

Women in Leadership Seminar Highlights May 23, 2008



Marcia G. Taylor

Topic: “A Conversation with Georgia’s #1 Woman Business Owner”

(Panel featuring Marcia Taylor, President/CEO/Chairman, Bennett International Group; Lynette Alt, Jodi Penn, & Regina Auletta – three members of her leadership team)

Marcia G. Taylor leads Bennett International Group, LLC, a marketing company for its affiliated transportation companies. BIG is an acknowledged leader in the trucking/transportation industry and a premiere provider of logistics, transportation and supply chain solutions to government contractors and commercial businesses for over 30 years. Mrs. Taylor has earned numerous awards and recognition including #1 Woman Owned Business by Atlanta Business Chronicle; #2 Diversity Owned Business in GA; #5 top Woman Owned Business in the US by Women’s Enterprise Magazine. Most recently, the north tower of the Henry County Medical Center was named the Marcia Taylor Women’s Center in honor of Marcia Taylor.

Marcia: Divorced and with 3 small children, Marcia moved to GA and went to work for a company called George Bennett Trucking Co. based in McDonough. There she met and subsequently married her second husband, J.D., and together they bought the business from Mr. Bennett in 1974 with a \$500 investment. Initially, it was only 15 trucks, 30 trailers, and 2 contracts. It was hard to find a bank to provide financing and they had very little capital at the outset. “In order to cover payroll, we would relay billing to our customers, pick up a check, and then we would be able to make payroll that week!”

By 1981, Regina had joined the company and they were up to about 6 or 7 employees plus 200-250 trucks. While the business was growing, challenges were always present, e.g., deregulation. “We realized our business model had to change.”

“One of the things we realized was the importance of really listening to our customers. If we listened, they would tell us exactly what they needed. And then, we would respond,

‘Yes, we can do that.’ This is how we created specialty niches for our business over the years – and continued to expand.”

One of the “highs” for the business was when they had their first \$1M in revenue. The lowest point was clearly when J.D. passed away unexpectedly. At this point Marcia wasn’t sure about continuing on with the business, but with good people working with her, and with some good support and guidance from outsiders – AND needing to provide for her family, she decided to stick with it.

“Later, as my children grew up, each of them got involved in running the business. David, my oldest son, likes to start new divisions and was instrumental in taking us international. We now have agents throughout the world and our Drive-Away division is the largest non union business of its kind.”

“But our goal was never to be the largest enterprise, but rather, to be the best in quality and service.”

“What really makes BIG successful is our culture and our people. We are not only a family owned business, we are a business made up of many families. We truly care about making this a good place to work for each of them. We also are serious about our core values including integrity, learning and development, and a spiritual commitment.”

Currently Bennett International Group includes 6 major divisions, over 600 total employees, and over 3000 contract associates.

Regina Auletta – VP / on the Board of BIG: She began as a clerk with Marcia and J.D. when she was 19. She has learned every job she has ever had through trial and error. “Marcia and J.D. believed in me and allowed me to grow with the business...and to blossom. We’ve always worked hard, but also had fun, and it’s never been static. There have been many opportunities to learn...and all along the way, Marcia’s encouragement and leadership have made the difference.”

“Marcia truly cares about all employees as human beings...it’s not just about the bottom-line or the money. Her caring manner and leadership style have filtered down in the organization and shaped the culture. This is how she builds strength in individuals and for the organization. She believes in promoting from within and helping people find the niche where they can contribute.”

Jodi Penn, VP Talent Management: Jodi joined BIG 4 ½ years ago after leaving Delta Air Lines and a successful career there. As a single mom raising 2 boys, she left Delta and planned to consult. She was introduced to Bennett by a mentor and was immediately “intrigued.” She looked Bennett up on the web, saw there was a woman CEO and thought it was worth checking out, especially because of what appeared to be a strong family type culture, solid values, etc.

“My interview with Marcia was much more of a conversation than an interview...and I knew this was a leader who spoke from her heart. I was also struck with the newsletter I

had read while waiting to see Marcia, the only corporate newsletter I had ever seen that was signed, ‘I love you all, Marcia.’”

“I had no idea when I started what it would be like to work in a family owned, woman run enterprise...although I knew it would be very different from the large corporate world I had come from. My primary observations are that everyone in the company loves and respects Marcia and ultimately, would walk on hot stones for her. Nobody seems to want to leave. We also look after our people, providing training and development and many opportunities to contribute.”

Lynette Alt, VP of Marketing and President of Alternative Logistics, LLC: Lynette is Marcia’s daughter and has been with the company “full time” for 23 years, since she finished college. She majored in accounting and business administration, but didn’t think that really matched her personality. Lynette is the youngest of Marcia’s 3 off-springs. “To be honest one of the challenges I’ve had is having my brothers want to take care of me or take care of areas of my responsibility. Of course, there’s a little sibling rivalry but basically, we’re family. We may disagree but when we leave the board room, we’re one team. We support each other and look out for each other.”

Working in marketing for the company, Lynette has helped to brand the corporation and to leverage the benefits of being a woman-owned business – the #1 WOB in Atlanta and is GA. “There are certainly advantages of being a certified WOB and we belong to WBENC (Women’s Business Enterprise National Council).”

Q&A: Have you been able to document your healthcare cost reductions based on your positive, caring and family friendly environment and culture?

ANS: No but that’s a great idea! We can do that!

Q: Have you considered going public?

A: We prefer to stay private. Public companies are required to answer to many different stakeholders, and the bottom-line is mainly the focus of attention. We prefer to maintain our autonomy, make our own decision, and be able to keep our values while making a profit.

Q: Has being a woman-owned business ever been a disadvantage?

A: Yes, Maybe...in the early days, some customers perhaps didn’t take us as seriously because we were woman-owned, but this isn’t the case now.

Q: What’s the best advice you can give for starting a family run business?

A: Being able to see your children every day ...even though there are clearly challenges along the way. Of course, our conversation almost always revolves around the business! At times it’s difficult to be the mother and the CEO...particularly with your sons...requires more boundaries. We have quarterly family meetings where we air our differences, regroup and recommit. We may disagree, but when we leave, we stand back to back and support each other. We also are building something for the next generation and that keeps us focused.

Q: What's been your greatest lesson in business?

A: My greatest life lesson has been learning to balance, trying not to be a Type A personality. Incorporating some relaxation is a good thing...plus having a strong faith has helped. A few years ago, we acquired a ranch in Wyoming and every Christmas, we all go there as an extended family to enjoy the season and to spend time just as a family.

Q: How did you transition after losing your husband?

A: I had great people and a great mentor and role model to work with.

Q: What programs / processes contribute to your unique culture?

A: Generally, the environment starts with how we treat our drivers. We show them we appreciate and respect them. We have Drivers Appreciation Week, a relief fund for emergencies, as well as an employee relief fund - among other things. We also do community work together and support several community causes.

Final advice: Embrace change; mentor others; listen to your customers.