

DARE Q & A with: Kim Greene



As the executive vice president and chief generation officer of the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA), Kim Greene is responsible for coal generation, natural gas, renewables, and hydroelectric power to ensure TVA achieves its vision of low-cost and cleaner energy by 2020. She leads the offices of Coal Operations, Gas Operations, River Operations and Renewables, Generation Construction, Power Supply & Fuels, and Engineering, Environmental & Support Services.

Before she became executive vice president, Ms. Greene served as group president of Strategy and External Relations, responsible for directing long-term goals and business strategies, and for meeting TVA's commitments to external stakeholders. She led the offices of Environment & Technology, Strategy & Business Planning, Commercial Operations & Pricing, Customer Relations, Economic Development, Government Relations and Communications. Before she was named group president, she served as TVA's chief financial officer, executive vice president of Financial Services, and chief risk officer.

Ms. Greene came to TVA in 2007 from Southern Company, where she was senior vice president of finance and treasurer. She began her career at Southern Company in 1991 and progressed through various areas of engineering, operations and finance. She spent eight years at the Southern Company subsidiary, Southern Energy, Inc., now GenOn, and worked in the areas of finance, structuring and asset management.

Ms. Greene, who holds degrees from the University of Tennessee (engineering sciences and mechanics), University Alabama-Birmingham (biomedical engineering), and Samford University (business administration), and who attended the Advanced Management Program of Harvard Business School, serves as a member of the advisory boards for the University of Tennessee College of Engineering and the University of Tennessee Department of Finance. She also serves on the boards of the University of Alabama-Birmingham Master of Safety Engineering program and the Electric Power Research Institute (EPRI). Kim Greene is a member of the Tennessee Women's Forum and Executive Women in Energy.

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

A: I have had many challenges in the workplace over the past twenty-two years. The biggest ones I remember are those related to the need to solve a problem and solve it quickly—and to do so mainly on my own. It's great to be a part of a team, but sometimes we only have ourselves to rely on. For example, as a young engineer, I designed a large valve system for a nuclear plant. During the outage required to install the valve system, we had problems. They could have caused delays, and delays cost money—lots of money. The people at the plant called me at 2:00 a.m. to tell me there were problems that needed to be (cont.)

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A: (cont.) addressed immediately. I went into the office and worked as quickly as possible to troubleshoot. The pressure was intense. In fact, just thinking about it now makes my stomach turn, just as it was turning that night.

I worked through the night and solved the issue. It felt terrific to have been able to get the project going again without incurring any significant delays or costs.

Another example is when I had to testify in an arbitration regarding a contract with a customer of my company. I was responsible for a contract to sell electricity for a period of five years to a very large customer. It was an extremely complicated contract, and disputes were arising between my company and the customer. The technical and legal details were intricate and convoluted, and there were tens of millions of dollars on the

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line. There were several witnesses, but my testimony was the most critical. I needed to be able to explain these complex details clearly to the arbitrator. If I failed to communicate clearly and properly, my company could lose many millions of dollars. I testified for three days, and, after my testimony, the customer settled the dispute favorably for my company.

On a larger organizational scale, I have had to restructure groups, bring in the right talent, let go of the wrong talent, and ensure that all work gets done according to rules and regulations. There are many legal and regulatory deadlines that cannot be missed; therefore, I have had to move quickly to get the people, processes and systems in place. The key is to lay out a clear objective and work passionately to meet it.

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

A: I wasn't a particularly courageous child; I didn't like to take risks, and I usually followed the rules. I did, however, have a healthy dose of confidence that my parents certainly nurtured. They told me that I could do anything I set my mind to—and I set my mind to lots of different things, including schoolwork, playing sports (basketball and softball), playing clarinet, spinning a rifle in the marching band, and joining the key club.

My courage has grown as I have grown older and have had to make tougher and tougher business decisions. I have taken career risks, which have always worked out. Moreover, I have had to make many decisions that are not popular, but are the right thing to do for the long-term success of the company. I believe courage is one of the key ingredients for true and successful leadership.

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

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A: I have made lots of small mistakes. I learned early to speak up as soon as I realized I made a mistake and to ask for help (or forgiveness) if needed. That has worked out well for me. I think I've averted the big mistakes because I ask for help, and I work to fix problems before they get too big.

One mistake that I did make a long time ago I still think about often. I was working on a project with a colleague—let's call him Sam—and Sam was not doing something that I thought he should be doing. So, I decided to air my frustration to another colleague—let's call him Tom. I typed out an e-mail about how Sam was wasting time and how upset he was making me. However, instead of sending it to Tom, I actually sent it to Sam!

AAHHH!!! As soon as I hit send I realized what I had done! So, there it was—the note to Sam from me about how upset I was with him.

Well, I learned two lessons. First of all, Sam was not mad at me about the e-mail. He told me I should have come to him with my frustration in the first place. We had a good conversation, and I committed to always address issues professionally with my colleagues. Secondly, I always reread e-mails and carefully check who they are being sent to before I hit send. If there is something in an e-mail that I wouldn't want the public to read on the front page of the newspaper, then I don't send it.

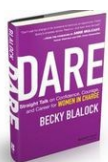
“If there is something in an e-mail that I wouldn't want the public to read on the front page of the newspaper, then I don't send it.”

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: Keep a positive attitude! I believe a great attitude is just as important as—if not even more important than—a great education.

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

A: Learn to do something well, then go do something else! Get out of your comfort zone and build new skills and experiences.



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