



Women in Leadership



Their voices, ideas and vision for the future of cheese and dairy.

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What do you think are the most important attributes of a leader, and how do you use your role to help direct, motivate and inspire your team and organization?

Humility, open-mindedness and authenticity are top-of-mind for me. All go hand-in-hand with the philosophy of servant leadership, a style of management practiced by my late father. Learn from your team, empower them to use their strengths and knowledge to make impactful decisions, and encourage and applaud successful outcomes that contribute to the well-being of not only the individual, but the entire organization. That last part is especially important. Positive recognition goes a long way in helping to create a happy, productive work environment while encouraging the replication of successful behavior and processes. My hope is that, at its best, our organization runs like a true democracy, with every team member truly feeling that their voice is not only heard, but considered and respected.

Can you share your perspective of being part of a family-owned company and what it means to be a leader of the next generation?

As fourth-generation owners of a family-owned company, my siblings and I feel a deep sense of responsibility to successfully build upon the legacy that my great-grandfather, grandfather and father created. Our father, in particular, was our biggest mentor. We learned most of what we know about leadership and ethical business practices from him. He recently passed away, and his guidance is profoundly missed. My brother, sister and I will need to lean on each other to ensure that we lead with integrity and honesty, just as he did. It's very important to us to remain true to our Golden Rule culture as we continue our growth as

a company.

What do you think traditionally has been a barrier to women entering or advancing in the dairy industry? How have women worked to overcome these barriers and build more opportunities for new generations?

Historically, the food industry has generally been male-dominated, especially in leadership roles. That's changing slowly but surely. For example, I served on the board of an industry association a little over a decade ago. At the time, I was the first woman to serve on the board in its history. Since my tenure, however, there have been many women who have served, including a member of our current executive team. Sometimes it just takes one person to hold the door open, so to speak. I also feel that it's very important to encourage other women in the industry. I really enjoy what I call "networking for good" — making connections that lift us all up and provide win-win opportunities and partnerships.

How do you see workplace and executive structures evolving with new generations and priorities? What strategies do you use to help promote a positive and productive company or organizational culture?

Workplace and executive structures are inherently dynamic and influenced by so many factors like cultural trends, societal norms and larger global geopolitical issues. It's our job as leaders to have the right team in place to help us anticipate changes in the workforce and how people can best do their jobs. Being open to new ideas and a willingness to be flexible are especially imperative to effectively handling challenges. For example, during the COVID pandemic, Nelson-Jameson was able to pivot quickly to a work-from-home model because our existing IT capacities were more robust than some of our competitors. We had been early adopters of Zoom (shortly after their founding), so the transition to strictly online meetings was pretty seamless

and preserved our business continuity. Had we not championed IT solutions for decades, we wouldn't have been poised to adapt as quickly as we did.

As to maintaining a positive and productive organizational culture — that goes to the heart of who we are. Our corporate credo includes the importance of adhering to the Golden Rule, which we extend to both our external supply chain partners, as well as to our internal customers — our team members. Our Employee Experience team is phenomenal and has taken our employee benefits, programs, experiences, training and educational opportunities to the next level. Ownership also recently established the Nelson-Jameson Foundation (NJF), which formalized Nelson-Jameson's long history of philanthropic involvement in our communities and industry. Besides awarding grants to charitable programs and educational institutions that are important to our employees and to our industry, the NJF empowers our team members to positively impact their communities through a Matching Gift program and Volunteer Time Off. In addition, our Golden Rule Assistance Fund provides financial aid to employees experiencing hardship as a result of a federal, state or locally declared emergency. We also offer the Golden Rule Scholarship program to spouses and dependents of our employees to further their education. We have found that the work that we do through our foundation has been a significant unifier for our team members across the country.

Thinking of leaders and/or role models you have worked with in the past, what are some strategies you have learned from them and adopted, and what are some things you have tried to avoid?

My favorite quote is from Winston Churchill: "Success is not final, failure is not fatal. It is the courage to continue that counts." I think that it's easy to get caught up in your mistakes. But it's important to remember that you learn from those mistakes, and that you carry on and try to do better. As a leader, you need to remember that failures are part of the process, and

your reaction to those missteps speaks to your character way more than those mistakes do. It's equally important to extend that philosophy to your team. My dad used to say, "Don't let perfect get in the way of good." It's very difficult to achieve and maintain perfection with any real consistency without sacrificing something important along the way. We should aim for good, and if we happen to hit perfect, then that's amazing and should be celebrated. But good is wonderful as well, and much more realistic. Personally and professionally, sometimes we just need to give each other some grace and aim for good.

Why is it important for team members to see diversity and representation at the leadership level to inspire and motivate them to advance in their careers?

It's important because it's difficult to envision that something's possible if you've never seen it. Nelson-Jameson is majority woman-owned, and women make up over 50% of our top management positions. Forty percent of our board of directors are women. Many of us are mothers, and our visibility in leadership roles helps normalize women leaders to the next generation.

What is a key industry insight you'd share with yourself 10 years ago if you could?

That I deserve a seat at the table, and not just because I'm a fourth-generation owner. I think it's easy for women in executive positions in the food industry to experience "imposter syndrome," since we are often the only woman in the meeting. It's easy to second-guess yourself and forget that your experience, knowledge and education got you there. My dad, for his part, was an early advocate of "Girl Power." When Cyndi Lauper's "Girls Just Want to Have Fun" came on the radio in the '80s, my dad took me aside and said, "Amanda, I need you to understand that girls DON'T just want to have fun. Girls can do ANYTHING they want to do." He instilled the confidence in me to be unapologetic about taking up space in this world — whether it was in the playroom as a girl or the