roles change, you should think about what the next level really means, what's different, especially when it comes to people. As you move up, 75% of your time should be spent on 'people issues.'"

On Giving Feedback: Can be tough of course but people deserve authentic feedback. It's how they grow. Tracy added: "How people lead through difficult circumstances tells you how they really are as a leader even more than the numbers. Make sure people know you care when giving feedback."