



WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP

Driving innovation and growth in cheese and dairy



Heather Engwall
is managing director at Carr Valley Cheese Co., La Valle, Wisconsin.

Q Thinking of leaders and/or role models you have worked with in the past, what are some strategies you have learned from them, and what have tried to avoid?

A Leadership is a lifelong practice, not a static title. At its core, great leadership relies on four pillars: clarity, trust, respect and empowerment. When team members feel trusted and respected, they feel empowered to take ownership of their work, which naturally drives productivity.

True leaders approach their roles with humility. They recognize they are not the experts in everything. Instead, their mission is to build a team with talented individuals and continuously nurture them to become their best. As Arianna Huffington once noted, “learning never stops; it is a continuous process.” A great leader embodies this by constantly seeking new knowledge and adapting.

Unfortunately, poor leadership is all too common. Many people treat management as an entitlement or a reward they deserve, rather than a responsibility that requires continuous nourishment and growth. Too often, individuals are placed in leadership roles with zero training or the wrong mindset. However, observing these poor examples offers a powerful lesson: It provides a clear blueprint of exactly how not to lead, reinforcing the kind of leader I strive to be every day.

Q How is technology (automation, AI, data-driven decision-making) shaping leadership and skills in the industry, and what skills will leaders need the most in the next decade?

A Artificial intelligence is no longer a futuristic concept; it is actively reshaping the global agricultural industry from the farm to the end consumer. To navigate this shift successfully, modern leaders must focus heavily on understanding the immediate and long-term economic benefits of automation. True strategic

advantage requires a nuanced understanding of where to utilize AI for speed and where to rely on human collaboration for critical thinking. Concurrently, leadership must remain highly vigilant regarding the unique ethical dilemmas and cybersecurity vulnerabilities that arise as data becomes digitized.

Last year, I had the opportunity to deep-dive into this transformation during a yearlong project focused on how AI can be integrated into the supply chain of a major dairy company. Our cross-functional team found that every single aspect of the business — from farm-gate tracking to processing and retail fulfillment — can be positively impacted by intelligent software.

The centerpiece of our initiative was the identification and rollout of an AI-driven sourcing and procurement platform. In its very first year of implementation, this system was projected to save significant capital and operational hours, while fundamentally modernizing our data quality and vendor management infrastructure. This project proved that when applied strategically, AI does not just cut costs — it builds a more resilient business model. Given how quickly this landscape is evolving, standing still is equivalent to falling behind.



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Q What advice would you give to young women who are hesitant about pursuing leadership roles in traditionally male-dominated industries?

A Young women should never allow gender to dictate the boundaries of their ambition or the pursuit of their

passions. It’s 2026, and the outdated notion that certain industries or leadership roles are reserved for specific genders should have no place in our reality. True leadership is defined by vision, capability and dedication — not by gender. It is time to decrease the barriers that limit potential and fully support women as they step into every industry, claim their seats at the table and redefine what it means to lead. Passion knows no gender, and neither should opportunity.

Q How do you navigate leading during times of disruption — whether it’s supply chain shifts, policy change or consumer expectations?

A Industry volatility and threats are constant in this market. However, navigating major shifts — such as tariffs, policy changes and the COVID-19 pandemic — has proven that seamless crisis management relies on a few key areas: mobilizing cross-functional teams, establishing clear strategic goals and maintaining an unwavering commitment to corporate agility. Implementing these elements into our core company operating model, we transform external disruptions from organizational threats into manageable strategic transitions.

Q What industry insight would you share with yourself 10 years ago?

A That store brands (i.e. private label) will significantly build credibility, consumer trust and loyalty.

Q Do you feel women in the industry are well represented in trade organizations, educational content and the media? Where do you see gaps?

A Women are making clear, measurable strides in mid-level management throughout the dairy sector, but the

real momentum needs to continue at the top-level management. Over the last few years, more dairy organizations have elevated women into top executive roles, most notably at the CEO level. From managing complex milk-shed logistics to steering multi-million dollar brands, these leaders are proving that the future of dairy relies on a stronger pipeline of female talent. Elevating women to the chief executive level is redefining how our industry innovates, adapts and thrives in a global market. Historically, while women have always been the backbone of family farm operations and dairy science laboratories, corporate boardrooms remain a bottleneck. By placing female leaders in the chief executive chair, the modern dairy industry is bridging the gap between traditional agricultural roots and high-level corporate strategy, ensuring sustainable growth from the farm gate to the consumer’s table.

Q What lessons from outside the dairy industry have you brought into your role that made a big impact?

A Early in my career, I had the unique privilege of collaborating with talented chefs from across the country. I credit the foodservice industry of why I’ve devoted my career to the dairy and cheese industry. Watching the chefs operate in high-stakes environments taught me invaluable lessons about leadership. Their enthusiasm was infectious, driven by an unwavering focus on the consumer, a deep passion for the product and a fearless commitment to continuous learning right on the line.

In those kitchens, I discovered that true operational excellence requires a mix of humility and trust. No job was ever too small for even the most senior chefs, proving that servant leadership is the backbone of a successful team. Teamwork wasn’t just a buzzword; it was a survival mechanism that required building absolute trust and having faith in our collective execution.

Today, these kitchen-tested principles form the foundation of my management style. I believe that when a leader is willing to work hard alongside their team, maintain a relentless drive to improve and encourage everyone to dream big, that energy becomes contagious. By fostering high-trust, collaborative environments, I help teams channel that same raw passion to achieve exceptional results. **CMN**