

Inspired by Family: Wendy B. McDonald Award Recipient Barbara Ross

Sometimes, a single decision can influence a lifetime. The year was 1973 in upstate New York. Barbara “Barb” Ross, in need of a summer job, was given the choice of working with her dad at Garlock Sealing Technologies or with her mom at a local drugstore. For Barb, a self-proclaimed daddy’s girl, the choice was easy. She recounts, “When I got there [to Garlock], I fell in love with it.”

The Journey

Bright and early at 7:30 a.m., Barb’s dad expected her to be in the parking lot (even though her hours were 8:00 a.m.-4:30 p.m.) walking into the office. From his office, he would keep an eye out for her car. If she was not there, “by the time I arrived at my desk, he was calling, and he would ask, ‘do you want to go to lunch?’ and that is where the mentoring and coaching began,” reminisced Barb. Through these and other daily interactions, Barb’s dad passed to her his strong work ethic while instilling a passion for the PT/MC industry.

As a third-generation family member working in the PT/MC industry, Barb says what she finds compelling is, “the diversity of occupations underneath the umbrella. There was always room for me to keep moving and trying something different,” she explained. And try different things she did.

Barb’s career began in finance, handling accounts receivable. She soon moved to the administrative office, handling special events, company vehicles and special projects for the president, VP of Human Relations and director of labor relations. Additional roles followed, including advertising assistant, supervisor of marketing communications and senior buyer. Each opportunity expanded Barb’s skill set and purview and proved instrumental in her journey in the PT/MC industry, helping her to understand how different departments worked together for a common goal.

A career high point came when Barb moved to Atlanta, Georgia and was named distribution center manager. Barb explains, “When I moved to Atlanta and was the first woman distribution manager for Garlock, I moved with a young son, all on my own. There was excitement (and anxiety!) day in and day out of having a young child and starting a big career without any family to support me. Included with this distribution manager position was responsibility for inside sales and customer service and supporting the regional sales manager who was based out of that office as well. So, it was a great, great family. We learned so much together.”

Barb was promoted to manager of customer service which relocated her back to New York with the first project of centralizing the inside sales/customer service from various U.S. locations back to the corporate location in Palmyra, NY.

After being promoted to marketing manager for Klozure, Barb relocated to Alabama as southeast regional business development specialist and progressed to corporate accounts manager. Another advancement opportunity moved her back to New York, where she accepted the new role of Klozure senior marketing, corporate accounts and customer satisfaction manager and subsequently, a promotion to director sales and marketing.

As she explains, “Along came an offer from Jim Lamb to join the Drives, Inc. team that I could not refuse. That led me back to Alabama where I arrived one week before my first grandchild was born. I had kept my promise to my son that I would not miss out being there when he began his family. I was with the Drives team for nine years, progressing to VP of sales and marketing before returning to Garlock as director of sales for the Rotating Seal Division seven years ago. It is where I enjoy opportunities and the rewards today.

The Advice

Succeeding as a woman salesperson in the PT/MC industry is considered one of Barb's greatest achievements. She has always worked hard to win people over and as she stated, "What I hold in my heart the most are the many times I've been able to help people."

That desire is personal. Barb herself remembers how she was encouraged by and counseled by leaders in the industry and credits those relationships for contributing to her success. Standouts for Barb are Bob Callahan and Jim Lamb because of their "openness and straightforwardness," which remind her of her dad. The advice and never-ending support of Mary Sue Lyon, Tribby Warfield and Nanci Malin will never be forgotten.

"My advice is to have both male and female mentors. It is also important to find sponsors; people who are willing to step up and sponsor you. Mentors are great, but a sponsor is someone that's going to speak up and promote you."

Barb says her mindset has been a key component of her success. She did not see feedback she received from colleagues and superiors as a critique, but suggestions for how to improve. The advice she's received from colleagues and peers has been invaluable and indelible. "Let people talk and absorb what they're sharing with you versus wanting to be the person first in line to say something," she shares. "The key is to be prepared, listen, be responsive, do what you say you're going to do, and admit if you do not know something."

The Significant Moments

Throughout Barb's career, there is one specific moment that holds a special place in her heart. It is when she received the Warren Pike Award. "It was a validation that all the hard work that I put in the industry I love was recognized and valued," she shares. "But nothing beats being a mother to Tim and a grandmother to Kristin, Tyler and Trey. They are the wind beneath my wings, and I love them with all my heart."

When Barb was told during a board meeting that she received the 2021 Wendy B. McDonald Award, she was ecstatic because she admired Wendy not only as a colleague, but as a mentor. "I had the utmost respect for Mrs. Mac and would spend time with her whenever I could. It is certainly special to receive an award named after someone you had a personal relationship with and deeply admired for their determination and professionalism."

One particular memory of Mrs. Mac stands out for Barb. "We were in Whistler for a PTDA meeting, and Penny, Mrs. Mac's daughter (who I'm also close with), had a meeting. Penny asked me if I would go with her mom to the different shops around the hotel. In one shop, I found a black and white scarf, with black fur. Mrs. Mac said, 'Oh, that's lovely.' The price tag was unbelievable, but Mrs. Mac said, 'You need to do these things for yourself.'" So, Barb purchased the scarf and smiles every time she wears it as she recalls that special memory of Mrs. Mac.

The Takeaways

The biggest lesson Barb has learned throughout her career is, "never lose sight of your family. They are crucial to your success." Today, with 46 years' experience in the PT/MC industry, Barb is revered as a woman, colleague, friend, mentor, mother, grandmother and much more. Humbled by the award recognition, Barb admits what brings her the most joy is simple: "I love to see people happy and successful. If there's any way I can help or take anything, such as hurdles, away from them so they can excel faster, that's what I want to do." Barb embodies one of Mrs. Mac's phrases, "You have to work at something to make it a success."