



Women in Leadership Seminar Highlights

February 17, 2017

Topic: “From CNN to Community and Global Activism: Leading from My Heart”



Susan Grant, former EVP of CNN News Services, and current Chair of Heifer International and Vice Chair of the Board of Trustees of Morehouse School of Medicine, was our featured speaker. What an amazing leader and humanitarian!

To say that she “inspired, informed and invigorated” the attendees would be a major understatement. Her intellect, wit and wisdom were openly reflected in all of her remarks and below are just some key highlights and “take-aways” from her life and leadership journey.

Susan began her remarks by asking the audience self-reflecting questions, e.g., “What brings you joy? When are you your best self? “

For herself, she answered “being purposeful, curious, adventurous, learning new things, seeing people not usually seen, being conscious and aware, being intentional on issues of social and racial justice - AND - being an integrated leader (mentoring, coaching and growing relationships.”)

As one of the most authentic and down to earth leaders we’ve ever had speak at WIL, Susan freely shared many of her own personal and career experiences – the good and the not so good.

She grew up in Chicago, the oldest of three children with activist parents who “opened the world to her.” At age 14 she got a job in a deli where she was a waitress. She said, “I learned more there than I learned anywhere else about class and privilege. It was hard work but it made me humble and human.”

When she finished high school, she worked a variety of jobs while helping to put herself through Vassar (chosen mainly because it was far enough away from home and she was exposed to different people and different cultures.) She also met her first husband, helped put him through law school, and ended up moving to Atlanta for his work. Even with an English degree from Vassar, Susan considered herself “unhirable” so she got a job as a temp which later turned into a secretarial position at - of all places - Turner Broadcasting.

Proving that any position in an organization can be pivotal and a learning opportunity, Susan said that that early experience gave her a perspective of various aspects of the corporate world because she was typing up major business plans!

In the late 70's and early 80's, Susan was fortunate to be part of CNN's beginning where she was in various early stage roles including direct sales of CNN to 'mom and pop' cable operators as well as a marketing and PR positions. "It was all new and novel and mission driven," she said, "and I felt like I had fallen into something good."

Susan decided to leave Turner in '85 and to try something else: working for a major film studio with headquarters on the west coast; she remained in Atlanta. After ten years, she was recruited back to Turner and took a job saving a failing division in 1994. (It was actually the #2 position reporting to the man who was leading the failing division. Interesting opportunity!)

In 1996 Turner merged with Time Warner and Susan began to pitch her own division, CNN News Services – a complete business with its own P&L. She finally sold her pitch and for a while, no one noticed that she didn't have a boss - she wasn't reporting to anyone! While that ultimately changed, her career trajectory continued as well as her significant impact.

Susan's portfolio of businesses expanded to include CNN Digital, CNNMoney, CNN Newsource Sales, CNNImageSource, the CNN Library, CNN Student News, and CNN Business Operations. She served as CNN's representative on the Board of Internet Broadcasting Systems from '05 through its sale to Nexstar in 2014. For her leadership in off-air management, the Radio and Television News Directors Foundation honored her with its First Amendment Service Award in 2008. Susan also was inducted into the *Womenetics* POW! Award Hall of Fame in 2013 for her many contributions to support women's advancement and leadership.

(FYI - Susan didn't share the above accomplishments in her remarks, but rather those were added from her resume.)

However what Susan did share with the WIL audience were these four "leading from your heart" principles:

1. Clarity: Be clear about who you are and who you choose to be at your core.
2. Compassion: Be good to yourself and to others.
3. Courage: See what is, don't just follow or pursue the "shoulds."
4. Faith: Hold strong to your beliefs, who you choose to be and how you live your life.