



Inspired By: Molly Shepard



“Before you start making decisions and/or changes, do some real listening.”

Building stakeholder relationships at the beginning of a job can make all the difference in ensuring a smooth transition, says Molly D. Shepard, MS, MSM founder, president & CEO, *The Leader's Edge/Leaders By Design* and advisory council member, Pennsylvania Conference for Women.

She shared some insights she's learned from her own job transitions and why she's committed to helping women succeed.

Q: How did your professional career begin, and how did you end up where you are today?

A: I launched *The Leader's Edge/Leaders By Design* after founding, growing, and eventually selling one of the world's largest career development consulting firm, Manchester, Inc. Through my work there, I helped develop the highest standards of excellence in program design and delivery. Manchester became one of the nation's top human resources consulting firms helping thousands of people a year transition into new jobs and reach their potential as leaders under our guidance.

Now, in my current role as founder and CEO of *The Leader's Edge/Leaders By Design*, we work with companies to help their executive and high-potential men and women make greater contributions as leaders to their companies. The idea for *The Leader's Edge/Leaders By Design* arose from the disparity I saw between the numbers of women in the workforce and those in senior level positions. I was acutely aware of the many unique obstacles and challenges that women face in their career advancement, and wanted to devote my expertise in coaching and counseling and energy to help women advance in the business world. Helping women succeed, and now men too with our partner firm *Leaders By Design*, has been one of the most rewarding, exhilarating successes in my career. And, it all started with a young woman who majored in Russian in college! I was lucky to have discovered my passion for helping people better manage their careers and leadership in my early work in Admissions and at The Hay Group, where I led the outplacement business. This interest led me to get two master's degrees, one in counseling and one in leadership, which have aided my career immensely. My experience serving on boards, both public and non-profit, has also contributed enormously to my growth and success as a leader in business.

Q: Who is a leader you respect and why?

A: The leader whom I currently most admire is Abraham Lincoln. When I learned that he advised Ulysses Grant to accept surrender from Gen. Robert E. Lee, I also learned that he advised Ulysses Grant to not penalize the troops, but to send them home to all their families with their arms to rebuild America. His remarkable ability to advocate the forging of teams and build relationships just astounds me as I read more about him.

Q: As a leader in your company, what is the best piece of advice you would offer to a new employee to help them succeed?

A. Before you start making decisions and/or changes, do some real listening. Listen to what people have to say about your role. Examine your goals and share them with your boss to ensure complete alignment with him or her. Building these stakeholder relationships at the beginning of your tenure can make all the difference in ensuring a smooth transition. Bring new insights to what is going on by taking a fresh look at the organization – interview peers and colleagues and uncover interesting information for you and your new boss to discuss.

Q: What would you say has been your driving force in your staying power in a male-dominated industry?

A. My driving force is the passion, talent, and determination I see in the women I have the pleasure of working with and meeting every single day. Despite obstacles and challenges large and small, work-related and otherwise, women love their jobs, are making real contributions to their companies, and they make excellent leaders in any organization given their innate skills in collaboration, strategic thinking, and communications.

While often underappreciated, women actually bring a wealth of natural abilities to leadership. My commitment in our work at *The Leader's Edge/Leaders By Design* is to help those who wish to advance to navigate their corporate landscapes more effectively and to help organizations understand the importance of diversity and inclusion as it relates to Talent Management, Recruiting and setting an egalitarian culture.

Q: As a seasoned professional, how do you share your experience with your team on a daily basis?

A. Our company, which is located in 5 cities, with over 30 coaches, works together, primarily, virtually. I try to reach out to the members of my team via email or phone regularly and also host quarterly Coaches' Roundtables to discuss pertinent issues related to the coaching industry, new trends, and significant articles and books on leadership to keep us all fresh. We also host an annual retreat to align the team around the next year's initiatives, programs, and goals. The health, happiness and well being of our community of coaches is a top priority for me.

Q: What is the one thing you make time for in your daily life that helps keeps you refreshed and positive?

A: My ever-expanding family and friends has always been my top priority. They keep me grounded. In particular, my step daughter, Isabelle, and my four grandchildren, Kaia, Devon, Tate and Zoe, remind me that the purpose of my work is to help make a better work environment and society for them in the future.