



Women in Cable
Telecommunications



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My Profile

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PAR Initiative

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PAR Initiative Edition

The WICT Journey: Learning from Different Generations

A woman's career is like a journey, with different ports at different times in her life. There will be periods of storm, of calm, and of exploration. Where she is on that journey greatly influences the challenges she will face and the course she'll chart to succeed. WICT talked to three women — in three different generations — to learn what challenges they face, what experiences shape their careers, and what they can learn from each other. Let's meet them now, and hear their stories.

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The 2009 WICT PAR Initiative survey will be available the week of March 23!

Visit www.wict.org for more information about the PAR Initiative.

Contact Parthavi Das at par@wict.org if you have any questions about participating.



Pat Berry, Time Warner Cable

Pat Berry is Time Warner Cable's regional vice president of human resources, Northeast/National Region. Her story is one that may become more familiar to women everywhere as their responsibilities grow to include caring for an aging parent.



Berry spent 22 years as the human resources leader in Time Warner Cable's Houston Division. In 2003, she retired and relocated to Kansas City to be near her family. "I retired early to care for my mother and also support my daughter, who's a single parent," explained

Berry. "I felt those heartstrings pulling me back. I decided it was time to return closer to home."

In March 2006, Time Warner Cable asked Berry if she could temporarily head human resources in Kansas City while the company explored the possible sale of the system. Berry agreed. However, when the company later decided to retain the Kansas City operation, "All the plans of me working for just a few months changed," she recalled. Her temporary assignment had suddenly become a permanent one.

Career Challenges

Because the Kansas City market was smaller than Houston, Berry had assumed the job would be easier to manage, allowing her to balance work and family demands. Instead, her return to work became the most challenging professional situation she'd ever faced.

"I was naive, thinking I'd step back into a situation similar to what I'd experienced during my past career experiences," she said. "The biggest challenge was coming into a completely unknown group as an outsider. I have to admit it was difficult."

Berry persevered. She was asked to help with some regional HR projects, in addition to her work in Kansas City. In January 2007, she took on the regional role full time, working for Bill Goetz, Time Warner Cable's executive vice president, operations, Northeast/National Region. She lives in Kansas City near her family and travels regularly throughout the Northeast and to the company's National divisions scattered virtually nationwide. While the travel is demanding, Berry is happy with her new position, citing Goetz's "phenomenal" leadership style.

"I love the people I work with," she said. "Our region has had a phenomenal year. That's what keeps me pumped every day — seeing the positive results, seeing employee growth and development, and seeing turnover in our region lower than average."

Impact of World Events

Historical events can profoundly influence how we embrace our careers. Those events are different for every generation. Berry was born during World War II, and she says she was strongly influenced by her parents, who grew up during the depression.

"My father worked so hard and never made a lot of money. But he raised four children, and all four of us went to college," said Berry, who internalized that work ethic. "We had to work, and work hard, but anything we wanted to do was possible.

Learning From Other Generations

Berry admires today's younger workers, especially their strong commitment to balancing family and work obligations. She also admires their tenacity in the face of obstacles. "They want to do well and they have these great aspirations, yet we're in an economy that's not so favorable. But they are still trudging along and trying," she said. Everyone, regardless of age or job level, can learn from the tenacity of these younger workers and "all the great things these kids are doing," Berry said.

She also acknowledges their dedication to the job, citing two recent instances when Time Warner Cable asked off-duty customer service representatives to fill in from home. One was a winter ice storm and the other was a retransmission dispute that flooded the call center with customer inquiries – on New Year's Eve. "Whoever we called, regardless of age or gender, pitched in. They gave up their plans for New Year's Eve."

Hopes for the Future

Berry hopes that the future will bring greater inclusion among workers of different generations. "As we grow, we have to be more open and inclusive between all of our work groups, no matter who they are and what they are doing," she said. "We have a lot to learn from the bright young people coming in, but also don't forget the intellectual knowledge of longer-term employees."

Plotting Your Course

The challenges women face in both their careers and personal lives change as they get older. It's important to recognize that what challenges you today will be different tomorrow.

Time Warner Cable's Pat Berry puts it this way: "Each piece has a face to it. Part of my purpose was taking care of my mother and also supporting my daughter and helping with the grandkids," she explained. But in just a few years, her granddaughter was driving and didn't need her as much. "Those phases go on. That's the reason you can't put all your eggs in one basket. As life goes on, there are many crossroads. The key is being flexible and having the interest and love for many things."



Brandii Toby-Leon, DIY Network

Brandii Toby-Leon is the director of press and public relations (PR) for DIY Networks, owned by Scripps Networks. She has 10 years of communications experience, eight years in public relations, and has been with the DIY Network for 2 ½ years. About a year ago, the company promoted her to the director position.

Impact of World Events



Toby-Leon's dedication to PR is a direct result of a significant world event — the terrorist attacks on September 11. At that time she was in graduate school in Washington, D.C., studying journalism, and she hoped to be an on-air reporter. She'd only been in the program a month and a half when the attacks occurred, and she admits that she found it difficult to cover the story.

"As much as I enjoyed journalism, I found out it wasn't my fit. But I loved the news and loved being able to work with the media," Toby-Leon recalled. "It really was a trigger for me in making a commitment to PR, but I was also able to move forward with a stronger news sense."

Career Challenges

Toby-Leon now runs DIY Network's PR department. It's this transition from PR manager to director that has been her biggest career challenge to date.

