

DARE Q & A with: Joan Pertak



Joan is the Senior Vice President & Chief Information Officer for PepsiCo Americas Beverages and Quaker Foods & Snacks in North America. She has 25 years of PepsiCo experience in the Supply Chain and Business + Information Solutions functions. Previously, Joan was a technical consultant and a retail manager.

Joan earned a BA from the State University of NY at Albany. She is the executive sponsor of the Business + Information Solutions Mentoring Program and an executive sponsor of the EQUAL employee resource group which supports PepsiCo's gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender employees. She is also an

advisor to PepsiCo's Women's Inclusion Network. Joan lives in Harrison, NY with her husband Bob and their three children, Kaitlin, Brianna and Ryan.

Q: What is the most challenging thing you have ever had to do?

A: I took a role that was important to the company but I felt didn't play to my strengths. The role was very large and difficult—and involved me leading a global team. When I accepted it, I knew that if I failed, there could be major implications to the business and to my career. So that was the most challenging decision of my career.

Q: Where did you get the courage and confidence to accomplish this matter?

A: I had discussions with senior leaders to understand why I was selected for the position. From them, I learned that I had some unique skills that were required for the role. Their confidence in me led me to take the position and when I did, I worked harder than I ever had before. I did whatever it took to keep the project moving forward, including taking some unpopular stances—when I had to—and never second guessing the decisions I made.

Q: What is the biggest mistake you have ever made? What did you learn and how did you recover?

A: I was working with a new team and I didn't take the time to understand the culture of the group. I made a joke that insulted the team leader. To recover, I found a private setting and apologized. The senior executive brushed off the situation saying it was fine, but I knew it wasn't and I sincerely apologized and took responsibility for what I'd said. When he saw my genuine concern, he accepted my apology and we moved on. From this mistake, I learned two things. First, it's critically important to understand a culture before diving right in, and second, sincerely apologize when you are wrong. I learned not to take the (cont.)

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A: (cont.) easy way out just because someone is willing to let you off the hook.

Q: If you had a young woman you cared deeply about entering the workforce today, what single piece of advice would you have for her?

A: I would tell her not to play defense with your career. Meaning you should never avoid difficult roles because you are afraid. Will it be hard to succeed? Absolutely! As Tom Hanks' character, Jimmy Dugan, said in the movie *A League of Their Own*, "If it was easy, everyone would do it. It's supposed to be hard. If it wasn't hard, everyone would do it. The hard... is what makes it great."

Q: How did you make the leap from middle to senior management?

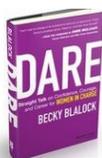
A: I was willing to take on a risky role to become a senior manager. There was no safety net. If I failed, I would have had to start over. To ensure I succeeded, I drew on my strong work ethic. Not many people fail when they are working their tails off.

Q: What advice do you have for building self-confidence?

A: I believe that lacking self-confidence is the most common, self-inflicted career limiter for women. The best advice I ever received to gain self-confidence was **Expect to be Accepted**. I used this advice early in my career, especially when working with new business units and with senior leaders. When you are young, new business situations can be intimidating. If you expect to be accepted, you walk into the room with a comfort level that everyone will want to meet you, get to know you and work with you. From there, begin to build your personal brand through hard work and great results. Over time, your reputation will precede you and when you meet new people, they'll say, "I've heard your name, it's great to finally meet you." Believe me, it happens, and it starts with expecting acceptance.

Q: What is your greatest fear today?

A: The only fear I have is that there isn't enough time to accomplish all the things that I want to accomplish in life. Some kids say they don't know what they want to be when they grow up. I always said that I wanted to be everything. I still feel the same way today.



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