



## WIL Highlights for November 20, 2020

**“Never Stop Learning: Lessons from Life and Leadership” featuring Hala Moddemog, President/CEO of the Woodruff Arts Center, former President/CEO of the Metropolitan Atlanta Chamber of Commerce**

**Summary:** What a fantastic way to celebrate WIL seminar #210 (virtual webinar #9) with TLG’s 2020 Lifetime Achievement Award for Leadership Character honoree – Hala Moddemog! Included in our introduction of Hala were highlights from the Oct. 28<sup>th</sup> awards event - with a very special video from her son, Ty. Accolades from some of Atlanta’s top leaders were impressive for sure, but Ty’s words took our understanding of Hala to another level as he shared poignant examples of her curiosity, her generosity and her ability to dream big.

As we listened to and learned from Hala during the interview, each of those attributes and many more were illustrated. Hearing her own self-description, i.e., “a bit of an adrenaline junkie, a risk-taker, and someone who believes you can do more than you think you can,” it’s not hard to see how and why she’s had tremendous success throughout her multifaceted career including 20+ years in president and CEO roles.

It was also revealing to hear Hala’s early life story and when it took a drastic and more focused turn. At the age of 17 she developed a strong sense of independence and determination following the sudden death of her mother who was only 42. As she transitioned into her professional life, Hala clearly brought her early life experiences with her. That included her family values-based upbringing in small town Georgia. Those values are integrated into the kind of wife, mother, grandmother and leader Hala is - the person admired by so many.

It’s also why Hala was recognized this year as the quintessential example of Turknett’s Leadership Character Model – not just for her lifetime of achievements – but for leading with Integrity, Respect and Responsibility.

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

- Grew up in “all American family” in Hartwell, GA with mom, dad, older brother and younger sister. From tragedy came strong expectations. Always knew she had unconditional love
- Attended Georgia Southern University and years later, received an Honorary Doctorate as well as their first Distinguished Alumnus Award

- Prior to her current role and her seven years with the MAC, she held positions including President of Arby's Restaurant Group; P/CEO of the world's largest grassroots nonprofit organization, Susan G. Komen for the Cure; and in 1995, she became the first woman to lead an international restaurant company as president of Church's Chicken.
- Serves on several public, private, nonprofit and advisory boards
- Honored with numerous awards including induction into the YWCA's Academy of Women Achievers
- Married to Steve and they have a daughter, son, and one adorable grand child

### **Key Take-aways:**

- Loves her new role at the Woodruff Arts Center promoting the High Museum, the Atlanta Symphony and the Alliance Theatre. Even during the pandemic, there's so much going on for people to enjoy.
- Career lessons: "It's about relationships; how you treat people and how you communicate even the bad news; build a great team and bring in people smarter than you. Be authentic, be who you are and that's enough."
- "I'm a get it done kind of person and sometimes I can be / have been too eager. Once in a while I've learned to play it cooler and not push so hard."
- Re the OnBoard organization's 2020 annual report re women on GA's public boards and women leaders' pipeline: "Getting women on public boards is one of my favorite topics, and particularly getting more women of color in the pipeline and on boards. Sponsorships are key."
- "There's a difference in a sponsor and a mentor. My best career sponsor was Frank Belatti who gave me the opportunity to interview for the president of Church's Chicken. I think he wanted the position to be filled by a woman, a first at that time. And once you've held these kinds of positions, getting recommended for a board seat is easier and a second or third board seat even easier."
- Lessons from McKinsey's 2020 Women in the Workplace study: "The heartbreaking news is that during the pandemic women have been leaving the workforce in significant numbers which could lead to a 6 year setback or decline in women's progress. It's not good for the country or the economy (will hit the bottom line of businesses.) {The causes) need to be fixed. One positive about the pandemic is that it got people talking more about flexibility."
- "It's about what talent do you get in the future. Losing women in the workforce at every level means losing and leaving 50% on the table and that simply won't work in today's economy."
- "We change as humans when we are forced to change. Everyone is going to have to crusade in their own workplaces."
- On how Hala has handled stress and juggled work and family: "I'm very fortunate to have a husband who is and always has been an incredibly supportive life partner. My

advice to young women is pick your partner carefully and be sure the person is invested in your success. It really matters. Also having extended family is a huge help as well although everyone doesn't have that."

#### Q & A:

1. **Hardest challenge:** "I've had many small challenges over the years but having to let people go or rightsizing when the business numbers aren't good is the hardest. Dealing with people's lives is just tough and yet, the buck stops with me."
2. **Any regrets?** "I try to live my life where I'm not going to regret something. But one lesson I learned when I was younger and trying to please the boss. Not speaking up about a major business plan (which I did not think was the right thing to do) turned out to be a very bad decision for the company and cost a lot of money."
3. **Leader(s) you look up to:** "Definitely Carol Tome, now CEO of UPS and formerly CFO for The Home Depot! Known as the Velvet Hammer, Carol's new role was celebrated by many, many people! Also Virginia Hepner – another terrific role model and leader who's been a wonderful supporter of mine and who I totally look up to. I also want to add that ATL has a lot of good women who support each other."
4. **What do you look for in a leadership role / how do you know what's right for you:** "It's not just about the money but rather I want to enjoy what I'm doing. I try to weigh the rational things like money, but also look for how I can make an impact and for an opportunity to give back. I usually have a gut feeling."
5. **How do you get your team to think big during this time of uncertainty:** "Well The Woodruff Arts Center family and campus are all about creativity and art, creating empathy and engaging hearts and souls. I'm new and still haven't been in the office during 2020 so I'm having virtual coffee meetings with random small groups to get to know them better and discuss how things are going. In this very challenging year, you have to get people to understand the burning platform while leading them with optimism, enthusiasm and engagement."
6. **Advice for next gen women:** "First everyone needs to know that getting results is just table stakes. In addition people are attracted to you when you show curiosity, are eager to learn and go beyond whatever your job is. I also know we have a lot to learn from the younger generation and I love that!"
7. **About the ERA:** "It shouldn't be a controversial topic but the country could never get 2/3 of the states to vote to pass the ERA and that's why we don't have it. But I say just barrel ahead and do what you want to do. I do not run around feeling like a second class citizen because I'm a woman. Nobody is going to impose that on me – and should not impose it on anyone."