"When you're a manager, you are focused on your discipline and getting the work done," she said. Now, Toby-Leon oversees the entire department. "You can be great at your craft, but you also have to learn how to prioritize the craft, delegate, and work with the team to learn and grow.... It's great that I have mentors that I can go to who can show me that there is a way to be successful."

Learning From Other Generations

Toby-Leon relies on her older mentors for guidance. She has several, both within her company and without. "From my perspective, you can't have too many mentors. We learn a lot by tapping into different perspectives and leadership styles," said Toby-Leon.

She has been particularly impressed with Jerilyn Bliss' collaborative leadership approach. Bliss is Scripps Networks' vice president of corporate communications. "She has a strong teaching style. I think that is empowering, and I'd like to emulate that," explained Toby-Leon. She added that Bliss has helped her learn different approaches for working with various personality types and prioritizing day-to-day work. She has also provided advice on educating and teaching others to help them along their

career path. "That's very important for me, to focus on the growth of others," Toby-Leon said.

She also learns from her younger employees, including interns she has brought to the company. "I like the refreshing and energetic approach that many of the younger workers have," Toby-Leon said, adding it helps her from becoming too serious at work. "It's nice to have that relaxed, yet positive and disciplined approach to every day work life."

Advancement of Women

For Toby-Leon, career advancement of women has always been part of her experience. Her father was disabled before she was born, so Toby-Leon's mother was the main breadwinner who went to work every day. "I had Mr. Mom, before it was a popular movie," she explained.

"I also have such a strong respect for the women who have laid the groundwork before me to create the opportunities," Toby-Leon added. "At Scripps, I am so privileged, and honored, and blessed to be surrounded by these woman who have paved the way... and show that a woman really can accomplish whatever she sets her mind to."

Toby-Leon also takes advantage of leadership programs offered by WICT to grow in her career. She serves on the 2009 WICT Leadership Conference committee and co-chairs the 2009 "Meet Ups" for the Knoxville contingent of WICT's Atlanta chapter. She recently helped coordinate a "speed mentoring" session (a take off on speed dating), which proved popular.

Hopes for the Future

Toby-Leon hopes that employees in the workplace will develop a more "global" perspective, regardless of their generation. "We all come in with great experience, but we are a bit skewed by that and our own worldview," she said. "It's easy to get stuck in that perspective, but it's best to have a really great, open dialog."

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Shawnnell Brown, The Weather Channel

Shawnnell Brown is the customer experience specialist with the Consumer Applications Software department at The Weather Channel. She graduated from college two years ago, and June will mark her second anniversary with the company. In spite of her youth, she is already making positive contributions.



Impact of World Events

Brown says that there are two events that have impacted her career development. The first is the recent downturn in the economy.

"I don't see it as the world ending. I see it as empowering me to become recession proof," Brown said. "It's changed my approach to my professional career. This is pushing me to go back to graduate school, and to get more skill sets under my belt."

The inauguration of President Barack Obama also impacted her. Brown admits that she was skeptical that Obama could be elected president. "I remember sitting with my friends and saying 'There's no way he can win.' I can't believe that I ever said that," she recalled. "It has changed my thought process about what I can do in my life. There have been times when I thought, 'There is a cap, as a woman and a minority woman.' Now, I know there isn't."

Career Challenges

In spite of her new optimism, Brown still sees challenges ahead. She believes her youth and lack of experience are her biggest career challenges.

"When you're the youngest on the team, they want to dismiss your ideas or what you want to do to help the company," Brown said. "They assume that because you are the youngest, and just out of college, you have no idea how the company is run." She acknowledges that it may take time to gain the trust of her team members.

In spite of that challenge, she has made suggestions that the company has embraced. Brown started an employee resource group at The Weather Channel. Dubbed "Generation TWC," the new group is for employees just entering the work force.

"I thought it would be a great place for us to come together to discuss challenges, and it has benefited my career by opening doors for me," she explained. "It has helped people to know who I am and that I care about diversity and advancing people."

Not one to shy away from a challenge, Brown invited Ovie Mughelli, fullback with the Atlanta Falcons, to speak at the group's kickoff event. He accepted the invitation to talk about the challenges of being new to the team (he began his career playing for the Baltimore Ravens), and he did not charge the group a speaking fee.

Learning From Other Generations

Brown believes there's a lot she can learn from older generations. "I would like to learn the art of effective leadership," she said. "I see fascinating leaders here, who can bring people on board and lead in a great way. I admire that."

She also added that she admires the dedication and loyalty of her older colleagues. "It feels great to be part of a team of people really dedicated to their jobs. It makes you happy to come to work and be motivated."

Advancement of Women

Brown finds the advancement of women in the work place inspiring. "I'm standing on their shoulders," she said. "We all know that corporate America is male dominated. With women paving the way, it's almost like I can't do anything but be successful, because I don't want to let them down."

"It's like a tunnel that was filled with bricks, and they took the bricks out so now I can walk through it. It's paved with all that hard work," she explained. "I'm hoping I can pave the way for women after me, so it will be easier for them to get ahead in their careers."

Hopes for the Future

In the future, Brown hopes that the gap between generations will close. "Yes, there is a generation gap, but there doesn't have to be a big gap," she said. "I hope to see the younger generation understanding the older generation more, and vice versa.... You have to embrace the differences and challenge your company to use the differences in a positive way."

Specifically, she wishes that older workers would be more open to the technical savvy of younger employees. "Social media is powerful. Yet the older generation may think that Facebook is silly," she says, adding that she hopes they will come to use it as a way to improve the company. And, she thinks younger workers could benefit from understanding the work ethic of older colleagues. "If we could learn that work ethic from them, and they could learn from us, it would lead to a better work environment."