



## WIL Highlights October 18, 2019

### **“One Entrepreneur’s Story: Cooking Up Trust, Teamwork and Long-Term Success” featuring Mary S. Moore, Founder/CEO, The Cook’s Warehouse**

**Summary:** To be voted “one of the Most Admired CEOs” in Atlanta, you would expect (hope) the person is a strong leader, has a collaborative management style, builds good teams, is a good listener, has a deep industry knowledge along with sound business acumen, and inspires others by her/his commitment to helping others and providing excellent service. Well, Mary Moore meets and clearly exceeds every criteria. As she shared her personal and professional journey from 3 year old cook on her family’s farm to successful entrepreneur / nationally recognized expert in the gourmet cooking field, the audience was mesmerized by her passion, her warmth and her authenticity.

Mary made us all believers in what can be accomplished when you are motivated by passion - when you won’t take no for an answer; when you’re not afraid of hard work and starting at the bottom; when you understand the importance of long-term relationships and the willingness of others to help you when you ask; and when you stop worrying about perfection. It’s actually easy to understand why Mary is so successful, has grown her business even beyond her own expectations, and is widely respected by fellow entrepreneurs – from CEOs and presidents to community leaders.

To top it off, Mary displays a wonderful sense of humor, doesn’t mind showing her vulnerability, and is just the kind of role model that female (and male) leaders need to emulate. It’s been said she’s “one of a kind” - and that’s not just in the kitchen!

#### **Background – Personal & Professional:**

- Mary grew up in GA on her family’s farm, surrounded by her parents, two older brothers and other relatives. Perhaps her destiny was determined as a 3 year old learning to cook with her mother but she was also part of the planting, harvesting, canning and raising chickens’ process.
- Playing shop, then working in her father’s business infused her with an entrepreneurial spirit. Her great uncle was also a major influence.
- Mary put herself through college at GSU working in the kitchens of two Atlanta award-winning restaurants. But with her talent which was recognized by others, she wanted to do more.

- Working at Harry's Farmer's Market, she started to do R & D which provided a real growth opportunity.
- Then it was on to NYC where not being able to find a carbon steel crepe pan changed her thinking and her direction. This was a "lightning bolt" experience – which led Mary to realize Atlanta needed a cooking tools' resource – and she wanted to CREATE that resource!
- With a little financial help from her grandmother and aunt who co-signed for an SBA loan when she was turned down 8 times by the banks for no collateral, Mary launched her business. \$70K in inventory in a building on Amsterdam Ave., The Cook's Warehouse was born. She also was able to augment her income by becoming a "hand model" for cooking / food related commercials.
- Took 3 ½ years to start making money but then the growth really started with a 2<sup>nd</sup> store. Along the way of course were more challenges to overcome including economic downturns and market crashes. But Mary continued to learn about leases, joint ventures, market changes, and to put emotions aside to make the best business decisions.
- When the Ansley Mall / former Piccadilly location came to fruition, it was because of relationships and perseverance. Opening East Cobb in 2011 to acquiring an online competitor in 2017, and the latest location in Chamblee/Brookhaven, Mary has been / is on a roll. From 8 cooking classes a month to 800 a year, to QVC and hundreds of cool events, Mary proves that an introvert following her passion can lead and do just about anything!
- Not surprisingly, Mary's been honored in many ways for her success and has held numerous leadership and distinguished positions in various organizations, e.g., YWCA Academy of Women Achievers, Global Innovator Award, USA; POW! Award; Past Chair, Atlanta Community Food Bank; Past Board President, Les Dames d'Escoffier International.

#### **Take-aways / Comments from Attendees:**

- "Get motivated / inspired early in your life."
- "Find the WHY in everything / anything; what's your motivation?"
- "Hire for the attitude and passion; train for the excellence."
- "Trust your gut more than other people's feelings or concerns; don't default; don't be afraid to follow your passion; love your job and stick to your roots."
- "Pursue through the barriers and never give up; work hard and persevere."
- "Don't take NO for an answer; ask questions."
- "Don't let perfection stand in your way of good enough."
- "Don't surround yourself with 'Yes' people; you're likely to fail."
- "Empower your team; do it quicker / faster."
- "Leaders need to create space for employees to challenge and discuss business ideas."
- "Have an open door policy; you're not growing if you're not challenged by your team."
- "Provide excellent customer service and be available to help others."
- "Relationships are critical; networking is extremely important; connecting and staying connected makes a difference."

- “No big win in reinventing the wheel; so much more to do.”
- “Regarding work/life balance, if you follow your passion, work doesn’t seem like work. It’s all part of life.”
- “Always be willing to make the tough call in business.”
- “Someone will be successful – might as well be you.”
- “Take / move forward boldly; give graciously.”