

*ACG Minnesota's Women's Leadership Series was held on January 28, 2020 at Allianz Field, featuring Wendy Nelson, The Carlson Family Foundation.*

Wendy Nelson, our Women's Leadership Series first speaker in the new decade, opened with this quote by Jill Lepore: "The past is an inheritance, a gift and a burden. It can't be shirked. You carry it everywhere. There's nothing for it but to get to know it."

Wendy caused us all to pause with her engaging storytelling. She offered glimpses into her childhood, her family's philanthropic values, and how the past shaped her and the work she and the Carlson Family Foundation do today.

She doesn't apologize for privilege. It's not about that. It's about responsibility and accountability. She clarified that doing the work doesn't come from an *I can* capacity, it comes from a place of values. In her role as the third person to serve as chair of the foundation and the first in the third generation, she talked about stepping up and how those values were instilled.

She didn't share business best practices, rather, she openly shared personal stories that show exactly how values are learned and pass to the next generation. In a roomful of mostly women and many mothers, you can bet we were all taking in these beautiful teaching moments and asking ourselves how we are finding ways to tell these stories and pass on strong values to our children.

"Does your family have a credo?" Wendy asked of the audience. Seeing not much response or at least no one that readily could recite theirs, she cued us in to hers. It was all about going wherever you go as a leader, dreaming with your all, and never, ever giving up. If anyone was taking notes, they most likely noted, "Craft a family credo. Make it stick."

The Carlson family commitment to engaging with communities and using capitalism as a force for good became apparent through Wendy's shared anecdotes that touched on these ideas: The best form of philanthropy is giving someone a job. Giving back is doing your fair share. Addressing the interconnectedness in communities is a virtuous cycle.

Wisdom imparted from her father and mother runs deep. If asked to envision an evening with Minnesota's leading philanthropic family, many of us might not know where to begin. Wendy enlightened us with a picture of evolving dinner guests focused on understanding the stories of people and groups who were marginalized.

She learned about showing up to change things that didn't feel right by being part of the solution. She learned that every life is precious. She also learned that not everyone behaved as if they believed that. "We still have a lot of work to do. The hierarchy that society applies to human worth still exists," she reminded us.

In an empowering wrap up, Wendy referenced poet Mary Oliver's prompt about *your one wild and precious life* and prompted us to think about what we can do in every platform to show inclusivity.

She touched on times in her personal life when she heard every sound from whispers to shouts that she was somehow less than, and times where she stood up for gender equality. Tap into the “courage of the child” and resist the stories others try to impose upon you, she advised. Forgo the new white figure skates for the used, black figure skates. Write your own story and look around to see whom you can help write theirs.

Perhaps many attendees were thinking about a person who interrupted society’s expectations and told us we could do whatever we desired. Now it’s time to be that interrupter for someone else. There may be gaps, but there are also deep sources of power (i.e. women have 80% of consumer buying power). Wendy gracefully and powerfully left us with some ideas for 2020. Let’s remember we are all interconnected. Understand abundance and address scarcity. Make the circle bigger. There is room for all.

*Thank you to our ACG Minnesota Women’s Leadership Series Sponsors Baird and Lathrop GPM who make it possible to bring in speakers like Wendy Nelson. 2020 marks the fifth year of the Women’s Leadership Series, co-presented by ACG Minnesota and Corvus North.*