

Women In Leadership Highlights

July 24, 2009



“Bumps, Turns, and Open Highway: The Road to Success” – a panel featuring two of Atlanta’s top women executives, Terry Trout, VP – Customer Experience with Cbeyond and Mary Ann Green, former VP Airline Operations Systems for Delta Technology. Selected as WIT’s 2007 Woman of the Year and a “Top 25 Power Woman,” Terry has had a stellar career of more than 25 years. She founded Cbeyond’s Women’s Network and holds board positions at The Sullivan Ctr. and with WIT. Mary Ann Green is equally distinguished as a finalist for the 2008 WIT/WOTY Award, president of Delta’s Women’s Employee Network, member of the board of trustees of Girls Inc. and an active member of WIT.

Key insights and learning points from Terry Trout:

- Grew up the oldest of five children in a military family and learned valuable lessons from that experience, e.g., in 9 elementary schools and learned to make the most of each new situation
 - Learned also to embrace where you are
 - To respect and embrace diversity
 - To raise your hand (speak up, don’t be afraid, etc)
- Parents also taught her to “see beyond herself” and that you can “defy the odds
- Life journey has developed her resilience as there have been many joys and opportunities along with heartbreak and disappointments. Among her challenges have been a divorce and brain surgery. She survived both and is stronger for it.
- Throughout her career in different companies and roles, she’s always valued participation and the opportunity to contribute more than the money or the title she held
- Believes there are “seasons for our lives”
- Can be described as a leader who is “brutal on process but gentle on people”
Editorial NOTE: others who know her would say she’s a great example of Turknett’s Leadership Character Model, i.e. leader whose foundation is Integrity, and who balances both the people side of leadership (Respect) and the bottom-line results side of leadership (Responsibility).
- Interesting fact: Terry is a twin, her twin sister is a doctor, and both of them have twin daughters! Imagine 6 powerful females together! Terry is very proud of her daughters who have just graduated from college and are about to become independent women on their own career and personal paths.
- TOP 5 lessons from her life and career so far:
 1. Do not be afraid to say YES to opportunities and new challenges
 2. Set your own goals including some that may seem unreasonable or unattainable
 3. Understand that your strengths if overplayed can become weaknesses (e.g., too much confidence can become a big ego etc)

4. Serving others is the benefit of being a leader and being a citizen of the community and the world
5. Faith is the underpinning of everything and being a servant leader comes straight from her faith and from scripture

Key insights and learn points from Mary Ann Green:

- Grew up with 4 siblings in a wonderful, values-centered family. Calls her life “charmed”
- Graduated with BA in Psychology and really didn’t have an immediate game plan. Serendipitously ended up in Stowe, VT at the Trapp Family Lodge where she was offered a job as a waitress and worked there for a year.
- Next she chose to apply with Delta Air Lines and was hired in Boston in reservation sales. Later got into Computer Services for which she had no particular background but found it challenging, interesting, and even intriguing.
- For this part of her career, she was more family focused (had married and 2 children) and not worried about promotions as much as work-life balance.
- When her children were older, she began to look at ways to differentiate herself in her work life, tried to think broadly, and not just about her own department but across the company
- Tried to look at herself the way others saw her, to become more self aware, moving from “doing” to “leading” and shifted her thinking from developing herself to developing others; also knew the importance of building a team in which the skills of others complimented her own skills (e.g., she knew financial acumen was not her strength so she sought that of others on her team)
- Went with Worldspan “spin-off” because it fit her life best at that point in time.
- Later asked for job back at Delta and got it. Found herself working harder than her team and realized she needed to learn to delegate. Continued to learn about her own weaknesses and worked on those but also led with her strengths.
- Believes in taking care of your employees, showing empathy etc. “Talent retention begins much earlier than at the last minute.”
- Later when Delta and its leaders faced their greatest challenge – Bankruptcy – many employees remained loyal because of the investment made in them over the years. During this experience she also learned that you cannot let yourself be paralyzed by fear of what might happen or by chaos. The challenge is continuous improvement and maintaining focus. Bankruptcy has an emotional side. Some cultural issues (some people blamed themselves for what happened to the company while others accepted no blame at all.) For others, it became an energizing time.
- Best advice: set simple, clear goals and constantly follow-up on those goals.

Q & A:

How do you motivate those who are not “go-getters” on your team?

Answer: (Terry) Have one on one discussions with each person on the team. Make sure the objectives are clear and that expectations are also clear. “Seek first to understand.”

Provide encouragement but ask what have they done, what haven't they done, etc.
Expose them to as many good examples of leadership as possible.

Do women always have to be the "peacemakers" in a male dominated organization?

Ans: It's true that women often approach situations differently. Etc

Any regrets in your careers?

Ans: (Terry) Not so much regrets but could have learned to "dial it back" sooner (can be very intense). (Mary Ann) Might have made distinction earlier on job vs. career.

How do you find a mentor?

Ans. (Terry) Doesn't necessarily like the word mentor, many different views and approaches. Believes you can share and get advice and wisdom from many people who are not "mentors" per se, e.g., over coffee, lunch or a simple conversation. Community involvement can provide opportunities as well.

Is there a benefit to one's career to staying in one function vs. moving around in many different departments for functions?

Ans: That depends...it can be very broadening to have different perspectives and to learn different functions. It can also be good to become an expert. It is important in general to learn as much as you possibly can about the business or company that you're in. You need to know how it comes together for your customers etc. If you are ambitious and perhaps think you want to be in top management or the "C suite," you need to consider what it takes to get those type positions, e.g., line assignments, P&L responsibilities, etc. Different companies look for different types of experience to move up.