

Women in Leadership Highlights November 19, 2010



“Leading a Nonprofit: A Great Role for Strong Women” – featuring Donna Buchanan, COO, United Way of Metro ATL & Vikki Millender-Morrow, CEO, Girls, Inc. Donna joined UW in 2008 after completing a highly successful 15 year tenure as president of JA of GA. Her stellar nonprofit career includes numerous committees and boards and she received significant recognition for her leadership, e.g., the Charles R. Hook Award, the highest national JA award presented. Vikki is also a recognized leadership role model, and began her professional career with an EE degree and a Masters in Public and Private Mgmt. She’s a recent graduate of the Diversity Leadership Academy. Prior to joining Girls, Inc. in January 2008, she served on the board and did fundraising for various nonprofit organizations in Atlanta. Both Donna and Vikki were nominated for Turknett’s Leadership Character Award in the nonprofit category.

From remarks by Donna Buchanan:

- Believes in the Woody Allen adage that “80% of life is showing up!”
- In her life and career, there’s been 6 major shifts but only 1 was planned. “You have to have the guts to seize the opportunity – gently but firmly.”
- When considering a job, be sure you can be true to your values.
- Her career path took a circuitous route from her first job with Jr. Achievement, to Jack Morton, and then back to JA – where she was president here in Atlanta for 14½ years.
- She had an “aha” experience about 10 years ago at which time she came to realize just how important your employees are. After that, she turned her attention to “listening more and trying to help them do what they needed to do...”
- Positivity matters...in everything that you do. In hiring, a person with great credentials but who doesn’t have positivity will lag the one with lesser credentials but who blows positivity out of the water! And, positivity breeds positivity.
- Over the years, she’s also learned to truly value diversity, not just gender, race/ethnicity, etc.—but diversity of experience, of thought, of perspective, etc. For her, this is a core strength of any successful leadership team.
- Have a plan of action; and don’t take too much time deciding what to do. Do it. Equally important is deciding what NOT to do.
- Spend time with problems, pay attention to what’s not going well and let your good talent contribute to the solution.
- Regarding succession planning, you may not go deep enough. People at all levels need attention but not everyone wants what you think they do (not the same as you). People have different priorities. She often uses testing techniques to figure some of this out.
- When it came time to make a transition from JA, the decision was made while she was on a train in Europe. The time was just right. She had much peace of mind about the next president of JA and she knew she could turn over the reigns to him.
- When the opportunity to be COO at UWMA came along, she met with the CEO and felt that this was a strategic move for her and “good alignment.”



- Feels a sense of urgency about the goals of the organization and knows you have to work hard, stay fresh, and stick to the mission.

From remarks by Vikki Morrow:

- First, Vikki credited Donna's mentorship for helping her along in her career.
- Coming from many years in the corporate world, and trained as an electrical engineer, the transition to the non profit world was HUGE.
- She knew however that EE wasn't necessarily for her...that she liked people more than the process of engineering.
- What she has is a real curiosity about all departments in an organization. Learned about them, and learned different skills as well.
- Working for a non profit is like being an entrepreneur...day to day challenge for funding and meeting expectations; requires calculated risk-taking.
- Also believes that women in general must be comfortable with "tooting their own horns" – being confident.
- Women sometimes can be very hard on/very critical of other women and thinks we need to be more encouraging and supportive.
- As a wife and mother of 2 boys, she's well aware of the need to "balance" life; but, for her, clearly being MOM is #1 priority and she works everything else around this. Knows you can "have it all, but not all at the same time."
- While in the corporate world, her focus was predominantly internal with very little outside involvement. But knows now how very important networking is, building and developing relationships outside your own organization. Even introverts can learn to do this, and will definitely benefit.
- What she loves: helping other women and girls; reaching back and up; giving in both directions.
- Best advice for leaders: be authentic...don't over-try to fit in, but navigate through the culture.
- "Life's a journey...you'll need to reinvent yourself and probably your career along the way."
- When she joined Girls, Inc, it was a scary time from an economic standpoint...Had never done fundraising and couldn't have been a more difficult time to learn! But times like that test what you're made of...and faith can get you through it.
- Besides positivity that Donna mentioned, believes tenacity is another critical attitude.



Overall comments:

- Mentoring can be formal or informal...and it doesn't have to be a defined relationship. Mentors come at different times in your career and on your path; you also learn from "mentees" by listening.
- Make decisions from your gut or through analysis? Probably some of both but you can also over analyze when you just need to step away, think, and then go for it. Failure is ok in some circumstances and we all learn from mistakes. However in most non profits serious failures can be fatal so you have to use good judgment when "allowing someone to fail" as part of the learning and developing process.
- If you or your staff thinks the mission is more important than the fundraising, just remember; NO \$\$\$ NO MISSION.