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RESIDES IN SEATTLE



BY JASMINE SPEARING-BOWEN
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Lisa Keeney McCarthy is the president of Keeney's Office Supply. She oversees operations, sets strategic goals and company policies and personally interviews and hires each team member.

She also served on the Independent Dealer Council and was on the Independent Stationers Board of Directors.

Was there a single event or inspiration that led you to your career path? My dad started the company in 1947. I started working at the company when I was 23 and quickly had the opportunity to transition into a leadership role. After learning about the industry and where it was going, I was able to make changes to the business model and keep the business thriving past the 70-year mark.

What was your first management position and what surprised you about that leadership role? Being president of Keeney's. The whole thing was a surprise. I had not planned on staying at my dad's office supply company for long. It was something to do while I planned my next career move.

When did you find your voice as a leader? When I had to. I was 23 years old and I came to work for my dad's company after teaching preschool for a while. Circumstances presented themselves as they did and I realized

I had to step up and take on management responsibilities right away. It was not something I had expected. Fortunately, I was good at it.

How do you identify leadership traits in others? I trust people who do what needs to be done to make things right, regardless of their position in the company. When people come to me and ask for advancement, I reflect on their demonstrated job performance. A person with leadership traits does not wait for an invitation to lead.

How often do you rethink or refine your leadership style? It's a constant process, but the changes are incremental, not revolutionary. I am the person I am, and my style of leadership has always come from my trust in others, my belief in the value of what Keeney's is, does and means to the business community, and my commitment to the customers and employees that the company serves. I am very attentive to input of all kinds – things that my colleagues here tell me, things that customers say, and things I can observe. I trust my instincts but I also take the time to refine and train my instincts.

What's the most common mistake you see young ambitious professionals make? Thinking that they know everything already. Really, people of all ages make that mistake.

At this point in your career, what are your professional aspirations? I would like to

continue to lead our team successfully into the future. Our world and industry are both changing rapidly and it is an exciting time to be leading a company. We need to continue to learn from our customers and meet their needs and be a nimble responsive company.

Within the last five years, how have the discussions around gender equity in the workplace evolved? While we used to focus on the need for men to treat women with respect and not say offensive things, I think now we are seeing a shift to taking steps to put more women in positions of influence and leadership. So the shift has been from the negative, "Don't do this," to the positive, "Do this!" It's a welcome change, as it is always more successful when you lead people toward something rather than away from it.

Where would you like to see the conversation around gender equity go in the next five years? If it were up to me, we would be able to stop talking about gender equity within the next five years. It is so clear that women make terrific leaders as well as terrific doers. Why should we need to debate this? Why not have real gender equity?

What advice would you give to your 18-year-old self? The advice I would give my 18-year-old self is to relax, life is an adventure to enjoy. Work hard, trust your instincts and surround yourself with brilliant folks that have diverse opinions.