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Erin Brockovich and retail leaders share challenges and triumphs at NEW Executive Leaders Forum

Walmart's Ruiz and Safeway's Renda keynote senior-level event

LOS ANGELES (August 7, 2012) -- More than 250 consumer goods and retail industry leaders focused on the legacies they are living and hope to leave at the sixth annual Network of Executive Women Executive Leaders Forum, July 30-August 1, 2012 at the Terranea Resort outside Los Angeles.

Gisel Ruiz, executive vice president and chief operating officer of Walmart US, and Larree Renda, executive vice president of Safeway Inc., joined legal legend Erin Brockovich and more than dozen industry leaders who shared their life and career experiences at the invitation-only event.

Walmart COO Gisel Ruiz spoke about the retailer's efforts to create a career path for women and the lessons she learned as she rose through the company's ranks. Key to Walmart's progress, she said, is not philosophizing but taking action.

To better position themselves in the workplace, women should "reveal your whole self at work – consistency is the cousin of integrity." Ruiz said. "That is being honest with who you are. Bring it all to work. Your 'true north' will never change."

Ruiz advised the crowd to "Lose the guilt," adding, "We set such high expectations for ourselves, that when we don't meet them, we fall prey to guilt. Don't be afraid to "roar," she told the mostly female crowd. "Leverage your strengths, don't change them. Be a woman. It is a gift. Women bring a different perspective to conversations and dialogue."

Women lead differently, Renda says

Larree Renda, executive vice president of Safeway Inc., characterized life's obstacles as "opportunities to grow, learn, advance and make a difference." The first woman and youngest person to become a vice president for Safeway Inc. and the company's first female executive vice president, Renda urged NEW Executive Leaders Forum attendees to never give up on their dreams, no matter the obstacles.

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Women lead with their brains and hearts, a different leadership style than a man's, she said. Women are cooperative, supportive, nurturing and participative and women's leadership instills pride, loyalty, high morale and peak performance.

She encouraged women to be assertive, speak up and self-promote. "I've never seen anyone who's been promoted because they did what was in their job description," she said, adding that it's often necessary to chart your own course.

Lessons from a legend

Erin Brockovich's legacy of overcoming obstacles, she said, started with embracing the belief in her own power. "Don't be afraid to be your own hero," she said. "As a leader, stand on your own two feet. Make decisions for yourself."

Women also need to take an assessment of themselves -- not what they have, but who they are, she said. "Look for better ways to run or start your business," Brockovich advised. "Be willing to adapt to new realities, and don't fear the change. Once you reassess, you will find confidence to move forward to your success."

The Forum also featured an address by Blythe McGarvie, a Harvard Business School senior lecturer and former CFO of BIC, who spoke on facing fears with courage, and a briefing on the status of women in business by economist Janice Madden.

A panel discussion on how to advance women leaders was moderated by Nancy Croitoru, president and CEO of Food & Consumer Products of Canada. It featured a spirited discussion by Kim Jeffery, president and CEO, Nestlé Waters North America; Lynn Marmer, group vice president, corporate affairs for The Kroger Co.; Kelly Semrau, senior vice president, global corporate affairs, communication and sustainability for SC Johnson; and David Williams, CEO of Deloitte Financial Advisory Services LLP.

The Forum also included three concurrent sessions featuring Angela Joyner, vice president, general manager, refrigerator portfolio for ConAgra Foods; Roz Hudnell, chief diversity officer, global director of education and external affairs for Intel Corporation; Donna Giordano, president of The Kroger Company's Ralphs Division; Kellie McElhaney, professor at UC Berkeley; Christy Consler, vice president of sustainability for Safeway, Bruce Karas, vice president of environment and sustainability for Coca-Cola Refreshments; Robin Ely, senior associate dean for culture and community at Harvard Business School; Jenna Dudevoir, director of marketing for Kalypso; Lisbeth McNabb, CEO and founder of w2wlink; and Sandra Finley, president of League of Black Women.

NEW Vice Chair Catherine Lindner, vice president, retail marketing for Walgreen Company, presented attendees with recent Network research on the future direction of NEW and the critical role women play in the industry's workplace and marketplace.

For session notes, high-resolution photographs and videos visit newonline.org/?page=summit12



Walmart attended the NEW Executive Leaders Forum in force August 1. Walmart attendees pictured front row from left: Marcia McGraw; NEW Board Chair Michelle Gloeckler, senior vice president, home, Walmart US; Forum keynote speaker Gisel Ruiz, executive vice president and chief operating officer, Walmart US; Amy Bagley; and Celia Swanson. Back row: Kim Sentebich, Rachel Marler, Tabitha Watkins, Karen Stuckey, Matt Mayes and Daria Reckom.

About the Network of Executive Women

The Network of Executive Women is the consumer products and retail industry's largest diversity organization, with more than 6,000 members representing 400 industry companies. The Network has 80 national sponsors and 19 regional groups in the United States and Canada. It hosts dozens of local events and two national conferences each year. For more information visit www.newonline.org.