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## Women in Supply Chain Management

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**Diane A. Mollenkopf**, PhD, *University of Tennessee*

**Loray D. Mosher**, PhD, *Sam M. Walton College of Business, University of Arkansas*

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# A Conversation with Robyn Brunscher

*Vice President, Business Development, UPS*

*The menu of questions for LQ's sixth annual Women in Supply Chain Management Executive Interview Series has been prepared by members of the LQ Board and friends of LQ.*

**LQ:** What legacy do you want to leave behind? (Martha C. Cooper, PhD, Professor of Marketing and Logistics, Fisher College of Business, The Ohio State University)

**Robyn Brunscher:** The legacy that I want to leave behind is how to "BE EXQUISITE." This concept is born from the principles of BLVD IQ, which means polishing your street smarts. BLVD IQ is a term that I saw on a license plate years ago. I have a pending trademark on the term as it relates to career development. I use this platform when speaking on behalf of women's leadership development and career development, both inside and outside of UPS.

For myself, BLVD IQ involves the practice of controlled instinct. It's based on building credibility and influence through the use of intentional vocabulary, the presentation of your personal brand and the appropriate timing of both.

What does the term "controlled instinct" mean? I often talk to young women in my industry about this concept, which involves the practice of wrapping that gut feeling with professionalism and credibility. Credibility, a mix of data and experience, is what validates your gut feeling. By leveraging research and substantiated data — enriched by your hands-on experience in addition to what you've learned through your degree — simply do your homework and be prepared. So I encourage a lot of the women in my environment to make sure that they are doing their homework to drive credibility. They also need to make sure that they're getting the experience they require to keep building upon that credibility.

Influence also comes with controlled instinct and helps to ensure that you are driving your message with a clearly established objective. In addition, it is essential to convey your message genuinely, and with all of your elements in place. For example, you may want to speak up in certain circumstances when there is something you disagree with. However, there



are much better ways to agree to disagree. By using control, the credibility that you earn by exercising this discipline and practice will increase ten-fold.

**LQ:** What characteristics do you attribute to your success? (Martha C. Cooper, PhD)

**Robyn Brunscher:** Three come to mind. The first involves applying all of my experience which enables the ability to convey genuine confidence. I think that the difference between confidence and genuine confidence is having the experience behind you; this is essential. The second is the ability to recognize

and act on an opportunity, and that often requires courage. The reason it takes courage is because it requires the ability to fail; even if you fail you know you did your utmost based on your ability to do the right thing at the right time. The third is delivering your message using humor and a little charm. Part of the reason I put these front and center is that people seem to relax and appreciate these attributes, especially in difficult circumstances.

**LQ:** What advice would you give a teenager? (Ellen Voie, CAE, President/CEO, Women In Trucking, Inc.)

**Robyn Brunscher:** In supply chain management, I would advise young people to focus on developing their financial acumen, which is especially important in today's global context. We are in an industry without borders and companies are leveraging resources from all over the world to find cost efficiencies in their supply chain. So it is especially important in the supply chain industry to understand and appreciate the value of financial acumen, which is often the basis of decision-making in an organization. Financial acumen means finding and knowing where you would like to play in the future to drive the highest level of return on investment. Early in my career this was a challenge for me — I invested into developing a greater financial acumen and know-how of my own organization and of my customers' businesses.

For UPS' sales strategy, a high level of financial acumen is vital for my team because we are consultative sellers, and we appreciate the importance of the return on investment for our shareholders, customers and business. While we are interested in what an investment provides for us as an organization, more importantly, when we invest in our clients, we need to know what this investment provides for them. This is an important focal point within our sales engagement process. Since I did not come from a financial background, I made honing this skill my number one priority both early in my career, and today for my team.

Second, it is important to be mindful of how one develops one's brand, which can be developed specifically around driving results in an area where you anticipate you would like to work within the supply chain industry.

**LQ:** Facebook's COO, Sheryl Sandberg, also writes in the introduction of her new book *Lean In* that new research shows more young women are entering the workforce with expectations of meaningful advancement. Given this trend, what is the best way to support these young women? (Loray D. Mosher, PhD, *Assistant Director*, Supply Chain Management Research Center (SCMRC), Sam M. Walton College of Business, University of Arkansas)

**Robyn Brunscher:** My response pertains to all young professionals who are entering the workforce, not just young women. Today, young professionals often have different expectations about the time required to invest for their career advancement. I believe that they often expect to advance sooner and with less experience. Given these expectations, I would suggest that they be well informed about the structure and importance of corporate hierarchy. I recently spoke with some young graduates who were interning and who had an opportunity to meet with a CEO of a company. I asked them how they had prepared for this meeting. They responded that they hadn't. Next, I asked how much time they had with the CEO, and they responded that they only had 15 minutes!

In today's world, corporations are driving flatter management structures where there exists a lot of open-door policy. This can cause a lot of confusion around access and relationships with senior management. I have also noticed that people feel more comfortable stepping out of traditional hierarchy to communicate. I don't think that our young professionals realize that greater access to senior management should not diminish their respect or their appreciation for the value of a firm's hierarchy or the value of senior management's time. In summary, my advice is: don't have delusions of hierarchy. Fifteen minutes with the CEO is a great deal of time.

