

Women in Leadership Highlights June 18, 2010



“Turning Adversity into Advantage in Business and Life” – featuring Ralph de la Vega, President & CEO – AT&T Mobility and Consumer Markets – a senior officer in his company and a top corporate leader. Since Oct. 2008, he has led all consumer marketing, sales, content and converged services, customer care and operations for wireless and wired. In prior roles, Ralph served as COO of Cingular Wireless; president – BellSouth Latin America; and president of BellSouth’s Broadband & Internet Services. A Cuban immigrant at the age of 10, Ralph’s life and career are chronicled in his 2009 book entitled “Obstacles Welcome.” Well known for his community service, he currently chairs both Jr. Achievement Worldwide and the Hispanic Initiatives for the Boy Scouts of America. Ralph serves on the GA Research Alliance Bd. and among other honors, was inducted into the Hispanic Scholarship Fund’s prestigious Alumni Hall of Fame and recently one a “Leader of the Year” award with the Georgia Hispanic Chamber of Commerce. He holds engineering and MBA degrees and has earned a “life and leadership degree” by achieving over-the-top results.

Seminar highlights:

- People should never be defined by adversity but instead - by how they react to it.
- Some well-known leaders he cited who inspire him because of how they reacted to adversity: Martin Luther King, Jr., Nelson Mandela, Hillary Clinton, and John McCain.
- One very important lesson he has learned is that you have to make sacrifices in your life, sacrifices for your future. This seems to be a concept that the younger generation doesn’t understand so well.
- His life story is chronicled in his recent book, and through it, he shares the obstacles he faced as a young boy at age 10 when he had to leave everything he’d ever known in his home country of Cuba and arrived in FLA alone. What was supposed to be a few days without his family turned into 4 years! Fast forward to today, it is clear that he learned many valuable lessons from his early life experiences.
- He not only learned to overcome adversity, but in fact, to embrace it, to welcome it and to seek greater challenges and to take risks.

- He defines the following as “pillars for success” (leadership framework) :
 - Dream Big
 - Have a Plan
 - Take Risks
 - Overcome Obstacles
 - Seize Opportunities
- Most important principles in how he leads and what he expects from others:
 - Integrity above all
 - Credibility – do what you say you’re going to do
 - Positive Attitude – a huge multiplier
 - Teamwork – no one succeeds on his/her own
 - Excellence – set high standards and exceed them
 - Vision – inspire others to achieve more than they think they can; look beyond the horizon
- Good advice for career building:
 - Remove the “yes buts” from your career progression. For example if people say, “She’s really terrific but she doesn’t have a degree.” That’s a YES BUT and you can do something about that if you want to succeed in that organization. Find out what your “YES BUTS” are and work to eliminate them.
 - Dream big...and don’t let anyone including yourself put limitations on you. If your organization doesn’t give you the opportunity to live your dream or to strive for your dream, find some place that does.
- Community service – Changing the world:
 - Ralph shared a wonderful story he just heard while attending a meeting of the Jr. Achievement Worldwide board in Montreal. This organization is active in 12 countries around the world and continues to expand. They have implemented 6 “Entrepreneurial Centers” in various countries to date and many of these involve women. The story he shared was about a group of young girls in Nairobi who are inspired to “dream big!” 143 girls have become “journalists” and are putting out a magazine to raise funds to support their mission of more education, etc. They are the poorest of the poor, but they have a dream and they are overcoming the many obstacles in their path. They are also inspiring others to dream big as well – and in so doing, are themselves changing the world around them.