

DARE Q & A with: Anesa Chaibi



Anesa Chaibi became president and CEO of HD Supply Facilities Maintenance, a multibillion-dollar HD Supply business unit, in September 2005. She has led the business through incredible transformational change, including acquisitions, integrations, divestitures, and a major enterprise resource planning (ERP) deployment, while growing profitability each year. She is chartered with further refining the strategy of the business to drive accelerated growth.

Anesa began her career in 1989 in the GE Chemical and Materials Leadership Program. She held roles of increasing responsibility in manufacturing, operations, production, marketing, corporate initiatives, global sourcing, Six Sigma quality, and, as a business leader within GE Silicones, in Plastics, Power Systems, Industrial Systems, Water & Process Technologies and Infrastructure before leaving to join HD Supply.

Anesa has a Bachelor of Science in Chemical Engineering from West Virginia University and an M.B.A. from the Fuqua School of Business at Duke University.

HD Supply Facilities Maintenance is a business of HD Supply, a leading industrial distribution company that provides a broad range of products and services to professional customers in the infrastructure and energy, maintenance, repair and improvement, and specialty construction markets. Through a diverse portfolio of industry-leading businesses, HD Supply is one of the largest diversified industrial distribution companies in North America, with approximately 640 locations and more than 14,000 associates.

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

A: In 2000, I accepted a role to lead a technical team of electrical engineers to develop, design, and produce a new product to serve the power generation industry. Although I have a degree in chemical engineering, I did not feel very confident that I understood the technical elements that were critical to the success of the position, product, and company. What made matters even more challenging was that I was the only female on the senior leadership team and I was in my early thirties, directing fifty- to sixty-year-old male engineers.

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

A: I was and am confident in myself and my ability to come up to speed quickly and deliver results in new environments, based on a variety of career experiences. In this situation, I immersed myself in the technical aspects so that I was able to build my competency, understanding, and confidence in leading this team. I also stood my ground when being tested or challenged by members of the team to establish my (*cont.*)

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A: (cont.) credibility and authority in this leadership position. It was challenging, but I never let any frustrations show, and in the end, failure was not an option. We prevailed and developed a quality product and delivered it to market in only nine months, which is a very aggressive cycle time for a highly engineered product and a significant accomplishment.

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

A: I jumped at the opportunity to join a startup, and I was instrumental in “bootstrapping” the business. There were three thirty-year-olds (including me) at the helm of the newly established company, and the macroeconomic environment shifted very quickly, and thus we missed the window to successfully enter the market. Ultimately, I ended up shutting down the business, shelving the products, and placing all of the business’s top talent in other roles before I moved on to my next position. Despite the collective capability, passion, and commitment, the business failed. However, I walked away with a tremendous learning experience and the understanding that life does go on, that you have to take risks and big swings to push yourself out of your comfort zone. I have found that the benefit of pushing myself is discovering there are always things to learn from each experience (good and bad), regardless of succeeding or failing.

“To accelerate your learning and development, pursue opportunities and roles that seem really hard and that others don’t want.”

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: Believe in yourself and take risks! If you don’t, you won’t reach your full potential!

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

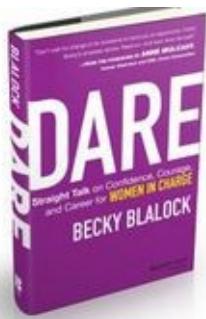
A: Test yourself and grow by taking risks. To accelerate your learning and development, pursue opportunities and roles that seem really hard and that others don’t want. Whether you succeed, fail, or end up with something in between, be tenacious. Make connections and be respectful of others. Inspire those you work with, and lead them to be their very best.

Q: What is your greatest fear today?

A: That the number of women in large operating roles or board positions does not improve in the (cont.)

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A: (cont.) near future. Despite the shifting demographics and the record number of women joining the workforce, the number of senior women in the top executive positions of major corporations is still very limited.



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