The second suggestion I'd like to share relates to career advancement. I've always viewed promotions

## BLVD IQ: Because a good attitude and higher education are not enough

**Business professionals** often plunge into learning business etiquette within the culture they are hired, rather than applying a universal standard of professionalism, no matter where they are hired. So let's pose a question. Who would you think has the greater advantage to fulfill their potential and garner coveted opportunities in the workplace: a streetwise go-getter; a traditional student slow-tracking into an entry level position; an adult student in an online degree program; or an out-of-the-box thinking entrepreneur? The answer is that any of these — when blended with the principles of BLVD IQ or "polished street smarts" — because carefully cultivated personal interactions are what truly shape professional destiny.

Robyn Brunscher, Vice President of Business Development at UPS, has learned over her 30-year career that to be effective one must apply a consistent, polished manner across all business scenarios. Brunscher is crafting and solidifying the concept of BLVD IQ aimed at professionals who have the potential to influence the bottom line. She believes that sometimes education on paper gets in the way of "reality" in the workplace. At the same time, extensive work experience can be conveyed without the filters necessary for different audiences — a one size fits all approach. This is where BLVD IQ comes into play — to expose career shortcuts and enable professionals to become that vital puzzle piece of succession.

BLVD IQ offers an opportunity to address gaps in education, generations and industry acceptances through the development of professional etiquette. It demonstrates that street smarts can be taught and learned. BLVD IQ offers an opportunity to polish professionals for advancement through:

- understanding leadership culture;
- tailoring one's language to gain credibility and influence; and
- honing a personal brand that quickly makes clear who you are.

Both inside and outside of UPS and in conjunction with her Mentoring in a Box and Women's Leadership initiatives, Brunscher is sharing the concept of BLVD IQ to help professionals avoid long learning curves and to develop their street smarts that will more intricately integrate them into the reality of the business world.

as a sign of your own patience. What I mean by that is we also need to teach our young professionals to respect the responsibilities of a position or office. When they are striving to move upward in an organization it is important to learn to respect the role and the responsibilities of the role instead of simply focusing on the person that may be fulfilling that position today. I have often seen this kind of confusion evidenced in the workplace when one's confidence and abilities are personally weighed against a perception of a professional performing in a specific role; I recommend that they have respect for the position, regardless of their own perceptions, as the best approach toward successful advancement.

**LQ:** How can Sheryl Sandberg's *Lean In* principles be implemented in your own corporate setting? (Diane Mollenkopf, PhD, *McCormick Associate Professor of Logistics*, Department of Marketing & Supply Chain Management, University of Tennessee)

**Robyn Brunscher:** There are three principles that I picked up from this book. One of the first principles that Sheryl Sandberg proposes is to “sit at the table.” I think every woman in business can recall at least one “aha” moment when she realized that she was clearly the minority in the room. The trick is to embrace this concept and leverage it to make a difference. Don’t just lean in — make sure you’re adding value.

The second key principle I especially appreciate is: always see and speak the truth as an important way to “lean in.” In large organizations it often takes an extended amount of repetitive and persistent communication to get leadership to embrace good ideas for new initiatives. In this context, my advice is to never stop speaking the truth. Always be prepared to present a solution and be willing to lead the charge.

Working together toward equality is the third key element. It is essential in order for women to “lean in.” Studies show that almost 71 percent of women are in the workforce. So when we talk about working together toward equality, it is important to consider both our professional and personal environments. I think we’re seeing more equality at home and this may not be captured statistically as much as we would expect. I work with a lot of men in my industry who I know are putting in their fifty percent to ensure the quality of home life. The other equality issue involves a different discussion, that of equal

pay in the workplace. Again, as we work together toward equality, this too is probably happening more than we’re aware.

**LQ:** In a recent interview, Sheryl Sandberg stated that there needs to be a change in the negative correlation between success and likeability for women in the workplace. What are your thoughts on this? (Loray D. Mosher, PhD)

**Robyn Brunscher:** Sheryl was acknowledging that the majority of women believe that likeability and success are mutually exclusive, but both of these objectives can be obtained. My position is that likeability — based on the definition of being sympathetic or invoking empathy — can evolve into respect when you focus on reaching your objectives. Policies for leadership practices allow for this approach if you know how to leverage what’s available to you.

Here’s an example. If you are leading a team and you need to apply corporate policy in the process, you’re not concerned about notions such as likeability. Typically, policies or guidelines for corporate imperatives allow you to meet your objectives without having to worry about whether you are liked or not. When you couple this approach with the outcome of reaching your goals, you’ll be both successful and respected. In my world that is what I strive for — recasting likeability into respect and successful outcomes.



## LQ’s Sixth Annual Women in Supply Chain Management Edition:

*Introducing Perspectives  
from LQ’s Women in Supply  
Chain Management Panel*