

WIL Highlights

December 14, 2018

The last program of the year (#187) featured the founder and host of Turknett's Women in Leadership seminar series, Susan Hitchcock, on the topic of "Resilience, Risk & Reward: Turning Challenges into Opportunities." Sharing her own story, both personal and professional, she provided reflections and insights from over five decades of leadership experience and even more life experience.

Susan began with an overview of her professional experience which includes:

- 25 years corporate experience with Southern Bell / BellSouth; 15 different management and leadership roles, both line and staff; in the highly technical and male-dominated Network Operations organization where she spent most of her career, she was the first female leader in some positions and/or the only female leader in many meetings in a department of over 40,000 employees; she was also (proudly) among the generation of women leaders who "cracked" the glass ceiling.
- Almost 25 years in consulting, talent management and leadership development; helped to grow and broaden the client base, reputation and revenue of TLG; influenced the focus on women's advancement and development through coaching programs and monthly WIL seminars (over 15 ½ years of WIL seminar); helped launch and sustain TLG's prestigious Leadership Character Awards in ATL (13th event held in Oct. 2018.)
- Research, writing and speaking about women's advancement / women's leadership / women's professional progress including over 60 profiles (SHEroes) about women of achievement across various sectors; Chapter 26 in the book entitled "The Female Leader: Empowerment, Passion & Power."
- Multiple leadership roles on community boards supporting women's career advancement and other issues (e.g., adult literacy) as well as serving as president of the Agnes Scott Alumnae Association and member of the Board of Trustees.
- Recognition by her peers for contributions to and support of women's (and girls') leadership and career advancement.

Another topic of importance to Susan: GRATITUDE. She thanked some of the key people – both personal and professional – who have supported her in her life and career. She stated that "the greatest reward to any leader is to see those we've mentored or helped in their careers go on to surpass us, to be successful and to in turn, mentor and support others."

An overarching theme for Susan is that "life is 10% what happens to you and 90% how you respond." On the subject of RESILIENCE, a characteristic she uses to describe herself, she referred to a recent Forbes' article about author and futurist, Andrew Zolli. In his book, *Resilience: Why Things Bounce Back*, he says, "Resilience is the ability of people, communities, and systems to maintain their core purpose and integrity among unforeseen shock and

surprises. It's a dynamic combination of optimism, creativity and confidence which together empowers one to reappraise situations and regulation emotions."

Zolli goes on to say that "Resilience = Hardiness + Grit + Perseverance. It also builds courage and courage is like a muscle. It needs to be exercised every day. It helps fuel grit."

Sharing some difficult and sometimes emotional experiences from her family background and early upbringing, Susan explained how her personal resilience was tested and how it has developed. Before age 18 her life wasn't always happy or "ideal" but it definitely changed for the better when she was accepted at Agnes Scott College (ASC) in Decatur, GA – receiving both an academic scholarship and a work scholarship.

Attending and graduating from ASC clearly influenced her life – including getting her first summer job with Southern Bell. This ultimately turned into her first management position with the same company when she graduated! Expressing her gratitude to the college, Susan said ASC introduced her to what it means to a leader; increased her self-confidence; and prepared her for future success in the male dominated business world.

Showing her "Scottie pride" with a current update on Agnes Scott, Susan couldn't help sharing a few 2018 bragging points: #1 Most Innovative Liberal Arts College in the country and #2 Best Undergraduate Teaching (by U.S. News & World Report.) This year the college also welcomed a new president and enrolled the largest first year class in the history of the college!!

Susan went on to share five key lessons learned from her business career - particularly from her early corporate experience and specifically where resilience and risks were involved.

- **Lead authentically.** Susan talked about maintaining your integrity no matter what and earning respect for doing so. She also discussed not trying to emulate others when their style of leadership is not true to who you are.
- **Where discrimination exists, tackle it.** Examples included opportunities Susan had to influence promotional opportunities for women and minorities; standing up for pay inequities for women managers and leaders; and hiring a gay male to be her executive assistant contrary to the prevailing standard at that time.
- **Say YES to "stretch" opportunities (and even ASK for them.)** Susan said she looked at new assignments as learning opportunities, even when she didn't have all the skills and background. She wasn't an engineer and yet she became a respected leader and learned to build successful teams in a highly technical department. Taking risks is important to career advancement.
- **Manage your energy or you'll burn out.** Susan admitted this was an area in which she failed at times, not always taking care of herself. In the high pressure, high demand work world, in addition to our personal lives, family expectations, etc., personal health and well-being is critical. Burn out is a real risk at some point IF you don't take time to refresh and manage stress.

- **Listen to your inner voice.** Define success for yourself. Know what's right and what's not for you, and pay attention to your own instincts, intuition, conscience or whatever you call your inner voice. Other factors will of course affect your decisions but often the answers come from within.

In a fun but also impactful PPT presentation, Susan then shared her "most unique leadership and teambuilding experience" from her first career. "The Great Flint River RAMBO Adventure" took place after Susan was promoted to district manager and was sent to an outdoor / experiential development program for 3 days. She was the only female with 19 of the firm's top executives! The conditions were rather primitive – she was in the river much of the time, slept in a tent with 5 men, and wore the same clothes throughout the experience because there was no privacy at all, not even a bathroom!

Despite the challenges she encountered on this adventure, the lessons she learned from that single experience had a profound and very positive effect on her overall career. "I survived, adapted, earned credibility, built trust, and made an impact," she said.

Other lessons she and her fellow participants learned included humility and vulnerability, courage and perseverance, and interdependence. Later, more female leaders were included in development programs; there was increased recognition of the different strengths that women bring to the table; and there was stronger commitment to diversity in leadership across the board.

Near the end of her remarks, Susan focused on the major transition she made – at the age of 47 - from the corporate world to working with Lyn and Bob Turknnett. While their working together was not pre-planned, Susan said, "It was meant to be and has been the most rewarding experience and relationship I could have ever asked for." Being part of the TLG's growth over two decades, learning from two highly respected leaders like Bob and Lyn, and seeing their impact on hundreds of leaders through the Leadership Character Model they created - Susan said all of these things are the result of taking a risk that turned into a tremendous reward.

Susan concluded her remarks with one final summary: her "7 C's of Success"

COMPETENCE, COMMITMENT, CONFIDENCE, CONNECTIONS, COURAGE, CREDIBILITY AND - last but most important of all - CHARACTER.

Susan's last slide featured a little girl in a Super Girl costume entitled "Resilience Personified." It was a vivid reminder that "life is 10% what happens to you and 90% how you respond."