



Zebra Your Edge Podcast

Hosts:

- **Therese Van Ryne, Senior Director, External Communications at Zebra, and global co-chair for Zebra's Women's Inclusion Network (WIN)**

Guests:

- **Lisa Shaheen, Director, Channel Marketing & Events, DTG**

Transcript

Therese

Welcome to the Your Edge podcast. I'm Therese Van Ryne, Senior Director of External Communications at Zebra Technologies. I'm thrilled to be joined today by Lisa Shaheen. She's from DTG, which is a Zebra independent hardware vendor. Lisa and I were recently chatting about being women in tech, and she mentioned that her mom, Cammy Shaheen, was also a woman in tech back in the 1970s.

In fact, she founded a tech company at a time when very few women were business owners, much less tech business owners. So I asked Lisa to share her mom's story with us as I find it to be very inspiring. Thanks so much for being here, Lisa.

Lisa

Thanks for having me. I'm really happy to be here.

Therese

Wonderful. Can we start by having you tell me a little bit about your mom and who she was as a person?

Lisa

My mother was a trailblazer. When I think back what she accomplished in the 1970s, not having a college degree and coming from a very traditional family where women were just supposed to be housewives and mothers. And she had ambition. She had drive. She wanted more from life than to just be a housewife and a mother. And, you know, growing up in the forties and the fifties.

That's all women did. So she went to work after high school as a secretary for what was then BellSouth, which was is now AT&T. And she worked there for many years as a secretary and kind of got her foot in the door in business. And then, of course, we came along, the kids, and women didn't work and have children.

So she kind of gave it up. And then she got a bug when, you know, we were a little older...I was early teens...and wanted to do something on her own. And technology was just emerging at the time. I don't know if you remember, but, you know, there was no internet, there was no email. It was a different time in technology.

Everything was, you know, maybe there was even - there was a fax machine, I think - so it was in its infancy. And she saw the potential and started a little business in a spare bedroom in our home. So, you know, she was an inspiration to me always. And I thought she was really brave.

Therese

Incredible. Incredible. That's so impressive, especially considering that she didn't have a degree in this field or there were only 400,000 women owned businesses across the U.S. in 1972 as compared to 12.3 million in 2018. Do you think her success is a testament to her drive and strength?

Lisa

Absolutely. I mean, if you met her, you could see that excitement in her eyes, like she wanted to learn, she wanted to excel. She wanted to build something. And, you know, she was lucky that my father was a little open minded. You know, he was in actually, he was in the computer field. He sold big computers that took up buildings at the time.

And so that's sort of how she learned about the computer industry. And she said, well, how can I sit in, you know, she kind of looked at it from a top down. She saw what was going on. And she said, how can I fit my skills in as someone who's extremely organized, who's personable, who understands kind of the sales cycle?

You know, I had worked in offices for executives. I understood how that whole that C-suite worked. And she kind of wanted to do something a little bit different. And, you know, it's incredible that she had that foresight. And women in technology, women are still not that big in technology. Right. You can attest to that, especially on the hardware side.

You know, I think there's a lot of women in software and there's probably a lot of women now in coding. My daughters are learning management information systems, as you know, and one of them has a major in that. So, you know, it's happening for women, but it's different for women.

Therese

Right. Yeah. Right. And I understand Raytheon was a company she secured as her first client. Can you tell us a little bit about that?

Lisa

That's a great story. You know, she was always in the executive suite as a secretary. She was she understood what secretaries needed to do their job effectively. So now they have computers and they have pin fed printers. I don't know if you remember those, but you had to design an invoice directly on to it would go into these pin fed printers and it had to print in a specific way.

So everything had to be designed for that in mind. And so she did. That was her first job. She went into Raytheon. We had a relative that worked at Raytheon somewhere, and when you showed up or you made a phone call back then, people answered their phone and they took meetings with you because they wanted to know what you had to say.

I mean, sales has changed today. People don't take calls anymore. Everything is done by email or text or whatever. But if you showed up at a business and you asked for a purchasing director or even as an assistant to somebody, they would come out and meet you in the lobby and hear what you had to say and maybe you'd get in.

So that's what she did. She walked in and got in to see the right person, met with the secretary because they were the ones that needed these products. And she designed... that was her first her first account. And it grew from there.

Therese

Incredible. Yeah. You mentioned that your mom was a champion of inclusion, that she always tried to invite women into the fold and empower them to grow however they wanted personally and professionally. Tell me a little bit more about that. How did she approach inclusion in her day to day life?

Lisa

Well, you know, she wanted women to succeed because she came up against a lot of roadblocks. You know, women in business back then, they weren't taken seriously. Number one, it was hard to get in the door. And so she mentored women. She brought women into her business and she taught them and trained them regardless of what kind of education they had.

Most of them had a high school education. That was it. Women...there weren't that many that women that had a college degree back then. Not like today. I think that women make up most or more than 50% of the college graduates in the United States today. So education was important to her and she always made sure we were educated, but she wanted women to succeed.

And she actually was the president of an organization. It was a networking organization. It was called the DPMA. And I think it stood for data processing membership or management association. And as president, she would bring in speakers to educate from the industry, and then she would also make sure that women came to these events, that they were networked with the right people.

And I think, you know, that was part of her success, you know, that she brought other women along with her and taught them the ropes and gave them a career. And, you know, back then, that was quite an accomplishment.

Therese

Yeah, absolutely. So she built this company from the ground up to solve problems she was seeing that no one else was addressing. She got Raytheon sign on as her first client. Then what happened?

