





**Kathy:** Everybody has a unique gift. I find people very different than me much more interesting than me.

**Lisa:** Sure, absolutely, different things will make you a better person.

**Kathy:** Everybody has a story.

**Lisa:** Everybody has a story. I want to get into your career because I think you went into school. Did you have a full ride? I think you were going to go into medicine, is that right?

**Kathy:** Yes.

**Lisa:** You go away to college, and then I guess you decided you really didn't like it. You didn't like medicine, maybe that's not really the path for me. Tell us about that story.

**Kathy:** Yes, I received the Bosch Alum Science and Math scholarship to go the University of Rochester. After about a year, I decided that was probably not the path for me. One of the hardest calls I ever made was to my parents to say, I'm coming home I'm dropping out. That was like something you just didn't do in our family. My parents were like, "Okay, come home." They had just moved up to the San Francisco Bay Area. I moved in with them and I didn't know anything about the San Francisco area.

After about three days living with my parents, we mutually decided I needed to get a job and get out. I went for a job interview and got lost and went and asked for directions. The place I went to said, "Are you looking for a job?" I said, "Yes," They said, "We're hiring, do you want to take the test?" I said, "Sure". Three days later, I started a gripper.

**Lisa:** That began a journey. I know I have said to you, Kathy, when I think about a couple things, I think about climbing the corporate ladder you're an awesome example of that.

Then the other thing that people may or may not know about you, you are one of only 36 CEO's of Fortune 500 companies that are female. I think when you became CEO it was like 18 or something like that. The other thing I think about you is shattering the glass ceiling. Talk to us a little bit about your journey, how you started, and then we'll get into a few other things.

**Kathy:** Well, I was very fortunate that I found a home with a company that share the same values as I did. I think that's important for anybody is to look at not just the job opportunity, but is it a place where you can make a difference and that you feel valued. I started at 19, as a college dropout making five bucks an hour as a customer service rep. I had no idea of the industry, I had no idea what the job was, but all I knew is I needed a job.

I started out as a customer service rep and the people I worked with, as well as my customers, taught me the business, which is also very fortunate because I would ask for help and they would help me. I think it's because I didn't try to fake that I knew something and that when I said I would do something I followed up on it that people felt I was worth helping. I advanced pretty quickly, I was pretty fortunate. I went into sales before the age of 21.

It was ironic because back in the day, they used to drink at lunch they used to have cocktails at lunch. This is 40 years ago so it was a different business environment. I wasn't able to, in the State of California, buy alcohol because I was 20 years old in sales. My customers wouldn't drink at lunch, which was a great thing because I didn't drink at lunch. It was a really interesting environment to go into a sales role also where I didn't really know a lot about the product, but I knew I needed to take care of my customers. That was the basic lesson. I was very fortunate to advance quickly I transferred to St. Louis, which also was our company's headquarters to marry my husband, my boyfriend of 10 years. We decided to get married after 10 years.

I was able to pursue new opportunities. Every time a new job would come up, somebody would either tapped me on the shoulder and say, what about this position, or in some case, I would ask for an opportunity especially if it was scary.





I need to handle the big stuff so that they can focus on what's really important which is taking care of the customer, but they also need to understand the bigger picture so that they don't get afraid.

When people don't understand what's going on, it creates a sense of fear. When you're an employee on company, we are in for the long haul. Too often companies look at a quarter-to-quarter type of mentality. In our case, we have the advantage that everything we do is about the long term impact of the company. We want employees who are going to be here for a career like myself, right.

I'm in my 41st year with the company we also have long term customer relationships. It's not unusual for us to have customers for 50 or 75 years, that also is very unusual in today's business environment. For us, it's a relationship with the leadership and our employees, and our employees and our customers. It's in a very important community that we need to continue to nurture and the way to do that is by having trust through open communication.

**Lisa:** Yes, oh, my goodness, there's so much in there that I just absolutely love. You've got to take care of the big stuff so they can focus on what's really important which is the customer, without customers you do not exist. We've already kind of touched on this, but the third thing you said is show the employees how they can make a difference. I think innately, Kathy, I do think people want to believe that their work matters.

**Kathy:** I think people want to know they matter, not just their work, but that they matter and that they can actually impact something. It's a relevance issue. We all want to be relevant, and the way we're relevant is by taking care of others. One of the things early on in this pandemic as people we're struggling with the stress, it was just the fear of the pandemic their personal lives were in an upheaval, there's an economic challenge.

As early on, I kept thinking to myself the best way to manage this is by getting outside of this internal dialogue and focusing on other people because we help other people it helps us.

We put a big emphasis on taking care of again, our customers and our community as a whole. I went to our social media team and I said look I want to talk about this.

I want to talk about the positive things that our people are doing to make a difference in a difficult situation because we need to lift everybody up and show there is hope. At the end of the day, the difference in our lives is the humanity of taking care of each other.

**Lisa:** You know what? This is why I love you. [laughs] Our hearts are so aligned, it's just crazy. Greg and I, we found a technology partner 26 years ago, from the very beginning and we've not changed this. We have always said if we take care of our employees, our employees will take care of our customers, and then our success will follow. We won't think about our success, let's think about our employees and making this an awesome place for them where they feel cared for, loved like family, equipped, all those things. They'll take care of our clients, and then our success will follow that.

**Kathy:** Then you all get lifted up, right? We all get lifted. The stories that have come out this year just reinforces as a leader that I need to continue to step up my game, because they deserve a leader who's going to be out there fighting the good fight, and working beside them as hard as they work every single day. We have this one woman her house was flooding, her basement was flooding, but the customer needed the product. She let her basement flood out took care of the customer, because that was the most important thing is to help them and then she took care of her personal situation. She's a hero to me.

**Lisa:** No doubt. Well, Kathy, I want to get into more of those stories because I just love the stories but we need to take a quick break and then we'll be right back with Kathy Mazzarella.

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**Lisa:** Welcome back. Kathy, oh, my goodness, you and I could talk hours and hours about culture. One of the quotes and I told you, this is a Kathyism. You said when your employees succeed, recognize and celebrate their effort, but when they fail, use it as an opportunity to help them learn and grow and you said it's kind of your mom look.  
[laughter]

Let's here about when they failed but I used to love that about you. We've talked so much about stories. You've got so many stories during this pandemic about the caring and the concern even for retirees. Tell us one story about something that happened with a retiree?

**Kathy:** Well, one of the things that we do is when our people retire from Graybar, they're still part of our families we'd like to describe it. What we do is we always check on them during any kind of difficult situation like the hurricanes, we'll call all the retirees to make sure they're okay if they need anything. Well, when the pandemic hit, we called our retirees to find out how they were doing.

One of our retirees in Louisville was a shut in he was very scary, and wouldn't go out. He had no food. We had a grocery list of five items soup, tuna, bread, milk, and eggs that's it. Our local management decided to take it upon themselves and get their own money to buy this gentleman groceries way in addition to those five items. The local management continues to check on him regularly every week to make sure he's taken care of.

The retiree was so grateful. He cried when we called him because he said he never expected this kind of kindness. When I asked our managers about it they said well, that's just what we do.











