

*ACG Minnesota and Corvus North's Third Annual AIM: A Women's Leadership Conference, was held on March 5, 2020, at the Hyatt Regency Minneapolis.*

### **Women Leaders AIM to be Authentic**

The forecast for the weekend following this year's ACG Minnesota and Corvus North AIM: A Women's Leadership Conference is sixties and sunny. Quite a different story from last year's conference when emcee Belinda Jensen, Kare11's chief meteorologist, had to deliver news that we might be breaking the 52" of snowfall within a 30-day period record.

With the weather news covered, Belinda talked about the designation of titan as an enviable title. Coincidentally we had one in our presence from *Twin Cities Business Magazine's* list of titans (published Dec 2019)-- the day's opening keynote, Anne Behrendt, President and CEO of Doran Companies.

### **Leader, Learner and Women (also Titan)**

Anne's career began in litigation and even when things went well, everyone involved was angry when the process ended. There was no celebration. When she made a pivot to real estate in 2015 to join Doran Companies, she worked with large, collaborative teams. There were celebrations upon major project completions. It was certainly not boring to do what others might view as transactional work.

Her role as Doran Companies' general counsel at the onset, shifted when she bought a portion of the company and moved into leadership as the company's CEO. She pointed out that having a seat at the table for years prior allowed her to understand the CEO role. When the time came she could confidently step into that role, even though she didn't know exactly how to do it. As a titan, she would quickly learn.

She focuses on being a driver and protector of company culture and leads by example unapologetically scheduling self-care and family time. However you lead, you must be yourself.

### **Behind The Scenes Family-Business Style**

Following Anne, the Business Owner's Panel with Shelley Buck, Prairie Island Indian Community; Keia Isaacson, Lakeside Floor Coverings; and Angela Pritchard Spiteri, Pritchard Companies; moderated by Nicole Behm Koep, Quazar Capital Corporation; dove right into a conversation around the opportunities and challenges of owners. Family businesses are not for the faint of heart. Emotions are amplified, Angela said. "It's the highest of highs [if you succeed] and lowest of lows [if you fail]"

Angela forged her way as a woman leader, coming back to her family's business after looking at opportunities in finance. She shared, "Fake it before you make it, but be sure you know you can." Shelley answered Nicole's prompt about the advice she'd give, "Listen and watch. You don't need to know everything." Keia talked about the importance of laughing and feeling good about yourself and reminded us, "What other people think of you doesn't pay the bills."

### **From Finger Guns To Financial Backing**

Deep exhale... A TED-style Talk by Alex West Steinman, co-founder of the Coven was next up to enlighten us. After a career in advertising dressing up garbage, she sought a different way to work and be with her three co-founders. Upon sharing their vision for a supported workspace for women, binary and trans folks, they received lots of finger guns and high fives, but not much real financial backing.

Understanding their charge and pivoting toward joy, which Alex noted is the true act of resistance, they formed and launched The Coven and most recently opened a new space in St. Paul for witches who bring the magic.

### **Breathe... Or You'll Always Be Outrunning A Bear**

With a slick transition by Belinda, we moved from witches to bears with Stephanie May Potter, The Art of Living Well Podcast, and her question, "When was the last time you ran from a bear?" In TED-style Talk format, Stephanie led us through what seemed to have been the top resonating theme for the day: self-care. The reason behind the bear prompt is the reminder that our bodies do not perceive threats from bears to daily at-home and at-work stresses differently. It all causes our bodies to pump with cortisol and royally mess with our wellbeing.

Stephanie shared 10 self-care tips to make better leaders, taking care to point out that the implementation of these practices from meditation to journaling did not happen overnight for her. She shared her corporate experience – wearing extra work hours like a badge of honor and eating her lunch at her desk every day. Self-care is no longer a yearly massage or a pedicure then going back to life as frazzled as you were before. Self-care is anything you do to take care of your mental, physical or spiritual health and more on a daily basis. Thank you, Stephanie. Let's all take more (self) care!

After two meaningful breaths as a group, we had time to mix with attendees and meet the female makers and creators at the AIM Expo. Chocolates, caramels, cookies, nuts, jewelry, you name it! Goodies in hand, attendees took a seat for the luncheon keynote, Rhoda Olsen of Great Clips (even Rhoda had a box of Sweet Jules Gifts). #WomenSupportingWomen

### **A Franchise With A Force**

Rhoda is simply a force. As Vice Chair of the Great Clips, she lives the vision, which is to work together build the most profitable salons by delivering the most powerful and enduring brand. Its leadership is also informed on issues that concern her stylists, like the #COVID19. Of this Rhoda says, "Everyone has a different lens and there's a lot of information out there. Follow the CDC. Put things in perspective and most importantly, wash your hands!"