Lisa

Well, Add-On data.

Therese

Worldwide. Yeah.

Lisa

I'm sorry. Yeah, Add-On Data was the name of the company. And we would call them a VAR today. So we were one of the original VARs. So she built the company step by step. And then she made relationships with manufacturers like Zebra, like IBM, and she would build the packages that the companies would need and consolidate it all.

So she would buy from distribution or directly from the manufacturer and then sell to the end user as a complete solution and a complete product. Unfortunately, she passed away young, so my brother and I took over the company at that point. I'd always

worked for her in high school and in college, and then I went off and did my own thing and then I ended up coming back and then I stayed a couple of years and then wanted to spread my wings again.

So I left. But my brother Steve, who's the CEO now of DTG, continued that business and morphed it into more of a high-tech type of organization. Custom cabling and more customization. But it was all built on what she had started and she had the contacts, she had the customer base. She knew how to provide good customer service so that everybody trusted her and she was the go to.

So what we tried to do is continue that and I'm glad to say that, you know, DTG is that kind of company. And then we leveraged, well he leveraged...DTG leveraged, Add-On Data to build DTG, and DTG is a very different kind of company now. But you know it's all built on what she started with Add-On Data.

Therese

Well, we are so grateful you've been a partner all these years and I'm so happy to see you and your family carrying on your mom's legacy. Now, you also owned your own separate business a few years ago, right? So like your mom, you started a woman-owned business.

Lisa

I did. You know, I've always had that entrepreneurial spirit. It probably came from her. You know, why work for somebody else when you can work for yourself is what she used to tell me. And then she'd said, "Well, what's the worst that can happen? You try it. If you fall down, you can always go back to work for somebody else."

So I always kept that in the back of my mind. So when it was time for me, I wanted to open my own public relations firm, so I did public relations marketing and some of the advertising and a lot of event management. And I went out on my own. I was living in Miami at the time and I built the business kind of the same way she taught me.

You build relationships with people, you talk to people and get them to trust you because you do what you say you're going to do. You follow through. And that was one thing that she always taught me. And I wasn't afraid. And it was it was a great experience. You know, I ran my business for about nine years and then we adopted some kids.

So things had to change a little bit. And so I stopped that. I worked, I went took care of my kids when they were really little. And then my husband and I started another business together. So I continued, you know, owning our own businesses for a long time. But I love doing the PR and the marketing, and that's what I'm back doing now. Back with DTG.

Therese

Amazing.

Lisa

Yeah.

Therese

How would you say your experiences in communications and tech have compared? It seems like in PR agencies or communications, women are often the majority. Yet in tech, women are still often in the minority, as you discussed.

Lisa

Yeah. No, I agree. They are in the minority, especially when you go to hardware events, like we're going to be at Modex. You don't see a lot of women there. It's mostly male dominated. I kind of had a leg up. I did have some tech clients in PR, believe it or not, because I had a background in it and I could speak to it and I was a little knowledgeable about it.

But, you know, I encourage women to get involved in technology. If you're coming from a PR and marketing angle, that's great too. But technology is here to stay and everything. Everything in our lives is built around technology, as we all know. So it was a different world. It's changing, I think young women should get more involved in technology.

I think that it's a great industry and it's not difficult to learn. You know, you just need a little training. You got to learn the bits and the bytes and all of the acronyms that everybody uses in this business.

Therese

That's right.

Lisa

But, you know, it's not insurmountable. And I'm proud that there's a lot of young women now entering technology. And I think it's a great field.

Therese

I agree. I think there's something that we can do to help more women see themselves in tech. Is it a messaging problem that leads women to think that if they don't have a degree or a passion for coding or engineering, that there isn't an opportunity for them in tech?

Lisa

Yeah, I don't know the answer to that question. I think stories like this will show women that, you know, even if you start in something else, you could go into tech. My mother did not have a college degree in anything. She didn't have a degree. She was a secretary. So you can learn. And I think young people, because they're brought up with technology now, they know more about it.

I think that they should be inspired. And I think that if we get the message out, people like you and me that have been in technology while that, you know, it's a great industry and it's changing and it's exciting. And I think we've just got to keep telling our stories.

Therese

Absolutely. Absolutely. What do you think we can do in our daily lives besides telling our stories to follow your mom's lead and help more women feel confident in themselves?

Lisa

I think we can mentor more. I mentored quite a few young women in my day. I used to run a women's networking group where I would bring speakers in and have them teach them something new or build their confidence. We would do, you know, like mock interviews with women so that they found their voice. I think there's a lot that women can do for women.

It's just I don't know that it's as prevalent as the old boys network. But I think women are starting to see that we, as a group, we as an amazing influence in the world, have a lot to offer. And, you know, we need to build our own confidence and get out there and tell more stories.

Lisa

I think it just, you know, it has to build organically.

Therese

Yes. Yeah. 100% agree with you. I love your idea, the mentorship. I mentor some young women as well, and I learn as much out of those experiences that they do. And I also think book clubs are an interesting idea. You can start small. I've joined a book club here at work and you start out talking about books, but then you learn so much about one another and what's happening in your daily lives, the parallels you have, the differences and you just you grow your network, your friendships, that way as well.

So yeah, this has been amazing. Lisa, thank you so much for being with us.

Lisa

It's been a pleasure. And thank you for all you do. I think that you tell a great message and you're getting the stories out there. So thank you for having me. It's been an honor.

Therese

Thank you, Lisa. And thank you all for listening. I'm Therese Van Ryne. Until next time.



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