Photography by Todd Hornsby

By Gayle Lantz

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I'd like to get your perspective and insights on the area of leadership... You've had a great deal of success in your business over the years. Is there anything that you're particularly proud of?

I am very proud of the team we have assembled and the quality of interaction we have in dealing with difficult issues. Accountants and lawyers who have been privy to our discussions when we're trying to make difficult decisions – or are debating something – are amazed. Our corporate accountant, who's been in business for 30 years and works closely with CEOs, said, "I've never seen dynamics like this." We have the willingness to debate issues without allowing egos to get in the way.

Is this teamwork something that you intentionally work on to create, or does it just seem to come together in some way?

It was intentional but very hard to accomplish. We picked people who had similar core principles. All of us had the same values of honesty, trust, treating people with respect, and doing the right thing. But we are very different in our leadership approach. I have a business background; I focus on relationships and lead by intuition. My partners are engineers, and they focus on analysis and facts. We used to clash a lot. What held us together is the fact that we all

shared the same core values, we trusted and respected each other. You need to have that as a foundation. Then I think you can work through almost anything.

Has anyone been exceptionally influential in developing your style of leadership?

I've picked up different ideas from people, companies, and even books. Everybody has something that they do very well, and I tend to assimilate. I take the best from what I see around me.

I have not had the opportunity to work at many companies, and when I started this one I was 34 years old. There was one individual who made me feel that I had a lot of potential and could do a lot of great things. You just have to have that one person who believes in your ability when you don't see it. So that made all the difference in the world.

I learned from my father how important it was to have the loyalty of your team. You cannot accomplish much without a strong team behind you willing to go the distance. My mother taught me to keep a cool head, have razor sharp focus during a crisis, and believe that everything always works out for the best in the end. I read a lot as well and have been influenced by ideas that resonate with me.

Given the current economic climate, is there anything you're doing differently now compared to the way that you've been leading or managing the business in the past?

Not really. I have always been fiscally very conservative. Our overhead is among the lowest in our industry, based on surveys. We have a strong balance sheet.

I have been more mindful about being positive when talking to our staff. I've always been brutally honest about any challenges that the company is facing and how we are handling it. That hasn't changed. We are communicating a lot more with the staff.

What do you enjoy most about the work that you do?

I enjoy getting calls that say, "I've got a project that needs help. I'm in trouble and I need you to come in and take it over." One of the biggest reasons our company has been successful, other than trust and people liking who they work with, is our responsiveness. We are able to turn on a dime. I got a call after work one night saying, "I've got this $400 million project and it's suddenly on a fast track. I need it drilled." So I was in my back yard calling drillers from home. Those things are really exciting.

What is your advice for other executives or aspiring leaders?

Keep your ego in check. Always make your decisions based on what is right for the company. When you are a leader or the head of a company, an easy trap to fall into is ego. Always ask yourself: "What's right for the company?" It may not benefit you personally. It may not make you look good; you may have to be the bad guy. Whatever it is, always think about the company first. Also, build relationships with your team, your vendors, and your clients.

Personal Side

- Favorite getaway

  Anywhere beachside along 30-A in Florida

- Personal motto

  It is what it is; deal with it

- Secret vice

  I won't tell!

- Something most people don't know about you

  I am shy

- Pet peeve

  People who won't own their problems

- What you can't live without

  Hope

- First job

  Cleaning lab equipment, sweeping floors, and delivering reports to job-sites

- Best advice given

  Endeavour to speak well. People judge you by how you speak

- Worst advice given

  Consider the jobs you create as your community service

Excerpts from an interview with Gayle Lantz, President of WorkMatters, Inc. (www.workmatters.com), a Birmingham-based consulting firm that helps companies improve performance by developing leaders and engaging employees.