

A Woman for All Seasons

Jackie Adamson gets right to the point about her 28 years of success.

By Shelia Watson

Jackie Adamson does not mince words when it comes to her management and leadership style.

"Given a choice, I would much rather have someone respect me than like me," she says. "Success for me is peer recognition, being respected, making a difference. When people began to seek me out for my opinion, then I really felt that I'd made it."

She illustrates her point with the story of a woman who became a role model for her as she began to pursue her career. "A lot of what I did I modeled after her. I wanted to be just like her and achieve success like she did." The woman never realized the impact she'd made, and such is the arena of the businesswoman, Adamson notes: "The few role models are so busy paving the road that they rarely realize their own significance."

Flash forward a few years. After speaking at an event, Adamson is approached by a woman who thanked her for the positive impact she'd made on her life. "This woman told me that at one point in her life I had

given her the encouragement she needed to keep going," she said. "It felt good to know this woman had seen me as a role model, but the funny thing is, I didn't even remember her or the occasion."

There is much about Adamson for other women to model. In her sixth year at Roanoke Trade Services, Inc. – a provider of bonds and insurance to the international trade community – Adamson was recently appointed national accounts manager – southern division, while continuing her role as Regional Vice President.

Prior to joining Roanoke Trade, she was employed 22 years at John S. James Co., a customs broker and freight forwarder, where she began as an office clerk and left having achieved the role of vice president. "I was the first woman in that company to be promoted into a management role," she says. "I'm very

proud of that. And I've worked with some wonderful people over the years. My 22 years at James S. James were terrific, and the people there are wonderful. They gave me a lot of opportunities over the years."

Among her credentials are a host of board of directors and committee seats she has held over the course of her career in the international trade industry as well as affiliations including Past President, the Women's Transportation Club; Past President, Delta Nu Alpha Transportation Fraternity; Past President, Customs Brokers & Freight Forwarders Association of Charleston; and Career Woman of the Year, Charleston Business & Professional Women's Club.

She was a member of the board of directors of the S.C. International Trade Conference for several years and is currently treasurer of the S.C. World Trade Center at Charleston. She has also served on the board of the Maritime Association of the Port of Charleston, having held positions as their



Adamson (right) with one of her role models, Jean Kirkpatrick, at an international trade conference in Virginia.

Government Affairs Chairman and a member of their PAC Board of Directors.

As the first women elected to the board of directors of the National Customs Brokers and Freight Forwarders Association of America, Inc., she represented freight forwarders and customs brokers throughout the southeastern portion of the United States and Puerto Rico from 1990 until 1995. She served on its Education and Legislative committees and as chairman of its Political Action Committee, lobbying in Washington on issues that impacted international trade. While on the NCBFAA board, she served as chairman of the Automated Export System and represented the National association on the AES Trade Resource Group. As co-chairman of that group, she assisted in bringing industry together with government to design the Automated Export System. George Weise, Commissioner of Customs, recognized her contributions and leadership to the successful development and implementation of phase one of that system.

Adamson is a licensed customs broker and a licensed insurance broker in this state, and she is the author of "Legal Liability Is Not Shipper's Interest Insurance." She also leads workshops in cargo insurance basics and lectures on Marine Cargo Insurance in the College of Charleston's Intermodal Program.

For someone with such high credentials, it may surprise a few people to find out that Adamson does not have a college degree. "I'm a high school graduate," she says. "I didn't



want to go to college; I wanted to work. And I have worked really hard over the years, learning as much as I could. What you see now is the product of almost three decades of constant learning."

One of the things Adamson has learned is temperance. "I used to be aggressive," she admits. "I was very tenacious, very direct. I never bit my tongue. If you asked for my opinion, you were going to get it." These days, she says, her goal is to be assertive rather than aggressive. "I think it has a lot to do with maturing and mellowing a bit."

Still, she insists being direct has its advantages, in her case undoubtedly assisting her in public speaking and training engagements, tasks that she says she loves. And she advises

women not to acquiesce. "I think it's okay to be direct, to state your point emphatically."

Her position on women in business is characteristically candid. "This is an industry full of detail, and that's where women do a better job. Women are much more detail-oriented than men, and smart managers have already figured out they could depend on women to put business plans together."

While there is a tendency to label her a feminist – she has a needlepoint pillow in her office that reads "Behind every successful woman is herself!" – Adamson scoffs at the idea. "If the fact that I'm a woman ever got in my way I was blind to it. Everything I've gotten I've worked for, and I've never seen my gender as either an aid or a hindrance."

She is quite frank about highlighting challenges she sees other women struggling with. "I see insecurities in women today and I wish I could tell all of them that if they take small steps at a time they can achieve whatever they want."

Adamson speaks from her own experience. She was the first woman elected to the board of directors of the National Custom Brokers and Freight Forwarders Association of America in that organization's 100-year history. "Admitting a woman into that fold was not a small thing, but they did it. I look at women today and I wish they would give themselves more credit. Too often they're willing to start a job at a much lower wage than a man would accept. I recently went through the interview process and found that only one in ten had the potential I was looking for."

And what about future plans? Any achievements yet to reach? Adamson ponders the question. "Certainly there are things I want to achieve – growth within the company, specific goals I want to reach – but I need to stop and smell the roses too, as cliché as that sounds. I used to work all the time, but now I rarely work weekends. That was my gift to myself last year."

"And besides," she smiles, "It isn't as if I achieve things alone. I've got a wall full of plaques and certificates that represent a lot of hard work, but I've had encouragement and help along the way. A lot of people help make you what you are."



Adamson in front of her showcase of hard work: "I've got a wall of plaques and certificates that represent a lot of hard work, but I've had encouragement and help along the way."