

DARE Q & A with: Hala Moddelmog



Hala Moddelmog was the first woman to lead an international restaurant company. In 1995 she was named president of Church's Chicken. Under her leadership, Church's outperformed the Quick Serve Restaurant industry growth rate for 8 consecutive years.

In 2006, she was named President and CEO of Susan G. Komen for the Cure, the world's largest grassroots network dedicated to eradicating breast cancer. On Hala's watch, Komen increased its levels of awareness, grew corporate sponsorships, and expanded its global reach.

Hala became President of Arby's Restaurant Group in 2010. Since her arrival, she has led Arby's to seven consecutive quarters of same-store-sale growth after four years of sales declines, introduced the Ultimate Angus product line, and launched a new brand-positioning and ad campaign. Hala is also the Chairman of the Arby's Foundation and is focused on ending childhood hunger in America. She has served on multiple boards and is a strong advocate for increasing women's participation in public boards. Hala is currently a director of AMERIGROUP (NYSE:AGP), and is a frequent public speaker. She is married to Steve and they have two grown children.

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

A: A recent exhilarating challenge has been to lead the transformation of Arby's. I was brought in to restore Arby's profitability and growth. Basically, a turnaround was needed. Arby's was disproportionately hit by the economic downturn in 2008. Sales, profits, and morale were down.

What attracted me to lead Arby's is that I love the brand and the products, and I knew it could be a great and growing brand again. Arby's had been my first job out of graduate school. I later moved on to be the president of Church's and the CEO of Susan G. Komen for the Cure, but Arby's always had a special place for me. As a matter of fact, this is my third time working at the company, so it wasn't difficult for me to see what was wrong with the brand. But I knew that making it right in the intensely competitive foodservice arena was not going to be easy.

Arby's is an iconic brand that is very well-known, has a great deal of consumer appeal, and a very distinctive position. We also have very committed and passionate franchisees. In this turnaround, I wanted to restore the confidence of Arby's 100,000 employees and franchisees and bring it back to its rightful place in the food service industry. The challenge was to regain the confidence of the consumers, the franchisees, and the employees.

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

A: I have strong family support and an incredible network of women and men who give me courage every day. I was confident that with strong vision, good communication, and collaboration, we would be able to grow the brand. My “always go to” is to hire an excellent team of passionate and smart people. I took the following steps to lead the turnaround:

First, I leveraged the expertise of our franchisees and employees by setting up informal “get-to-know-you sessions.” I traveled to visit our large franchisees and owners of single restaurants. Through these series of meetings, I learned a lot about where we should focus our energy and strategies.

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Second, I focused on communications. I wanted to make sure the franchisees understood what we were doing to grow their business and gain their buy-in and trust. Most important, I wanted to instill confidence about our plans to grow Arby’s. Through a weekly series of webinars, conferences, and e-mails, I worked to communicate the growth plan to our franchisees and employees and restore faith in the brand.

Third, I ensured we had a great leadership team that was highly accountable for growing the brand. The team is collaborative and has been instrumental in the turnaround of Arby’s.

Fourth, we celebrate our wins. We try to enjoy our small and large victories. This is a team that works very hard, but we like to laugh and enjoy one another’s company. We know there will be bumps along the way, so we spend time having fun with our wins when they happen.

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

A: I’ve made my biggest mistakes when I haven’t trusted my gut instincts. For example, when I was at Church’s, we received a lot of pressure to grow the brand outside of its core competency—which is delicious, inexpensive fried chicken. We created a Mexican concept that was co-branded with Church’s, and it didn’t work. I never felt quite right about it, and the experience reinforced my strong belief to trust my intuition and take a pause when something doesn’t feel right. I should have had the courage then to voice my concerns earlier in the process.

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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: My advice is to dive in with everything you've got; you really know more than you think you do. Learn from others around you. I have learned what to do and, more importantly, what not to do. Also, work hard, really hard. People appreciate that and will help you along the way.

I also believe in the 90% rule. I am convinced that life is 10% what happens to me and 90% how I react to it. Everyone has obstacles and challenges that come their way. Ninety percent of success is how you deal with the curve balls—those surprises that inevitably come our way. I believe it's important to maintain confidence, composure, and to stay calm when there is a problem. I try to understand the issue, put the facts on the table, pinpoint where the mistake happened, then brainstorm and work to fix the problem. Those who can remain calm and disciplined and who are able to shake-off obstacles definitely stand-out from the others.

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

A: I recommend having a positive attitude and visualizing the best possible outcome. Obviously, in order to have confidence you have to believe in yourself and you have to be your authentic self.

However, there is no substitute for being prepared, practiced, and knowledgeable. Do your homework, gather the data to educate yourself on the topic and share your point of view.

Most important, get the results! In the end, results are what you are hired to produce, and corporate success does not come to anyone without producing those results. If you consistently show that you are prepared and have a well-formulated point of view, success, respect, authority and confidence will follow.

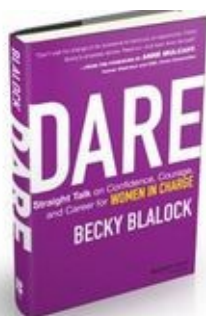
Q: What is your greatest fear today?

A: Running out of time is my greatest fear. Life is so good, so full. My husband and I have two incredible adult children, and I love seeing them start their careers. I live vicariously through them. I also have had a very privileged career with the good fortune to lead three great brands: Arby's, Susan G. Komen, and Church's Chicken. (cont.)

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A. (cont.)

I have travelled to thirty-four countries and there are at least thirty-four more I want to visit. The people that I have met along the journey have made me fear that the journey will be too short to take in all the world has to offer in terms of experiences and the beauty of human interaction.



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