

“Why you should take the time to do a one-on-one with each person on your team” With Bobbie Lasan of SoCal Refining & Marketing



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Take the time to do a one-on-one with each person on your team. The extra time/effort at the beginning of a project saves time in the long run. Figure out who are your strongest players and invite them to step up and take ownership of different areas, so you end up with many “co-chiefs.” That gives you someone to go to for specific updates, and gives them the satisfaction of being a key player in an area.

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I had the pleasure of interviewing Bobbie Lasan, a principal at SoCal Refining & Marketing, LLC. She graduated from UCLA with a bachelor's degree in mechanical engineering and spent half of her career in manufacturing management roles with Procter & Gamble Company (P&G). The latter half of Lasan's career has been in various leadership roles in the male-dominated downstream oil industry.

Thank you so much for doing this with us! Can you tell us a story about what brought you to this specific career path?

Downstream oil is very different from paper products manufacturing, so there was no direct connection between my first and what I call my “second career”—it was related to my network. I was a stay-at-home mom for a couple of years after leaving P&G. Shortly thereafter, an acquaintance who I had partnered in buying an investment home with shared he was expanding his business and opening up an office. I helped him prepare presentations to a bank, and, because he knew about my leadership roles with P&G, he realized he'd found someone who could start up and run his new office.

Can you share the most interesting story that happened to you since you began leading your company?

I tend to be the person in our organization that looks for the inefficiencies that slow down the work, cause miscommunications or frustrations, figures out the problem (whether it's internally or across multiple companies we work with) and implements procedures or spreadsheets that clarify and make it easier get things right in the future. One of the most rewarding experiences I have had in my role is breaking down the barriers and roadblocks for folks on my team by doing just that, and then sharing this with others outside of my own company. I have a collection of emails from those folks who have mentioned things like “by the way, I still use the spreadsheet you gave me to calculate the tax rate changes for each store” or “This is brilliant. Can I steal it?” For me, it's satisfying to know I have helped make their businesses a bit better. I take pride in the fact that my sphere of influence can reach outside of my own organization. I know that they see me as knowledgeable about downstream oil topics, but they also see me as a leader for sharing that knowledge and helping them.

Can you share a story about the funniest mistake you made when you were first starting? Can you tell us what lesson you learned from that?

When I first started working in the fuel industry, I was still learning about operating retail sites but managing experts in retail with years of experience. An owner had decided to become a “jobber” and was telling everyone in a meeting about different things he thought folks would need to work on. Assuming that everyone else knew what a jobber was and how that business worked, I did not ask questions even though I understood very little. At a break, I asked a co-worker to explain to me a jobbership and I found out neither she nor anyone else knew what it was. When the meeting resumed, I asked him to back up and explain what a jobber was and the general idea of how this business worked. The lesson I learned is that just because people have

years more experience than you, it doesn't mean they know all the answers. Don't be afraid to ask questions. In this case, it saved a lot of time and frustration by getting everyone on the same page and educated so we could quickly move on the business acquisition.

What do you think makes your company stand out? Can you share a story?

What makes SoCal unique is that we are comprised of a small number of people but each with a unique set of skills and experience. Because we are experts in our own businesses, we can provide real-world advice as we consult. We can either coach them through the project or we can do it for them. We all act as if we are the owner of a client's business. That might mean being available early in the morning or late at night at times.

What advice would you give to other female leaders to help their team to thrive?

No matter how busy you are, make sure to touch base with your team members individually. Make time for lunch, take a walk/break together or just spend a few minutes after a call asking about how a person is doing. When a leader shows they value a team member, that team member will be willing to go the extra mile regardless of gender.

What advice would you give to other female leaders about the best way to manage a large team?

Take the time to do a one-on-one with each person on your team. The extra time/effort at the beginning of a project saves time in the long run. Figure out who are your strongest players and invite them to step up and take ownership of different areas, so you end up with many "co-chiefs." That gives you someone to go to for specific updates, and gives them the satisfaction of being a key player in an area.

None of us are able to achieve success without some help along the way. Is there a particular person who you are grateful towards who helped get you to where you are? Can you share a story about that?

I will always remember the HR manager I interviewed with at P&G while in college. She not only did a great job selling the company at their presentation on campus, but she was a great role model—confident, intelligent, able to lead/excel in many different roles/areas (from operations to HR). Although she was never my direct manager, she was supportive and always available for advice. The whipped cream on top was the fact that three of the top five leadership roles in the plant were held by women when I started. There were a significant number of women in other key leadership roles throughout the plant. As a young woman coming out of college into her first job, that was what I saw and the message I got was: "You (a woman) can be successful in this (work) world. It's a normal thing here. Even though this is manufacturing (traditionally male) and we hire all engineers, (where only 20 percent of engineering grads are women)." I have to also give credit to P&G for developing that culture.

How have you used your success to bring goodness to the world?

I used my leadership skills to help with my children's school by taking on leadership roles in the PTSA. Whether it was as president, VP, membership chair or for the big fundraiser, I used the leadership skills I developed at work to coach and recruit the board members/chairpersons and to keep everyone on budget. We had a very successful PTSA that helped make the school a better place because of all the activities the PTSA handled and money we raised for it.

What are your “5 Leadership Lessons I Learned From My Experience” and why. (Please share a story or example for each.)

1. Surround yourself with others that are better at the things you aren't as good at.
2. You don't have to be an expert in an area to manage it and the people in it.
3. Be okay with not doing everything with perfection. Some things need perfection, but many do not. Go for the 80 for 20 rule—the Pareto Principle. Find the 20 percent of items you need to work on to get 80 percent of the outcome, and focus on those (first).
4. Delegate where you can. Be okay with how others do things (differently than you would) as long as the objective is met. Ask for help once in a while.
5. Advocate for others. Besides giving frequent feedback/praise, make it a point to share what a great job someone did while in a group session or to others even when they aren't there.

You are a person of great influence. If you could inspire a movement that would bring the most amount of good to the most amount of people, what would that be? You never know what your idea can trigger. :-)

Volunteering was never a priority in my family while growing up, but I truly believe that if every person volunteers in some way we can really make this world a better place. I encourage every person out there to find something they can help with or donate their time. This is a learnable trait, and I encourage everyone to try it on an organized or personal level.

Can you please give us your favorite “Life Lesson Quote”? Can you share how that was relevant to you in your life?

“Do not listen with the intent to reply, but with the intent to understand.” When I was younger, I never even thought about this. My thought when hearing something was always to try to relate to what the person was saying with an experience of my own or how I thought about what the person said. As I got older, I realized the wisdom in this quote. Show people you are listening and value what they are saying, whether in personal life or work, by truly listening and then asking a follow up question about what they just said.