

## **WIL Highlights for Katerina Taylor**

**Oct. 26, 2018**

Katerina Taylor, President/CEO of the DeKalb County Chamber of Commerce, has a lot of life, professional and leadership experience for someone so young. In her remarks for this month's seminar entitled, "Lessons Learned That May Not be True – Never Stop Learning" she definitely impressed and inspired the audience with her wisdom and authenticity.

Self-described as a bit "weird and crazy," Katerina began her remarks letting the audience know she's not afraid to share personal and professional perspectives that may not be the norm for everyone – and that's ok. Growing up in Kansas in a family of 9 children, she said, "I learned a valuable at the age of 6." Her story was about how she took money from home without her parents' knowledge to provide milk for her classmates who couldn't afford \$2 per week for their milk. When the truth came out, Katerina was disciplined for "stealing" money her father brought home from his grocery store in a brown paper bag, but - she also made her parents proud to see her respond to the needs of others. Later in her professional life, she realized another valuable lesson.

- 1. Business has to be engaged in education and help deliver on specific needs. The future workforce depends on it.**

Working in her father's grocery store also provided Katerina with her first entrepreneurial experience. She put a piece of candy in a balloon and charged customers a nickel to pop the balloon. While she made a small profit (with no overhead), she also learned a lesson she would have to unlearn.

- 2. Not true: "Men are better at business than women." Although she might have been exposed to this way of thinking early on, Katerina knows that women are just as capable as men in the business arena.**

Another lesson from her childhood came when Katerina was 9 years old. A classmate offered to pay her if she'd write three stories for him. "I didn't get this in writing," she said, "but I trusted he'd deliver on his commitment. However, when I delivered on my end of the deal, instead of paying me, he tried to give me BUBBLEGUM!" Here's the next lesson:

- 3. Negotiate. We are worth more than BUBBLEGUM!**

**Another early life admonition for Katerina was one we've all heard: don't pick up strangers. When she was a teenager, and had her driver's license, her parents expected her to follow that principle. But one particular day, Katerina saw an older woman walking alone and carrying a heavy load of groceries. Without hesitation, she stopped, offered the woman a ride and drove her home. This set in motion a lesson she still believes in today.**

- 4. Engage and connect so the world is a little less full of strangers.**

### Other key lessons and take-aways from Katerina:

5. Being a twin, actually a “mirror twin,” **she had to unlearn the idea of always being the same. In other words, she had to learn – apart from her sister – to be her own person, to be an individual.** That included leaving Texas after she graduated from college, and moving to Georgia where she had no family and no contacts.
6. Katerina spent 9 years in leadership roles with SunTrust. During that time she began to get involved in the ATL community, starting with United Way. **“I learned that sometimes you have to take leadership - step up to a challenge.** I stepped up to chair the Young Professional organization and held that position for 2 years.”
7. As a relatively young business leader, **sometimes people say “you have a lot to learn.” Katerina didn’t and doesn’t disagree and she continues to learn in order to become the best leader she can be.**
8. **Lesson to unlearn: “You can prepare for anything.” Katerina believes you can certainly prepare yourself but you can’t always know what’s coming.** You need to build confidence, “build your own mold” as a leader, and understand your strengths and your shortcomings.
9. She also talked about **“manufacturing confidence” to build yourself up when you feel like a light weight,** perhaps in the presence of more seasoned leaders. Her current role puts her in a very male dominated environment, so she must understand her own power and use it.
10. Responding to a question from an attendee about **helping women get recognized,** Katerina said that volunteering, engaging in the community, serving on boards and demonstrating your commitment to a mission or organization are certainly good ways to build your profile and show your value.
11. **Ways she stays energized:** rest on the weekend; delegate when she can; use the CALM app; and utilize her Apple watch to remind her to take “breathe” breaks! “Lastly,” Katerina pointed out, “I had to learn that I don’t have to be everywhere or do everything possible thing.” In other words, prioritize in order not to burn out.