

WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP

Driving innovation and growth in cheese and dairy



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Q What do you think are the most important attributes of a leader, and how do you use your role to help direct, motivate and inspire your team and organization?

A Communication, accountability, trust and leading by example in all areas are at the top of the list. Leadership is not defined by title or position, but by the example we set through modeling the work ethic, dependability and commitment we expect in others. Fostering an environment where members feel valued, respected and empowered builds trust, which in turn strengthens relationships and cultivates a shared sense of purpose and pride.

Q Please comment on the significance of taking on a leadership role in a multi-generational family company? What are some unique insights you have gleaned from your predecessors?

A Taking on a leadership role in a multi-generational family company is both a privilege and a responsibility, and not without its unique challenges. The values and traditions established by our founders and my grandparents remain deeply ingrained in our organization, and I believe preserving those principles is essential as we continue to evolve. There's a delicate balance where tradition and experience meet the change and innovation necessary for continued growth and long-term sustainability in an ever-changing industry. It is both a responsibility and an opportunity to find that balance and ensure that the same values, dedication and commitment to excellence that shaped our past continue to define our future.

I am incredibly fortunate and grateful to be in the position of having worked closely with not only my father, but my grandmother as well. Their experience and examples have provided me with unique and invaluable insight into the principles our company was founded upon and continues to operate with today.

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 adopted, and what are some things you have tried to avoid?

A I have had the privilege of working with strong, tenacious women I consider great examples of leadership. Through their guidance, I've learned that being the first to step in and roll up your sleeves with a willingness to contribute at any level is fundamental to earning the respect of team members. It demonstrates a genuine desire to support your team and with consistency, can largely impact their perception of your commitment to their success. It also provides an opportunity to refamiliarize yourself with other positions and gain fresh perspective as well as potentially identify areas for improvement. Working alongside team members you may not regularly interact with is a great way to strengthen those relationships and open the door for comfortable communication.

I have also learned how important consistent communication is, both within and between departments, and how its absence can cause resentment and frustration, among other issues. Being intentional about taking the time to relay (even sometimes seemingly basic) information helps to make employees feel included, therefore invested, and more connected to the bigger picture. Leading by example in this way can also encourage reciprocation from others.

Q What role do you think leaders play in strengthening trust between the dairy industry and consumers, especially around transparency, nutrition and sustainability?

A I believe leaders in the dairy industry have a responsibility to build and maintain consumer trust through transparency, education and open communication. With information so readily accessible through social media and various media outlets, we know that misinformation can spread quickly. Buzzwords can quickly create misconceptions about products and practices, and I believe this makes transparency more important than ever. Through providing information rooted in facts, we can help consumers better understand the processes, ingredients and standards behind the products they purchase. The same applies to conversation surrounding nutrition and sustainability, where providing only factual, accurate information that explains the reasoning behind industry practices can help bridge the gap between producers and consumers.

Ultimately, trust is built through honesty, consistency and a willingness to have the difficult conversations. As industry leaders, we have a responsibility not only to uphold high standards but to effectively communicate those standards and the values behind them. Educating consumers and encouraging informed decisions are essential to strengthening confidence in our products and the dairy industry as a whole.

Q What are some non-negotiables you expect from your team and co-workers? How do you resolve conflicts in the workplace?

A Open-mindedness, honesty and accountability are all non-negotiables for me. I believe these qualities are essential to a productive and collaborative work environment. I value individuals who are willing to consider different perspectives, accept constructive criticism and take responsibility for their actions. As a leader, acknowledging my missteps shows that I hold myself to the same standards I expect from my team, and this often results in strengthened mutual respect.

In my experience, communication is often the root cause of and the solution to many workplace conflicts. Poor communication leaves room for speculation and leads to assumptions, misconceptions and misunderstandings between team members and can usually be avoided through setting clear expectations, direction and goals. Leaders have a responsibility provide an environment where employees feel comfortable asking questions, expressing concerns and sharing ideas.

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

A I would stress the importance of being direct, clear, concise and confident, and pushing for your voice to be heard. As women we encounter moments where our directness and assertiveness are misinterpreted as rudeness or harshness, so it can often feel second-nature to prioritize being agreeable or accommodating. You can't allow those perceptions to inhibit your ability to deliver information appropriately and effectively. I would also encourage young women to trust their knowledge and abilities, even when they find themselves in environments where they may be outnumbered or underestimated. Exhibiting confidence doesn't necessarily mean having all the answers, but having the courage to ask questions, contribute ideas, challenge perspectives and stand behind your convictions. Respect is earned through integrity, consistency and competence, and you should never feel the need to diminish your voice to gain acceptance.

Q How do you balance authenticity with professionalism in your leadership style?

A I try to balance authenticity and professionalism by being genuine and approachable while maintaining clear and consistent boundaries. As a naturally empathetic and somewhat transparent person, this has not always been easy and has meant learning the hard way a time or two when and where to define those boundaries. I want my team to feel comfortable sharing and having honest conversations while being mindful of the responsibility I have to enforce those boundaries. I believe you can be compassionate and understanding while still having difficult conversations, making tough decisions and holding people accountable. **CMN**

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