



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 The most important attributes of a leader are transparency, authenticity and humility. Leaders do not need to have all the answers, but they do need the right intentions. Skills can be taught; character cannot. Admitting mistakes, being open to learning from others and extending the same grace to people that you would want extended to you creates trust, and trust is foundational to strong teams.

In my role, I focus on giving people the space and leeway to think for themselves rather than prescribing solutions. I ask how they want to solve problems and encourage them to challenge assumptions. I consistently push my team to be better than they were yesterday, while also taking the time to celebrate wins and progress along the way.

Procurement touches nearly every function in an organization — from what we buy to how we manage risk and solve complex problems. Because of that, relationships matter. Beyond the work itself, I place a strong emphasis on building bonds across the organization. Solving hard problems is far more effective, and frankly more enjoyable, when you are working alongside teammates you trust.

Q Thinking of leaders 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 opportunity to work with many strong leaders and role models throughout my career. What stands out most about the best of them is that they never made me feel like I worked for them. Instead, we worked alongside one another. There was a shared commit-

ment to the success of the business and a genuine interest in my personal growth and success.

That sense of collective ownership is something I strive to bring to my team and cross-functional partners. I truly believe we are in this together, and leadership should reinforce that mindset rather than create unnecessary hierarchy.

One approach I have intentionally avoided is using titles or authority as a means to get things done. Early in my career, I assumed that leadership meant being able to dictate decisions without regard for how others felt. That assumption is not only incorrect, it is destructive. People have many options in today's job market; what makes them stay or leave is how they feel inside the organization. Respect, trust and inclusion drive performance far more effectively than positional power ever will.

Q How do you see technology — automation, AI and data-driven decision-making — shaping leadership in the dairy industry, and what skills will leaders need most in the next decade?

A I am very bullish on technology, including both automation and artificial intelligence. At a practical level, technology allows us to operate more efficiently — from simplifying administrative tasks such as summarizing meetings to analyzing large data sets that enable better financial modeling, risk reduction and cost management.

Technology will continue to evolve rapidly, and its impact on our industry will be significant. Earlier in my career, more than 20 years ago, I worked in defense on what was then referred to as future combat systems, including drone technology. At the time, it was considered highly advanced. Today, that same technology is widely used to protect lives by providing visibility and insight from a safe distance.

The lesson for leaders is not just to adopt technology, but to understand its purpose and limitations. In the coming decade, leaders will need strong critical thinking skills, data literacy, adaptability and sound judgment. Technology is a powerful tool, but leadership will still require human decision-making, ethical consideration and the ability to connect people around a common objective.

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

A My primary non-negotiable is complete honesty and transparency. I strongly believe that truth eventually comes to light, and if you would not want something known, it probably should not be done. There is no benefit to dancing around issues or withholding information. It is impossible to solve problems effectively without full transparency.

When conflicts arise, I address them directly and respectfully. Avoidance only compounds issues. I focus on facts, intent and outcomes, and I expect open dialogue from all parties involved. Conflict, when handled correctly, can lead to better decisions and stronger alignment.

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

A My advice is to stop being your own hurdle. It doesn't matter if the leadership roles have been male dominated. Act like you deserve a seat at the table. Do not let yourself be the hurdle and prevent you from becoming the leader that you want to be. Companies are actively seeking diverse experiences and perspectives. Be the voice of change that you want to be.

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

A For me, the balance comes from being honest and clear about expectations — both for myself and others. I hold myself to the same standards that I hold my team to, and I do not ask anyone to do something I would not do myself.

When I make a mistake or recognize that I could have handled a situation better, I address it directly with the individual or team involved. Authenticity does not mean oversharing or lack

of discipline; it means accountability, consistency and respect. Professionalism and authenticity are not mutually exclusive — they reinforce one another when practiced intentionally.

Q How do you navigate leading during times of disruption, whether it is supply chain shifts, policy changes or evolving consumer expectations?

A Disruption is more common than not, especially in today's environment. The key is to separate noise from what truly matters. Leaders must stay focused, avoid emotional reaction and align the right people around a clear plan.

If a pivot is necessary, it should be made decisively. Changing course is not a failure — doing nothing is. Alignment across cross-functional partners is critical. Risk-taking is easier when it is shared, and when challenges arise, success comes from standing back up together and moving forward as a team.

Q Please share a time when your insights led to a unique solution to a challenge at a company or organization.

A One of the most meaningful experiences in my career came from recognizing that I did not have the right answer — and being willing to listen. During a widespread force majeure involving nitrous oxide across North America, supply constraints created significant operational risk.

A product manager proposed an unconventional solution: sourcing nitrous oxide from Europe and trans-filling it into alternative bulk tanks for delivery to our plants. This had never been done before with our supplier. Implementing the solution required close collaboration across suppliers, ocean freight partners and U.S. logistics teams.

We made it work because we listened, partnered effectively and set aside ego. That solution has since become a broader contingency option for future disruptions. The innovation was not borne from individual expertise but from shared problem-solving and trust in one another's ideas. **CMN**