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F R O S T & S U L L I V A N

Council Virtual Event: Unexpected Positivity

A Conversation with Beverly Rider, *Senior Vice President and Chief Commercial Officer, Hitachi*



As COVID gripped the globe, nobody was left unaffected. In this wide ranging and personal Leadership Council Discussion, Richard Sear, *Partner and Senior Vice President* at Frost & Sullivan, asked the very accomplished Beverly Rider, currently *Senior Vice President and Chief Commercial Officer* at Hitachi, a series of questions about her experiences navigating a year of profound challenges. They discussed her leadership and personal philosophies and strategies, both “on and off the field,” uncovering unexpected positivity and inspiring advice from the multi-talented executive. Here are highlights of their discussion grouped by topic:

On reading and personal growth: Beverly recently reread three books: 1) *The Giver* by Lois Lowry. The book is a Newbery Award winner and explores the themes of individuality over conformity and security over freedom. 2) Malcolm Gladwell’s *The Outliers*, which examines the world of the “best and the brightest” and asks the question: what makes high-achievers different? 3) *The Fountainhead* by Ayn Rand; a thought-provoking analysis of the importance of personal purpose, innovation and new ideas in society.

Beverly noted that *The Outliers* and *The Fountainhead* are both books about pushing boundaries. She shared that while feeling a lack of control at the beginning of the pandemic, she sought inspiration about how to deal with the situation and made a conscious decision to move towards positivity. One example of this is the blog she started, *Good things about COVID-19*. She also explored new hobbies and lifestyle improvements, including gardening. She is a big fan of a company called Gardenuity, whose mission is to “make gardening accessible to everyone” and sells and ships customized garden kits, which can even be matched to the climate you live in.

On leadership and team building: When queried about whether her leadership style had changed as a result of the pandemic, Beverly admitted that her approach used to be much methodical. She didn't start work conversations with "How is your day going?" but now realizes its importance. Today, she is likely to ask about challenges team members are facing, so she can balance workloads and help them succeed. Beverly needed to become more patient and help pick up slack, especially if an employee was in a health or other crisis due to the pandemic.

Beverly also shared that approximately 50% of her team is new, and in spite of being a very experienced and independent group, they have formed a strong bond. She told stories about bonding with some of her customers and suppliers, and helping them in unexpected ways when they were in need.

On her drive to succeed: Beverly has many outstanding personal and professional achievements. When asked how she became so accomplished, she said she had actually "failed a lot," and noted that the "key to success is to fail big." She shared that she was raised in a single-parent household and watched her mother work hard and go to school, attaining several degrees. The fact money wasn't always plentiful only propelled Bev's drive, purpose, and desire to create new opportunities. She strives to bring up her own children to appreciate these lessons and to have strong work ethics.

On teamwork and success: Richard Sear asked: "*How do or will you evaluate success?*" "*Weekly?*" "*At the end of your career?*" Beverly replied that she measures success by whether she has positively impacted others. "*Did I love others?*" "*Did I add value?*" Yes, KPIs, revenues and margins count, but a bigger question is, "*Did I do good in the world?*" She shared that Hitachi had a recent potentially lucrative business opportunity that they declined to pursue because they thought it could have a negative impact.

On changing definitions of success: Beverly was also asked: *During COVID has your definition of success for your team changed?* She stated that people were not buying as much, presenting new challenges. For example, business development managers cannot see people in person very much, so they need to create relationships over the phone and via online video platforms. Her team in particular has been hit with a lot of trauma and grief as a result of the pandemic. She is in the position of having to balance expectations from her company's leadership team with current health crisis realities. She knows this isn't unique to her or her company, and feels fortunate they have been blessed in so many ways despite what is going on in the world.

On hiring: *What are some keys for identifying the best people?* Beverly said that she had "some phenomenal hires, but also admitted much is luck too." As noted, a candidate can be stellar in a two-hour interview but not pan out in a position. She likes to elicit stories from candidates as part of the hiring process. She shared she has asked interviewees to share three favorite experiences with their children or to talk about their favorite trip and what activities they participated in while traveling in order to learn what really makes a candidate tick. Ultimately, Beverly looks for a no-nonsense, "gonna get it done" attitude when hiring. Extra degrees like MBA's are nice, but are not always key.

On gender: Beverly believes that women bring each other down too often, and noted that it's still a very male dominated business world. She shared that it is her goal to support women in pulling one another up. It is an important platform for her and she has been lucky to have it shared by many of her female counterparts through the technology industry.

Beverly does not subscribe to the belief that just *because* you're a woman you should get the job. Skills and attitude matter for either sex. She observed that women often suffer from a lack of confidence; they will only go for a job if they have almost all the needed skills, while men will often -- and confidently -- apply for jobs when they only have some of the skills required. She wants women to have faith in themselves and say "yes" more often than "no". She stressed you don't have to have 10 out of 10 skills to apply for a new position or challenge. In fact, will over skill sometimes is all that is needed.

Finally, she advised women (and everyone, really) to be their true, authentic selves and to live out their ethics and values. As a participant noted, "not taking yourself too seriously" can also help!

On kindness: When asked, *If you could place a large billboard anywhere with anything on it, what would it say?* Beverly replied: "Be nice." Do not be derogatory...give the gift of human kindness. That can be as simple as smiling at a stranger, saying, "I like your shirt," or as profound as paving the way to help your employees succeed during an unprecedented pandemic. Basic human courtesies and kindness, coupled with giving people the benefit of the doubt can often go a long way. Beverly makes it a point to express her love and affection to those around her.

On getting over it: Beverly shared a fascinating personal approach to "getting over" disappointments. Whatever the loss -- a job, a break-up, a business setback -- Beverly gives herself 24 hours to "get over it." She does allow herself to wallow, vent and feel the pain...but only for one day. While it's easier now, she shared it took some time to learn this skill and it's not perfect. Larger personal and emotional losses can't always fit into this schedule, but she believes everything else can.

On investing: When asked, *What is one of the best investments you've ever made?* Beverly replied that it was investing in education. She and her spouse made it a point to focus jointly on their financial education. They learned about stocks, real estate and other potential assets together. They took classes and greatly improved their financial literacy and ultimately their retirement portfolios. They made investments in real estate and real estate vehicles in particular.

Beverly pointed out that little to no financial education is typically offered in schools. This ongoing reality may contribute to the fact that the average American retires with only \$126,000 in savings. As noted, improving business and financial acumen is always a worthwhile investment. However, she stated, the most important thing this investment brought her was time with her husband, doing something they both enjoyed and the ability to pass on her learnings to her children, friends, family and professional colleagues.

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