



Transformational Leadership in Action: Insights From the Executive Suite

Executive Vice President Katrina (Trina) Evans, chief of staff and director of Corporate Center for KeyCorp, was a keynote speaker at the Woman of Power Conference in Cleveland recently. Conference founder Raquel Eatmon interviewed Evans to gain her perspective on the importance and impact of transformational leadership for today's successful organizations.

KeyBank was a major sponsor of the event, which was attended by more than 400 of Northeast Ohio's top professionals and leaders. The following is a summary of her remarks that day.

Q: What do transformational leaders do?

Evans: Central to being a transformational leader, is the ability to build trust.

Transformational leaders win hearts and minds, drive performance, lead change and carry the culture. They work hard to build relationships, demonstrate respect for others and engage team members to succeed for the common good. They are known as people who always have the best interests of the team – and the company – at heart. They check their egos at the door and work hard – they're willing to roll up their sleeves and get in the trenches. They are accountable, not just responsible.

Key takeaways



According to KeyBank's Trina Evans, the best leaders build trust by being collaborators, not competitors.



In her role of executive vice president, chief of staff and director, she sets aside time each day to meet with emerging leaders from across her organization.



Evans also shares the value she sees in mentors, missteps and finding balance in your own life.

I believe that all our efforts as leaders should be focused on making people feel valued and respected. By emphasizing authenticity, cooperation and open communication, transformational leaders can create an environment where employees cleave to the organization's purpose, values and culture.

The best leaders build trust by being collaborators, not competitors. By being listeners, not talkers. By being humble not arrogant. Leaders have to be "followable." And people will follow leaders they believe are real, down-to-earth human beings.

Q: How important is EQ – or emotional intelligence – in leadership?

Evans: EQ is one part understanding yourself and one part understanding and anticipating the emotions and agendas of others. Many experts believe that the ability to understand and express emotions plays an equal if not more important role than IQ in successful leadership.

Having EQ means you understand your own motivations, strengths and gaps. It also helps you recognize the same in others. It helps you sense the feelings of others, including how and why they may respond to something and where resistance could surface. My EQ helps me meet my team where they are, help them understand the "why" of a change or an objective, and move us forward in a productive, focused way.

Q: You set time aside each day to meet with someone who may be several levels below you in the organization. Why?

Evans: Junior people often think executives have all the answers. Frankly, I rely on others because I find I have so few of the answers! I tend to ask a lot of questions because I want team members to know that what they are working on is vital and valued.

This commitment to expand my circle of influence (and to do the same for those with whom I meet), comes from my desire to get out of the echo chamber; to put my ear to the ground to understand what is happening in the broader organization; and to learn some new things along the way. It helps me get closer to the rich talent in the organization and to get a fresh perspective on plans, priorities and projects.

I would also say that this is part of my commitment to diversity and inclusion and to making sure that I don't live – and make decisions – in a vacuum. These relationships help make my thinking clearer, my work more productive, my decisions crisper and my influence broader.

Q: Did you have mentors? If so, what difference did they make?

Evans: I have been – and continue to be – inspired by the women and men in my life. I've had wonderful mentors and champions over the years who helped me see the path ahead and who believed in me before I did. These are people who tell me the truth – even when I don't want to hear it. The key has been to listen, learn and change (we are all works in progress!).

For example, my nature is to be quiet – a listener, a watcher, an observer and a synthesizer of thoughts and ideas. Beth Mooney, KeyBank's CEO, convinced me that I have an important perspective, a depth of experience and a way of "connecting the dots" that is unique.

She pushed me to use my seat at the table to shape our thinking and our actions. Thanks to her confidence and support, I understand that I have an obligation to put myself into the conversation. I found I can be a proud and productive introvert while also leaning in and using my voice where I can make the most difference.

I would also say that my mentors, coaches and champions have also instilled a pay-it-forward mindset. Thanks to their support, I have been shown the power of carrying as you climb. So being a mentor – to people inside and outside my company – is an important part of my career.

Q: You've been in a variety of functions in financial services. Did that make a difference in your development?

Evans: Versatility has been important in my career. I've worked in many areas of the bank, and I've benefited greatly from taking risks and taking on new opportunities. Some of us doubt that we can do a job if we haven't done it before or haven't trained our entire career for it. I learned the importance of taking advantage of opportunities and taking risks. It's been an experience filled with self-discovery and growth.



My grandmother always said that failure isn't about how hard you fall but how high you bounce!

Q: How did you recover from any missteps during your career?

Evans: I would tell you that I've learned more from my failures than my successes. I think that how you recover (versus the failure itself) telegraphs the quality of your character. Our reaction to failure can help a manager understand our potential to take on bigger assignments and greater responsibility.

By "reaction," I mean: Did I take accountability? Did I focus on finding solutions? Did I tend to the team during the process? Was I a good steward of the company and its resources? Did I carry the culture?

For me, recovering from a failure was about taking ownership, stepping into the breach, righting the course, caring for the team, focusing them forward and owning the solution.

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Q: How do you celebrate successes?

Evans: I find it hard to celebrate successes for me – not for my team. For me, I rarely slow down to smell the roses, let alone stop! I'm a grounded and grateful person, so I tend to focus on what I could have done better, and I tend to look forward. I sometimes wish I could revel in the home run...take a few victory laps. But that is not my nature. I guess on the bright side of that, when you separate yourself from your own headlines, you stay humble. And people follow humble leaders.

Q: Have you achieved balance in your life?

Evans: Balance implies harmony, but a guilt-free state doesn't exist. So I've created my own yardstick for what's important to me: I want to be a good mom, to excel at what I do, and to help my community. Others will have their own priorities. The most important thing is that each of us is comfortable with the choices we make (and supportive of the choices of others). I'm proud of my career, but I'm even prouder of my family and my contributions to my community.

Q: What are your thoughts on the road ahead for women?

Evans: I think a lot about the future for my 14-year-old daughter and other women. For those of us who have achieved C-suite roles, it's critical that we create more opportunities for women – and men – and an atmosphere of diversity and inclusion. When I started in banking, there were few women in senior leadership roles, and women didn't have a voice. And on the point of "voice," I'm profoundly encouraged and inspired by the growing focus on diversity and pay equity.

I know I'm standing on the shoulders of all the women who came before me. That makes me very conscious that our daughters and sons will be standing on the shoulders of my generation. So I approach my job with the obligation to not only do it well, but with a feeling that I must help clear the path for those who follow.



My grandmother would be proudest of *how* I accomplished my successes.

Q: Do women have the financial tools they need to be successful?

Evans: More women than ever are heads of households, business owners and in the workforce, but they don't always have access to sophisticated financial products and counsel. It's an issue, one that Key is meeting head-on. Key4Women is designed to be with women on their professional journeys, providing advice, capital and networking opportunities all along the way. We're excited about this initiative, which provides the tools and resources women need to confidently make good choices about their future.

Q: You mentioned your grandmother as one of your inspirations. What do you believe she'd think about your career?

Evans: My grandmother would be proudest of *how* I accomplished my successes.

She believed that strong work ethic, abiding values and service were central to a happy and productive life...and she believed that we all have the obligation to be productive.

She also believed that you could be both liked and respected – you didn't have to choose. She told me that people will remember how you did something, long after they've forgotten *what* you did. She believed that a person's "how" is a reflection of their character. As she said, it's important to do the right thing the right way.

In all of these ways, my grandmother defined what it means to be a transformational leader.

The support you need

For more Key4Women resources to help you reach your goals, visit key.com/women, or [email us](#) to learn more.

Would you like to weigh in on future topics? Please take our [survey](#).

