



WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP

Driving innovation and growth in cheese and dairy



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Q 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?

A Stepping aside. I really believe that's one of the most underrated traits of a strong leader. There's this misconception that if you step aside, you are giving up control or influence — but I see it as the complete opposite. To me, it's about trust. It's about showing confidence in your team and giving them the space to truly thrive and show off the skills they have developed.

For example, a major media outlet recently reached out to me for an industry quote, and instead of taking it myself, I connected them with one of my team members. I wanted her to have that moment — to build her own relationships, be seen as an expert and gain the confidence that comes from being trusted. She nailed it, and honestly, watching her own that conversation was way more rewarding than doing it myself.

Celebrate your team's wins publicly, give them opportunities to stretch themselves and trust them to make decisions. When people feel supported like that, they show up with more creativity, energy and ownership, and that's what really moves an organization forward.

Q Please talk a bit about your involvement in Females in Food and what this organization is doing to empower women in the food sector?

A As president of Females in Food, I am proud to lead an organization that's truly unique in its approach to empowerment. We connect women from every corner of the food and beverage industry — across the entire supply chain and across sectors like

dairy, beef, grains, ingredients and consumer brands. It's an incredible ecosystem where women can learn from one another's experiences and broaden their perspectives. Coming from the dairy world, I have found real value in hearing from women outside my niche — and I also love helping others better understand dairy through our monthly "Let's Chat Dairy" calls. Those conversations help bridge knowledge gaps and bring more diverse voices into the dairy space. Education is everything when it comes to inclusion. The more we share insights across sectors, the stronger and more innovative our industry becomes.

Q What advice would you give to young women who are hesitant about pursuing leadership roles in traditionally male-dominated industries?

A My biggest piece of advice is to find your voice. Don't be afraid to speak up, even when you're the only woman in the room. Ask questions — a lot of them — and don't stop just because someone seems too busy or unwilling to help. Persistence is key.

Challenge ideas, do your own research and take the time to learn outside of work hours. That's how you build confidence and credibility. It's not always easy, and you will have moments where it feels uncomfortable, but that's where growth happens. Every time you push through that hesitation, you prove to yourself (and others) that you belong there.

Q How do you balance authenticity with professionalism in your leadership style?

A For me, authenticity comes from experience — and a lot of hard work. Early in my career, I had to be scrappy just to stay in the game. There was a point where I worked three jobs at once because I believed in the long-term payoff of building a career in commodities, even when I was un-

derpaid. That shaped me. Because of that background, I lead with empathy and honesty. I understand what it feels like to grind for opportunity, so I try to create an environment where people feel seen, valued and supported no matter where they are in their career.

Professionalism doesn't mean perfection — it means showing up consistently, communicating clearly and treating people with respect. My authenticity comes from remembering where I started and never losing that perspective.

Q What can companies and organizations in the dairy industry do to further diversity, equity and inclusion in their hiring and career advancement practices?

A Our Females in Food research reflected in our most recent industry survey that while companies are talking about diversity, real progress comes from action — not intention. Leadership development remains the biggest gap. Most organizations offer mentorship, but few create true sponsorship or clear advancement paths. Flexibility and parental support are also limited — only a small share of women reported access to paid family leave, which is a major retention issue. If companies want to move the needle, they need to go beyond policy and build true inclusion — through equal pay audits or sponsorship opportunities, for example. Respect matters most, but respect without value feels like being tolerated, not celebrated.

Q Please share a time when you felt your insights presented a unique solution to a challenge at a company or organization?

A When I first joined HighGround Dairy, the European Union had just lifted its milk production restrictions, and there was a clear gap in our market coverage. I saw

an opportunity to step in and start connecting European trends to the broader global market. It was one of those moments where timing and curiosity aligned — I saw an opportunity, raised my hand and helped create something that didn't exist before. That experience really shaped how I approach challenges now: if there's a gap, fill it; if there's a question no one's asking yet, start digging.

Q What lessons from outside the dairy industry have you brought into your role that made a big impact?

A Before I entered the dairy industry, I worked in the cotton market, where my role required constant communication with partners across Asia. Because of the time zones, I was essentially on call 24/7 and for better or worse, that experience taught me the value of always being responsive and connected. That mindset naturally aligned with HighGround Dairy's global approach. The company already operated with that same level of dedication to clients across time zones, and my background in international markets helped strengthen that even further. I understand firsthand how important it is to be accessible and proactive no matter where our clients are.

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

A Ten years ago, I thought expertise meant having all the answers. Now I know it's about asking better questions. The dairy industry evolves fast, and staying curious is the only way to stay relevant.

I'd also tell myself that success is not just about knowledge — it's about relationships. The people you learn from, collaborate with and support will have the biggest impact on your growth. Focus on building trust, and never stop learning. **CMN**