



Women In Leadership Seminar Highlights March 21, 2008

March 21: “Women of Power” – Celebrating Women’s History Month with Marie Mouchet, VP / CIO of Southern Co. Generation & CIO for Southern Nuclear & Southern Power, based in Birmingham, Al. She holds a masters degree in mathematics from GA State University. Internally and externally, Marie is recognized for her leadership and ability to get results across a broad spectrum of responsibilities. Among the honors she’s received: Woman of the Year in Technology Award (2007), Woman of Excellence by B2B Magazine, and in 2004, one of 14 women worldwide selected to participate in IWF’s Leadership Foundation Program.

Seminar Highlights:

Looking back after 27 years:

Marie began her career in 1981 with Southern Co, a regulated utility. Might have been considered by some as “boring” but not to her.

(Marie loves basketball, March “Madness” and all. Shared her career story in terms of a basketball game from the perspective of a “player” on the team (individual contributor in the company) and then as a coach (similar to her role as a leader, someone who guides the team but isn’t “on the court.”)

When she started with the company, she was “the lowest person on the totem pole.” Was hired “off the street” (meaning not from within the company) and after leaving the teaching profession. (Note: she actually took a pay cut to take this job. The reason she did that was because she had two sisters who were in the corporate world and she believed the opportunities were better for her long-term.)

In the short term, however, there were many adjustments, e.g., she didn’t know anyone she’d be working with. Also, in the teaching world, there were all women. In her new position in the world of engineering, there were all men...and Marie. But what excited her were the “little things” – e.g., “I got to have something on my desk (couldn’t do that as a teacher) and I could go to the bathroom any time I wanted!”

She soon got involved in helping with rate cases – preparing to go for a rate increase before the Public Service Commission, the body that regulated utility companies like Georgia Power, etc. In those days, every thing was done by hand – very little computer programs or spreadsheets to help with the regulatory process. She was fortunate to help design computer system to do rate cases.

She worked in the Services Co., which basically provided staff support and other functions for the various operating companies. It was a great opportunity to learn, because she got to know all the different operating companies and worked on their rate cases. She was able to demonstrate that she could learn, and DO. This experience enabled her to learn part of the “core business” and this was invaluable.

Important lesson to all up and coming leaders: “Understand what drives your company; learn the core business. For me in my career, this was a unique experience from some of my peers who did not have the same opportunity early in their careers.

Also, sometimes you move sideways and backwards in your career to learn new things...and that’s ok.”

Another lesson: “You can’t over emphasize the value of building strong relationships, across your company or organization. You also have to deliver or drive results and do a quality job. This is how you establish credibility.”

On being a woman in a male dominated environment: “In FLA. in the ‘80’s there were 4 utility companies and I was the only woman among 20 men. In an important Public Service Commission meeting, when I arrived, one of the men said to my colleague: ‘Good, you brought your secretary and she can take notes.’ That was his assumption and of course, it was wrong! But I didn’t let it bother me - and I didn’t take notes!”

“There were also other situations I had to deal with as a female. I was divorced with a 3 yr. old and I had to travel quite a bit. I would get ‘hit on.’ I didn’t know any better than to think ‘this is just the way it was.’ You’d get referred to as ‘Honey or ‘Darlin.’ At this point in time, I really didn’t have anyone to support me with this situation. Of course times have changed a lot since then.”

Other departments Marie was in included Marketing and Public Relations. Interesting experience in PR. In 1990 she interviewed for the job and got it, and she was 9 months pregnant. She was astonished they gave her the job anyway. She took a 3 mo. leave and came back to many challenges – new baby, new team, new system.... This provided an emotional roller coaster.

Second half of her career was the time of the “deregulated hype” -- Retail world/market: Visiting big retail customers. Went to Wal-Mart HQ in Bentonville, Arkansas. At that time, in systems’ meetings across 5 companies, managers were not rewarded to work together, however with the threat of loss of customers, that changed. Now go to market as Southern Co., a whole entity. Must meet the challenge of competition.

(Back to the basketball game analogy)

As a coach, the leader’s job is all about people – getting and keeping talented people and building the team. Getting the right people in the right job. Coaches / leaders change so you have to teach the team to deliver the results no matter who the coach is.

You have to know your strategy & “game.” Be flexible and dynamic. Be able to lead and coach in crisis. Get them through good times and through tough times.

You give it all you have, continue learning, and you’ll still make mistakes. For men and women, there’s always the struggle with work life balance. “I’ve always been passionate about job I’m in and shared my experience / mentored others.”

Most important life lesson: “Success is NOT the key to a happy life. Being happy = being successful. Being true to yourself and being comfortable with your choices are what you should strive for.”.

As you think about a career, you should try to pursue “what you like.” It is usually a choice for the long-term. There are always risks and challenges. Today’s workforce has 4 generations working at the same time and there are differences there as well. Need to learn what the expectations of each generation are.

On mentoring: Never had a “formal” mentor. Thinks of it as “coaching” or a sounding board opportunity. It is NOT a stepping-stone to next job; it’s more about guidance.

Marie also shared some company “stats” from 1993: 28,000 employees, 5600 females, 1600 professional women (salaried), only 4 women officers. As of 2007: there were about 26,000 employees, 6400 females, 2800 professional women, and 25 female officers. Progress for women has been made.