



**DAVID A MARSHALL CONSULTING INC.**

**Monthly Leadership Newsletter**

**DONNA WATERSTRAAT: THE INCREASE OF WOMEN IN  
MANAGEMENT OVER THE YEARS**

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## **INCREASE OF WOMEN IN MANAGEMENT OVER THE YEARS**

When I started working at Robroy, I stepped into a culture that was rooted firmly in the 1950s: predominantly white, predominantly male.

It was people like Donna Waterstraat who were instrumental in not only changing the culture, she helped improve our productivity, pushed for more women in management, and make the organization very profitable.

Here's how she did it. A few years ago, the New York Times made a big splash with an article saying there were fewer women running big companies than there were men named John. This was well before my own time when I became a shipping and receiving supervisor at Robroy.

When I joined the company, I walked into a man's world. At the time, there was only one woman who was in a management position: a supervisor over the inside sales department. I had applied for a material manager position, but I was told I didn't have enough experience managing people yet.

This wasn't uncommon at that time, since women were rarely being considered for management positions. In fact, it's only in the last 30 or so years that this has been studied and considered. Even now, researchers are making discoveries about women in management like it's a great surprise.

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*In 2019, the Harvard Business Review released a report that found that women scored higher than men in most leadership skills.*

*Our current data presents even more compelling evidence that this bias is incorrect and unwarranted. Women are perceived by their managers — particularly their male managers — to be slightly more effective than men at every hierarchical level and in virtually every functional area of the organization. That includes the traditional male bastions of IT, operations, and legal.*

*Women were rated as excelling in taking initiative, acting with resilience, practicing self-development, driving for results, and displaying high integrity and honesty. In fact, they were thought to be more effective in 84% of the competencies that we most frequently measure.*

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Being confident also means being willing to accept input from your associates and not pretending to know more than they do. That's something David taught me; he always surrounded himself with people smarter than he was. So I made sure I listened to our associates whenever we had to make any changes.

At the time I was hired, David felt that I didn't have enough management experience, even though I thought I'd had plenty in my job in New York. He put me in shipping and receiving since I had the background in the area. I was looking for a career, not a job, and I didn't just want to be a supervisor on the floor.

I said as much, but David was adamant about this. But he was also just as serious about helping me grow, so I kept asking for different responsibilities and duties. Sometimes he would say yes, and other times he would say, "Not yet."

I respected his decisions because he knew what he was doing. At Robroy, you had to be a team member and not just a boss. I wanted to be a part of a team, and I wanted to be a decision-maker, not just a doer. I wanted to be able to say, "I don't agree with you," and have input into the company's decision making. David didn't care if you were a man or woman, you were part of the team and part of management, and he always made sure we had input.

My time in shipping and receiving was also a good way for me to get used to dealing with the associates and for them to get used to me. Coming from New York, I wasn't used to the slow pace of a Texas factory. I believed you needed to — and I told people this — "put a little more wiggle in that walk." I wanted people to move fast and with a sense of purpose. I always believed in being honest with people and gave people straight, direct feedback. I didn't sugarcoat anything, and I let people know exactly what I was thinking.

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Needless to say, this got me a few grievances filed with the union, because they didn't like how I did things, so that was a bit of a learning and growing experience.

But after figuring out what worked and what didn't, and after people learned what I expected from them, we quickly got used to each other and worked together more effectively.

As I continued to grow, I moved up into new positions, like Operations Manager over the Gilmer and Avinger plants, where I ran inside sales, materials/purchasing, production, and shipping and receiving, my original department. Over the years, I also learned the importance of confidence for women in management. If I was going to make the changes I wanted to make, to be a decision-maker and not a doer, I was going to have to be confident in my decisions. Being confident also means being willing to accept input from your associates and not pretending to know more than they do. That's something David taught me; he always surrounded himself with people smarter than he was. So I made sure I listened to our associates whenever we had to make any changes.

I was even able to oversee an entire revamping of our inventory and manufacturing processes because I had the confidence to listen to the staff's input. And I was honest with them from the beginning about its importance. As a result, we were able to make the changes we needed and saved the company millions of dollars every year. I've been fortunate because I've always been very confident. I recognize that it's not easy for everyone, especially women, and especially young women, to show confidence and honesty in the workplace.



We've been taught all our lives that relationships are important and that it's essential to "be nice" if you want to avoid conflict. But if you want to be a manager, you can't sacrifice honesty for niceness, or sacrifice confidence for getting along. Women in management have to really prove themselves in companies where there are no women managers.

Women managers have to be smarter and work harder just to compete with men of average talents. Being honest and being a team player is only part of it. You have to ask for new roles and responsibilities. You can work your ass off, but if you're not constantly asking for new responsibilities, you're never going to move forward in a man's world. You have to constantly pursue new avenues.

Bottom line, if you're looking for a career that you can be proud of, you've got to be willing to work hard, be a team member, and engage with your team members. But don't be afraid of telling the truth when it's required. It takes confidence and a willingness to be honest, even when it's hard.

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## About David A Marshall

David Marshall is a Senior Manufacturing Executive with Corporate Culture Development and Operational Excellence Expertise. David most recently was President and COO of Robroy Industries and Board Member where he oversaw this manufacturing organization with four locations in the USA producing high quality electrical products and oilfield products. During his tenure he worked hard on implementing cutting-edge technology into these facilities during renovations of several of the plants and build out of one ultra-modern 130,000 square foot manufacturing facility in Texas.

With David guidance, these companies saw a remarkable seven record years of profitability; eleven consecutive years with profitability exceeding 20% of revenue; and more than \$300 million added to the equity of the business since going private in 2001. David earned his MBA from the University of Virginia: Darden School of Business.

He currently consults manufacturers looking to achieve operation excellence. His motto is: "If you can't measure it, you can't manage it."

He has been a manufacturing executive, as well as a sales and marketing professional, for a few decades. Now he helps companies turn around their own company by making the right decision. If you would like more information, please visit my website and connect with me on Twitter, Facebook, or LinkedIn.

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