

UWO alumna, global business leader shares industry insight with COB students

by Amy Pinkston - Wednesday, October 26, 2011

<http://www.uwosh.edu/today/15083/uwo-alumna-global-business-leader-shares-industry-insight-with-cob-students/>

Throughout her career, University of Wisconsin Oshkosh alumna Cheryl Stallworth-Hooper has helped build some of the world's most successful brands.

From managing Colgate's business in Central America and its multicultural marketing in the United States to holding several key marketing positions at Coca-Cola, Stallworth-Hooper (BA '78) has used her skills to work her way to the top as CEO of Firefly, North America, a Millward Brown company that focuses on consumer insight.

Stallworth-Hooper returned to UW Oshkosh and presented to the College of Business's international marketing classes led by Professor Soo-Young Moon on Oct. 24, 2011.

Stallworth-Hooper, who received her bachelor's degree in radio-TV-film from UW Oshkosh and a master's degree in marketing from the University of Wisconsin-Madison, has more than 25 years of global business experience.

Her primary message to students was about the importance of education, both in the classroom and from experience.

"If you have the opportunity to get a good education, it's your responsibility to share what you've learned with others to make their lives richer and fuller," she said.

She shared the top five lessons she's learned, provided specific examples of why they rose to the top for her, and emphasized how they can be applied both professionally and personally.

- "You must know and pursue what fuels your passion. If you can find that spark, it can shape your career and your life," Stallworth-Hooper said. She said she had a professor in college that introduced her to the world of advertising and helped her find a passion for marketing and consumer insights. Stallworth-Hooper spoke of peoples' "love affairs" with brands. She told this story as she held tight to her Apple iPad and used Apple as one of her personal brand love affairs.
- "Be aware of your blind spots. Ask for feedback and suggestions early and often for how you can improve. Sometimes it's hard to hear, but it's always worth it," she said. After she earned her MBA degree and started her first job, Stallworth-Hooper saw several of her counterparts who had equal credentials and intelligence being promoted. She quickly sought feedback. It wasn't long before she was also moving up the corporate ladder.
- "Find a mentor," Stallworth-Hooper said, referring to her mentors as her "personal board of

directors." She said finding these individuals is about developing life-long relationships. People want to help people they like and trust. These are two-way relationships, and you have to pay it forward.

- "Be yourself. Accept who you are. Listen to your inner voice," she stressed. For Stallworth-Hooper, this was a tough lesson. She had worked hard climbing the ladder and she liked her job, but was at an organization that was very individually focused and she's a collaborator. After reaching out to several of her mentors, it was her mother that reminded her to be herself and listen to her inner voice. She took this advice and made a career change that helped her find her current position.
- "Nothing is ever predictable. You have to know that everything you encounter, good and bad, is helping to prepare you for the next experience," she said. Stallworth-Hooper spoke of the many challenges she's faced over the years, from being a young black woman on a corporate team of white men to landing in a foreign country without speaking the language. She shared many examples of doubt and frustration, stating that without those experiences she wouldn't have ended up where she is now, leading the North American business for a global company.

"My favorite part (about leading an organization) is my ability to force innovation and challenge my team to be on the leading edge, creating tomorrow," she said.

During the presentation, Stallworth-Hooper also fielded questions from students and shared a personal lesson she learned about work-life balance after her sister died at a young age. As a CEO she said it's just as important to make time for the personal relationships in life as it is to make time for career.

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