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LEADING
THE WAY

Female executives
share solutions

May the
road
rise up

With plans of returning to Ireland, retiring Mercury president Pat Mackey reflects on his career and shares thoughts on boating's future.

MERCURY

Leading the way

BY LIZ WALZ

The boating business' female executives share solutions to its challenges.

Women have been offering the boating industry solutions to its problems since the first family marine business was born.

But over time, the number of women in the boating business, the diversity of their roles and the heights to which they've risen have increased. Just take a look at the winners of the Darlene Briggs Woman of the Year Award, currently celebrating its 20-year anniversary. The award, which was established to celebrate the leadership and commitment of a marine retailer to her industry and her community, has recognized the achievements of a wide range of boating business professionals, from fellow marine retailers to boat builders, engine manufacturers and industry consultants.

When you talk to these women about their careers, some will tell you they've been able to help the industry better target female boaters. Others will share with you the accomplishments they've achieved using their unique communication and leadership skills. Still others will tell you that being a woman has had nothing to do with their job performance or their contribution to the industry.

I think they're all right. In today's world, there are as many different experiences and perspectives as there are persons, and we each apply them to our jobs in our own way. *Boating Industry* magazine's aim in highlighting the women leaders featured in this article is to share their solutions to the industry's challenges in hopes that it might help it improve and grow.

Not only have these submissions been edited for clarity and length, we received so many that we were unable to fit them all in the magazine. For the full-length versions of the following solutions, as well as 11 additional submissions from some of the industry's best and brightest, visit the March issue on www.boating-industry.com.

Leading the way

WANDA KENTON SMITH

President

Kenton Smith Advertising & PR



WORK TOGETHER – In today's sluggish market, our industry needs to do a better job of local marketing, and we need to do it together. Many manufacturers and dealers are not collaborating to maximize their potential. Dealer inventories are piling up, and manufacturing plants are coming to a grinding halt.

Nobody likes this situation. There's finger pointing, frustration and some truth on all sides. Here's my take on how we can minimize the financial and professional stresses associated with a declining market.

Manufacturers need to have marketing, advertising and promotional programs in place to reinforce their brand and support their dealers year-round. The minute they go dark or significantly reduce their marketing initiatives, they send a negative message to the boating public and their dealers. Manufacturers need to maintain a strong presence in their target markets, creating effective programs to help dealers move inventory. These should include professional tools that can be customized for each locale and are easy to execute. When possible, this should be accompanied by solid co-op funding. It's also smart for manufacturers to consult with a few key marketing-savvy dealers in the early stages of program development to get their recommendations and ownership.

The dealers, likewise, need to become more accountable for local marketing. The manufacturer needs to provide the program and the tools, but the dealer must champion the effort and enthusiastically plan and execute it. Dealers need to get more aggressive, calling on previous customers and prospects.

In addition, dealers should give customers real and enticing reasons to buy now. There is plenty of negative press as to why they shouldn't buy. We need to counter with positive, legitimate reasons why now is the absolute best time to buy and make it authentic. This may require some real creativity and customization, which is why the 1:1 customer contact is so important. What it may take to get Customer A off the block may be entirely different than Customer B.

Dealers need to ask for referrals and then systematically follow-up. They need to get involved in their communities and network among prospects who meet the boat buying demographic. Don't wait for Mohammed to come to the mountain: take the mountain out there! Connect regularly with existing customers through special events, forging a relationship of trust beyond the sale.

Ultimately, both manufacturers and dealers need to develop and create marketing strategies supported by well-conceived, specific plans with tactics, timelines and budgets. If they don't know how, they should get outside expertise.

Nothing happens when we don't market. The inventory stockpile builds and the product takes a beating. The longer it sits, the harder it is to move and the less desirable it becomes. The Catch-22 domino effect begins to take full impact as retailers and manufacturers experience the sloping downward spiral we all so want to avoid. ■