

# LESSONS FROM LEADERS

## THREE WOMEN AT LOWE'S HIGHLIGHT INCLUSIVITY



BY EILEEN HOULIHAN

Vision. Integrity. Courage. These are all qualities of a great leader. NAHB sat down recently with three women at Lowe's to discuss how these values have transformed their career paths across the home improvement retailer.

"I was able to reach my level of success as a manager through hard work, a great network of peers and mentors, and some great managers that I like to call my coaches," said Ebony Wheeler, a store manager in Mount Holly, N.J. Wheeler was recruited by Lowe's in 2014 and quickly entered the store manager training program.

Wheeler says she learned quite a bit through Lowe's annual Women's Leadership Summits. The summits provide female leaders the opportunity to connect across the company, focus on their development, and hear from executives and keynote speakers. During her Lowe's tenure, Wheeler has worked at four stores in three states.

"Working at Lowe's is not just a job," Wheeler said. "It's a calling

that fits well with all aspects of my life and provides the work-life balance I need to be there for my family." She enjoys what she does, which makes it seem less like work and more of a purpose. "I get the opportunity to make a difference every day."

Lowe's launched its Women's Business Resource Group (BRG), Women Empowered, in 2019 to drive engagement, retention, and development of women at all levels across the organization. The Lowe's BRGs allow for a community of associates and allies to come together, have transparent dialogue, and educate the organization and the public about the issues facing different communities.

"Women in Leadership events encourage and inspire women to grow across the company," said Colleen Gee, a Lowe's regional vice president with 22 years of retail experience. "Lowe's Women Business Resource Group provides support for women at Lowe's, our customers, and in the community," Gee said.

Gee worked her way up through a variety of positions at Lowe's

and enjoys embracing the challenges of her current role, where she oversees dozens of stores in Lowe's North Division. As a champion of Women in Leadership events, Gee says it's important for women at all levels of the organization to network with women in senior leadership roles. "The inclusive environment has allowed me to grow within the organization, achieve my goals and empower others to achieve theirs," said Gee.

Diversity, equality, and inclusion are key commitments at Lowe's. Those commitments form the foundation of the company's culture and extend to every area of the business.

Rochelle Komlosi, Lowe's director of pro national accounts, said she believes in pushing herself to continually learn new things and challenges herself to believe all things are possible. Komlosi plays a key role in Lowe's pro partnerships and has been in her position for a year and a half.

Lowe's is a great place for women to succeed because it gives everyone an equal opportunity to grow their career, she said. "Lowe's encourages diversity at all levels throughout the organization. It is an inclusive environment for leaders to be successful," Komlosi said.

Lowe's fosters that inclusive culture, one that celebrates differences and recognizes diversity of all kinds as strengths. The company says it allows them to better serve their customers and support the diverse communities they serve.

"At Lowe's, we have several Business Resource Groups that are committed to understanding associate engagement and values each associates' unique experience within their job," Wheeler said. "I belong to two groups that are centered around the promotion of development, business improvements, and community for women and Black associates.

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Colleen Gee



Ebony Wheeler



Rochelle Komlosi

"Group conference calls and forums have allowed me the ability to network across the company to gain a deeper understanding of our current environment within and outside of Lowe's that impacts the way we work," she said. "It's an opportunity to join in on conversations to identify strengths that we need to maintain and to provide opportunities to make improvements."

Growth and success also come from being part of a good team. "I truly believe if you treat your team well, they will become your personal cheerleaders to help you achieve your goals," Wheeler added.

For Gee and Komlosi, mentors Joe McFarland, Lowe's executive vice president of stores, and Scott Matthews, Lowe's vice president of pro outside sales, have been their biggest champions.

"Joe has been a champion of mine since I was a store manager," Gee said. "He challenges me to do more than I thought was possible and has afforded me the opportunity to be successful. When I wasn't getting the desired results, Joe was always there encouraging me to push forward."

"Scott believes in me and gives me the confidence I need to grow as a leader," Komlosi said. Getting to hear from other women leaders at company events has also inspired her. "It's always great to hear from other women about their work experiences and what got them to where they are today."

For women starting out in the industry, these three leaders have some sage advice. "Be yourself and define yourself by your actions and your leadership; do not try to be someone that you think others want you to be," Gee said. "Celebrate your differences and lean into them to help you be successful."

"Push yourself to continually learn new things and challenge yourself to believe all things are possible. Learn about all the different business groups within your company so you aren't always tied to one," added Komlosi.

And Wheeler turns back to that key leadership quality, courage. "My advice to women building a career is to be courageous, be yourself, be resilient, and be open to being coached." She said the best players on the team are always the most willing to practice what they've learned. "Don't give up. You can do it one promotion at a time!" **BW**



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