

Women in Leadership Seminar November 16, 2007



“Keys to Long Term Success” – featuring Claire Lewis Arnold (aka “Yum”), CEO of Leapfrog Services and one of GA’s most seasoned leaders in high growth business development and strategic planning. Previously, CEO of NCC, one of Ga’s five largest privately held companies; 10 years in marketing with Coca-Cola USA. 2002 Small Business Person of the Year, 2004 Lettie Pate Whitehead Evans Awards for outstanding performance as a corporate director; 2006 YWCA’s Academy of Women Achievers. Currently serves on Bd. of the Atl. Rotary Club, Westminster Schools, the Ga. Conservancy, and Bd. of Visitors of the Fuqua School of Business / Duke University, etc. Join us as a “Yum” shares her secrets of success and continuous development.

Claire “Yum” Arnold

Background: Claire’s career path includes at least 4 companies, 9 different jobs, 6 public boards, and over 20 industry and non-profit boards. What she’s focused on over the years is “getting to really know herself.” Her career has covered big money, marriage, children and mistakes along the way. Each career experience has provided insights into what really suits her better.

She grew up a “farm girl” – father was a VA blueblood, mother was from Berkeley! She lost her father in a plane crash when she was 15. Went on to college, graduating with debt. Math major...because she figured she could make money with it. In 1969 she accepted her first adult job, with C&S Bank. But she realized she was too independent to be a computer programmer. Her next move, an offer from Coca-Cola in long range planning and later, merger and acquisitions but she was one of only a few women in management. The money was good though and she surprised herself with how well she loved business, especially sales. During her tenure, they sent her to a Harvard course and continued to support her development. Over the next 10 years, she would leave Coke and then return to work there again. It was a great learning experience and some of the personality instruments she used there are useful to her today.

On marriage: 35 years with the same man, one she met and received a proposal from 2 weeks later. When they decided to get married, her husband took a job on Wall Street and they lived in NY. He also would later graduate from law school and she took time off for their family. Over time, both Yum and her husband came to realize that they are entrepreneurs... he’s a thinker and she’s a “doer.” It’s a partnership that revolves around

respect...and of course their 3 children together, 2 boys and a girl. One of the key lessons of her life: sacrificing personal life for career IS NOT worth it. Personal relationships are what really matter.

Career experience: Besides Coca-Cola, Yum also worked for Pfizer in NY and found it to be a poor cultural fit for her...was micromanaged and miserable. Moved on rather quickly. Left NY and actually spent a year driving around in her VW, pregnant. Husband finished law school. When she tried to transition to “pure motherhood,” she found it was not entirely satisfying. With her self-described kinetic (ADD-like) personality, Yum needed to work. For a while she commuted with her 1 yr. old from Durham to Atlanta to work with Coke but the bureaucracy of the company got to her.

At this point, she and her husband, Ross, decided to go entrepreneurial and found a company and did a leveraged buy out (LBO). NCC had a huge inventory and receivables. They raised \$30M in loans. Had to learn it on her own but the company became successful and went from \$30M in sales to \$1.2B – including over 2000 K-Mart stores as customers. It was an “MBA” by fire. Became chair of the industry association and neither she nor Ross ever looked back.

While this was indeed a meaningful business experience, she also was able to balance family (had 3rd child). The job was flexible enough for her family responsibilities. Very hard work but had a blast...and did it on her own terms. However, some health issues did emerge and have troubled her ever since.

When she took time off, her kids would ask, “When are you going back to work?” They were actually proud of what she did. She did a lot of introspection.

Along the way, she’s had tremendous experience in the community and various civic organizations. Been recognized numerous times with awards, honors, etc. Joined Young Presidents Organization (YPO) over 20 years ago, good sounding board. They updated each other on business matters as well as family, volunteer and health. Also was part of a women’s investment group for many years. Thinks most of the time, people should be giving to others, not getting something back.

Transition to Leapfrog Services: her current business. She met her now partner and they first wrote their core values. Used low margin lessons in this business and have not outside capital. Fulfills her need for variety. New COO on the team...strong where she’s weak. She focuses on strategy, business development and creativity.

Now she’s very mindful of balance in her life and her employees. She’s stopped beating up on herself, knows her shortcomings.

Self-described strengths: problem solving, strategic vision, thinking in conversation, brainstorming, working.

Feels best when: doing something for someone else; working in a team; in the midst of lot of different things going on; learning new things

Frustrated when: isn't using her inborn competencies and abilities; doing administration work; mired in details; sitting still

Overall insights: when you come to know yourself better, you realize there are no bad choices, just transitions from which you learn. She learned something from each experience, each career choice, each company.

- Nurture bodacious aspirations!
- Be flexible for the unexpected
- Adaptation can be fun
- Find a passion that will mostly likely play to your inborn drivers
- Overanalyzing things as an entrepreneur won't work very well