

Leading Women on an AWESOME Path

After reaching the top of the supply chain field, Ann Drake wondered why more women were not there with her. So, she took the cause for female business excellence into her own hands and formed AWESOME.



Ann Drake paved the way for DSC Logistics to become one of the top supply chain management firms in the country, before selling the company to Korean-based global logistics innovator, CJ Logistics USA.

by Lou Carlozo

Ann Drake has amassed a track record that made her an industry leader—an accomplishment underscored when she won the Distinguished Service Award from the Council of Supply Chain Management Professionals in 2012. It's the industry's highest honor, but Drake recalls a moment just as poignant as receiving the award itself.

"As I gave my acceptance speech to a room of about 2,000 professionals I asked, 'Do you remember when it used to be all men?' I looked around the room and said, 'dear me, it still is.'" In that moment, she started paving the way for women to join her in a male-dominated industry.

Creating equality was at the top of Drake's mind, and while that's reason enough to create change, some are already finding that having women at the top is profitable. According to research by the University of California-Davis, large companies in that state with women at the top outperformed those with mostly male executives and boards.

A FORCE FOR FEMALE EMPOWERMENT

During her time as the Chairman and CEO of DSC Logistics, which concluded last year, Drake was in an ideal position to act. She was lauded at the time as “a leader, a mentor, a pioneer, and an extraordinary, energetic ambassador for the logistics and supply chain management professions” by the CSCMP.

Bringing those attributes to the table, she founded AWESOME—a non-profit organization dedicated to advancing female leadership in the supply chain field. “AWESOME” stands for Achieving Women’s Excellence in Supply Chain Operations, Management, and Education.

From its origins in 2013 the organization has grown in scope and presence to encompass an annual symposium; a \$74,000 fellowship through the MIT master’s in supply chain management program; and an Excellence in Education scholarship enabling college students from top universities with supply chain programs to attend top industry events.

SUPPLY CHAIN, DEMAND FOR WOMEN

Under Drake’s leadership, AWESOME has also built a wealth of intelligence that includes its latest action agenda white-paper, “Seven Smart Moves to Make Bigger Waves for Women’s Leadership,” and an annual report on industry progress in female employment and opportunities, produced in partnership with Gartner Research.

To hear Drake explain it, supply chain presents a special set of challenges women are uniquely qualified to embrace.

“It’s okay to say yes when you know you’re not ready; in fact, saying yes to whatever comes along is the way to advance your career.” —*Ann Drake*

“So much of it is collaboration across silos, across companies, across departments, across oceans,” she said. “And to fully execute the supply chain, you’ve got to be completely horizontal in your thinking. And women are naturals at making things work, putting together the pieces and figuring it out.”

GETTING TO YES AND SUCCESS

The business world, it seems, having women in leadership is catching on and staying, especially in supply chain. In fact, a survey released by Gartner, Stamford, Conn., and conducted in partnership with Achieving Women’s Excellence in Supply Chain Operations, Management and Education, Chicago, shows a growing representation of women in almost all categories of supply chain management, especially at the vice president and senior director level. In addition, respondents reported that supply chain-led goals and initiatives to improve gender diversity are gaining traction. (In 2019, the women in the top positions did not increase.)

Drake ultimately hopes that AWESOME will not only avail women of the tools, resources and connections needed for flourishing careers. All of this, she believes, will also help women build an attitude of positivity and courage to foster female success in supply chain.

“A lot of life is accomplishment and experiences, and I think confidence holds so many women back,” Drake asserted. “We have to help them get past the confidence issue and get them to say yes. So that’s what I’m about as far as AWESOME is concerned. I’ve been there, I’ve seen it, I’ve made money and I want to help other women to get to where it took me too long to arrive—and give them the means to help others.” **S**