Getting a haircut is emotional and Great Clips embraces that. Rhoda believes that every interaction counts. This culture plays out in Great Clips salons everywhere, in the charitable programs they run and support to assist their stylists in need, and in how they encourage local franchise owners to support local community.

She left us with thoughts on leadership, “The role of a leader is not to manage and change others, but to change themselves.” She backed this with many examples from her shift after coming back from cancer and the acknowledgement of the powerful reality of physical strength feeding into your mental strength. Women – do your pushups and hold your planks! Fit in physical activity whenever you can. She also wove her creative parenting of her three sons into the equation with some colorful stories of their youth. Instead of expecting them to do something different, she did something different and unexpected.

### **Authentic Brands For All!**

Post Rhoda inspiration, it was time to return to TED-style Talks. This one delivered by the high-energy Jennifer Zick of Authentic Brand. Jennifer walked us through her personal brand journey from establishing credibility, to developing her personal brand, to a merger of personal and business brand. To outline this authentic personal brand concept for the audience, she uses a graphic of circles to show the important things that go into a brand. They include questions you have, feelings, values, beliefs, and fears and the outer circle ones definitely require some level of vulnerability. Who’s ready to go there? That’s where things get real.

On that note, attendees selected one of two breakout sessions to attend: Franchise Panel or the Caregivers Panel. The franchise panel featured Sandy Bodeau, Lathrop GPM; Kristen Denzer, Tierra Encantada; and Cindi Nikituk, Farrell's Extreme Bodyshaping. The Caregiver’s Panel featured Leah Challberg, Alzheimers Assoc.; Emily Nicoll, CBRE Minneapolis; and Gena Petrella, Clarityze; and moderator Gail Rosenblum, Star Tribune.

### **Franchise Basics to Booming**

The franchise discussion touched on Cindi’s previous career as nurse with Health Partners where she made some intuitive suggestions while serving on the company’s wellness committee; and Kristen’s previous businesses including one as an event planner with an overload of weddings that led to burnout. Both women are faced with the challenge of replicating an experience that they deliver on and envision for the brand and all of its locations. Every day. The beauty of franchise is understanding and having a solid basic business and knowing it so well that you can grow it.

### **Messy, But Accurate, Metaphors**

The caregiver conversation shed an incredible light on the challenges that caregivers face, especially for those of us who haven’t experienced giving this constant and time-consuming type of attention to loved ones. The panel members shared metaphors for their roles as caregivers from Gena’s ball-of-yarn mess of a stages of grief map to Emily’s comment of feeling like a buffet, essentially feeling overcommitted and giving too much. Leah shared some thoughts on helping caregivers including the ask of *what have you done so far?* and *where are you now?* versus running them through an entire list of things they could do.

Before sun-setting the day of learning and moving into happy hour, Jen Gilhoi, Sparktrack Consulting, led a workshop around social media and mindset. Just like any area of our lives where we’re practicing self-care, we need to create our own guidelines around posting and engaging.

### **Social That Sparks**

Jen encouraged us to experiment, follow others who are doing it well, and have a plan by identifying your purpose, themes and brand. She shared that it is less about frequency than it is about quality and the idea that even a minimal amount of social media can work in your favor, especially if your social media purpose is around building relationships you've already established in person. So go ahead attendees, test out some #socialthatspark!

The day came to a close with a nourishing happy hour that felt rich with leadership, action, information, motivation and self-care conversations. We can't wait to see how attendees will take the knowledge and connections gained at AIM into their personal and professional lives. After today's content, wouldn't you all agree the "bring your full self to work" movement is continuing to converge in a healthy, necessary way? Share your thoughts – we'd love to hear from you!

*Thank you to all of our sponsors who made AIM possible this year: Amma Parenting Center, Finance & Commerce, Global, Knoll Parameters, PNC Bank, SALO LLC, Star Tribune and Veritae Group. We also want to thank our AIM Expo businesses including Amma Parenting Center, Camille Elyse Confections, Droolin Moose, Fair Anita, Isadore Nut Co., Kakookies, Mademoiselle Miel, MDA Leadership, Sweet Jules Gifts, The Top Knot Tribe and Wellness With V.*