

## A Conversation with Connie Anderson, President and Owner, Aspen Logistics

Executive Interview Questions for LQ's Women in SCM Executive Interview Series have been prepared by members of LQ's Board and friends of LQ: Elsie Blauwhoff, CPP, Corporate Procurement, Apotex; Sue Gadsby, Director of Procurement, Apotex; Michelle Kiang, PhD, Founder and VP Marketing, PINC Solutions; Diane Mollenkopf, PhD, Associate Professor, Department of Marketing and Logistics, The University of Tennessee; Susan Moore, Director of Sustainability, Lakeside Logistics; Sue Oaks, Partner and Vice President, A.T. Kearney; Kate Vitasek, Founder Supply Chain Visions.

**LQ:** Is there a particular woman whose role in supply chain management inspired you to try even harder to succeed in your career? (Sue Gadsby, Director of Procurement, Apotex and Elsie Blauwhoff, CPP, Corporate Procurement, Apotex)

**Connie Anderson:** When I started off, there weren't any women in logistics and supply chain - certainly not in many management roles. In our industry, everything was male-oriented. So, there wasn't a female mentor that drove me to do well in business. However, I had a passion for it and also wanted to prove myself amongst my male peers.

You can be one of the guys without being one of the guys, and still be successful in the industry. I also had two great male mentors, one who was my father and the another who had all successful daughters and understood the challenges of women in management.

**LQ:** Would you encourage other women to seek their careers in this industry and what's your advice for them? (Michelle Kiang, PhD., Michelle Kiang, PhD, Founder & VP Marketing, PINC Solutions)

**Connie Anderson:** I would encourage other women to get into the industry. I think it's necessary for more women to get involved in logistics; it's still difficult at times but it's getting better. My recommendation for anyone new to the industry would be to just persevere and be true to themselves as they move upward. That will help them make the right decisions, create respect within the organization and more importantly, help them sleep at night knowing they're doing the right things.

That's the way to be successful.

**LQ:** Do you think that there are distinctive leadership styles between men and women? What would you suggest to women in your industry for overcoming or even leveraging the differences to their advantage? (Michelle Kiang, PhD)

**Connie Anderson:** From my experience, I think women tend to have better communication skills and are more team-oriented. The way to leverage that communication ability is through collaboration. Collaboration folds right down to the basics and that involves communication skills in a team environment. It can be a perfect fit. I believe that for you to be effective in your job, effective for your customers in any way, it's got to be by building relationships and communicating.

I have hired a lot of good people around me because I don't have all the answers. We discuss all major decisions as a team and I get everyone's input before a decision is made.

In addition many women that I've dealt with are much more detail-oriented than their men counterparts sometimes to their detriment. I'm into documenting things because there are a thousand things that impact my desk and email daily. It's the never-ending bombardment of data. Documenting has been a plus to my management style; having things documented allows us to be more focused in our business objectives and we are much more results-oriented because we are focused.

**LQ:** What are the characteristics of the "new generation" leader? What will set her apart? (Diane Mollenkopf, PhD, Associate Professor, Department of Marketing and Logistics, The University of Tennessee)

**Connie Anderson:** When we talk about new generation, we need to talk about age. I find it interesting that people in their twenties have a whole different philosophy about the work ethic than when I was starting my career. You can't think of it as wrong, you have to think of it as different and you have to manage it differently. You need to outline expectations and in many cases teach very basic things that I always thought of as common sense.

However, to handle the differences in people and generations, we have built five different values (Customers First, Passionate People, Teamwork, Continuous Improvement and Environment Matters) that encompass our culture. We train leaders, managers and supervisors on our culture.

Our culture is that of a service organization: being passionate about serving; making sure the customer is first and what does that mean when you say that; and why it's important to work as a team. By creating values, it keeps people focused on how we should be doing our jobs and how we want Aspen to come across to our customers and to others within the industry. The larger you become as an organization, it's important to ensure you don't lose your culture. Our culture is what makes us different.



**LQ:** What role does corporate culture play in hindering or hampering a woman's rise to leadership positions? How can fellow women help change corporate culture to be more female-friendly? (Diane Mollenkopf, PhD)

**Connie Anderson:** When I started out in business and management, women leaders didn't want to come across as "too female" with female characteristics. There were always different words being used about females versus men in the same kind of situation. So, many women tried to take on more masculine approaches. One of the things I've found over time, as a female leader, is that it's okay to care. I think that's what makes women special in how they manage things - they tend to care. I also insist that we all challenge each other. If you want to live in a continuous improvement lifestyle, you've got to challenge the status quo. We've got to create an environment on the executive team that allows us to feel comfortable about challenging each other, and not feel vulnerable with this approach. I try to create an environment of open discussion where it's safe to voice your opinion.

**LQ:** How have you managed to balance work and family throughout the various stages of your career? (Susan Moore, Director of Sustainability, Lakeside Logistics)

**Connie Anderson:** When people say the older you get the wiser you get, I think that's a true statement. I love working in this industry, but I think it was much more difficult when I was younger because my kids were young and you were always torn wanting to start your career and go up the ladder. Back then, life balance wasn't even discussed! But it's necessary to take the time and be with your family, and create that balance.

I encourage our management teams to take their vacations and time off and not be worried about the business. When you're at it and at it, without taking that time for yourself, you can become less productive - you're not as effective. You can't think differently and you don't come up with fresh ideas. I don't expect any of my management team to eat, live and breathe Aspen Logistics. I don't think that's healthy for them or for the organization.

**LQ:** What specific steps have you and your firm taken to remove obstacles? (Sue Oaks, Partner and Vice President, A.T. Kearney)

**Connie Anderson:** I'm all about diversity. I've tried to ensure that there's a balance between men and women in the organization. We look for people who will fit into the culture of our organization, knowing that sometimes that it might not be the most qualified candidate in the short term, but they will be the best candidate in the long term.

When we're hiring a manager, any management level has to go through a panel survey. There's usually an HR person there, and management from IT, operations, and transportation. We place a premium value on our corporate culture, and as a result, we make sure everyone in the executive team has a say in any new manager because we deal with everyone on a daily basis. It's essential a new member on the team fits in with our people and culture.

With this process in place, many obstacles are eliminated because we're not dealing with conflicting culture ideas right up front.

**LQ:** What one word would most people use to describe your leadership style? (Kate Vitasek, Founder Supply Chain Visions)

**Connie Anderson:** I would say my leadership is team-oriented. I do not make decisions without others being involved. I can but I chose not to. I really rely on my executive team to give input as to the direction of the company. I value their input because I'm not doing some of those tasks day in and day out. I think you build better direction and the whole organization, as a total, stays more focused in the implementation of our initiatives.

**LQ:** How does it feel to sometimes be the only woman in the room?(Kate Vitasek)

**Connie Anderson:** When I started off in a management position, I wanted to make sure there was a comfort level with the men I worked with. To this day, some of those men and I are very close friends. I really think by building relations, you don't get so caught up in being the only female. You have to be self-confident when you're the only woman and that's tough sometimes. I don't ever make things a male-female thing. I try to have relationships with whomever, no matter their age or their gender. If you approach it that way, instead of thinking, "I'm the only female here," then it will be fine.