

MedRisk

Shelley Boyce

Leadership Spotlight

By: CresaPartners, Matt Feeney and Jeff Baker

When you first meet Shelley Boyce (Founder & CEO of MedRisk, King of Prussia, PA) you immediately understand why she has grown MedRisk (www.medrisknet.com) into the nation's leading provider of specialty managed care services for the worker's compensation industry. Why? Because it's clear that Shelley has all the attributes of a great business leader. She has passion/drive/focus/persistence and vision. But there's something more. Shelley is more than just a great leader she is also a great mentor. That's why we identified her as our first follow-up interview at Executive Leaders Radio.

ELR: How did MedRisk come to be?

SB: I was attending Wharton and working on a project which became the foundation for what the company is today. After years in the healthcare industry I believed there could be some improvements made in managed care/workers comp arena and I used this idea as the basis for my business plan for the project.

ELR: The project must have received a good grade.

SB: Actually quite the opposite. My concept met with rejection all around and through this process I became a lot more passionate about the idea. My persistence drove me to question what they really did not like about the plan and to see what changes I could make. I remember feeding my newborn one night at the kitchen table and I had my school work on one side, my job work on the other and my business plan in the middle. It was then that I decided I was going to do this and from that point I never looked back. All the concerns I had about what if it doesn't work?, what will I do if it fails?, etc. went away and I never looked back. I believed in what I was doing and felt it could be successful. The resistance I met only served to increase my resolve and actually turned out to be a huge benefit.

ELR: What did your family think of this move?

SB: My husband questioned it initially but when he saw that I was determined to do this he became a big supporter--and still is today.

ELR: Speaking of family, you are clearly passionate about yours and we wonder how you deal with the demands on your time and what have you done with your employees.

SB: The MedRisk team works extremely hard and has many times logged extra hours to complete an assignment. It is important that we realize that and learn to take breaks between projects and recognize people for their efforts. Time away is rejuvenating. People return from time off energized and refreshed. On a daily basis, we try to accommodate colleagues' needs whether it is a single parent needing child

care pick up or attending an important sporting event. Those individuals consistently make up the time and work tenfold. Family time is an important balance to maintaining a healthy workplace.

As for me, I have always lived by the "who will remember rule."

ELR: Meaning?

SB: When you have a choice to make on what to attend you need to ask "who will remember" that I was or was not there? Several years ago I had an event for my daughter at the same time as an important meeting. I chose to go to the meeting and several years later my daughter still remembers that I missed the event. Nobody remembers who was at the meeting or what was decided. I try to keep that in mind for all conflicts even purely business.

ELR: Flexibility is an interesting concept especially when you are dealing with younger generations. How are you dealing with the challenges of managing multiple generations within the company?

SB: I think the first thing you need to accept is that the younger generation has skill sets and attributes that as an older generation we can benefit from and learn from. They are out of the box thinkers and as leaders we can look to them for ideas. Some of your best ideas do not come from your leaders they come from people within. The younger generation are "thinkers" and if you ask them they are "talkers". They have great ideas. We've got to be open not only to listen to them but to ask them. You have to realize it is not the way we may have thought but there is a lot to learn.

ELR: We hear so much about communication styles. Are you using any social media?

SB: Communication is three way - what you see/ what you hear and how it makes you feel.

You lose pieces of that when you rely on texting, email etc. That being said, there are advantages to technology. We have a huge social media program in development now and we have to embrace this. There are risks and we have teams in place to evaluate governance along with evaluating what will work best for us. It has to be more than just putting it out there, we have to figure out how to use the tools to elicit feedback and respond in a real time base in a community environment. We are using an internal tool called "Chatter" that enables us to get feedback from folks who are working on a project. It opens up a dialogue and makes us more collaborative. It cuts down on meeting time, the older generation might say let's have a meeting and get 15 people there. We spend too much time in meetings. With this tool you get it out to those 15 people and in a few minutes have feedback. These are not a replacement for personal interaction but can be a great way to fill in some gaps and we have to use it to reach our stakeholders. It is not a replacement for person to person interaction but it can help augment it.



ELR: What changes have leaders had to make in order to remain effective?

SB: You have to embrace different leadership styles and different worker styles. Leadership styles have needed to transition from being more managerial to being more communicative, collaborative, consensus building. Not that every decision can be made by consensus, leaders still have to lead and make decisions and be clear. But overall the more effective leader is trending towards a style that encourages and promotes participation and team work.

ELR: How do younger workers grow into becoming leaders?

SB: More than ever we have multiple generations in the workforce and we need to help the younger generation learn how to lead. This can be helped by being part of a mentor program but also relies heavily on being involved, by watching others and by being willing to learn. Much like what I said earlier about being able to learn from the younger generation the reverse is also true. The person to person interaction is critical. You don't mentor in an email.

ELR: Can you identify young leaders? How do people develop this skill? What traits do leaders exhibit?

SB: Wow, that's an interesting question but I believe the answer is yes. I am part of the selection process for the Jefferson Scholars, a scholarship program sponsored by my alma mater the University of Virginia, where we pick the top 30 kids from across the country. They all had 4.0 plus averages so their smarts weren't the issue. They all had great activities but what moved them on in the process was who had leadership capacity, aptitude, experience and that's not something you learn in social media. These kids are 25 years old and have a presence that fills the room with a collection of people who are often twice their age. Some of them clearly had an aptitude for leadership but while there is some element of being a "born leader" but it does not mean that it can't be further learned, groomed, enhanced or maximized. People need to take their time to gain the experience needed to become a true leader and to try and learn something from everyone they interact with. Each of the candidates had a story about a role model, learning by example, taking initiatives outside the normal activities. It's also not always about your title or that you have been given the power. It is the person who takes charge in a group and emerges from the group as a leader. These people are chosen by the group to lead and they develop followers and become the great leaders of the future. Most leaders have a sense of self & success but develop something that is more inclusive of others and bigger than the individual. It is not about "I" but more about "we" and there is no place for arrogance in being a leader. They understand the power of the team is what helped them to achieve success. This is something I learned as a nurse. I could not do my job alone and really depended upon the entire team to help the patient.

ELR Summary and Final Impressions

What struck us the most about Shelley when we sat down with her to do this follow-up interview was the "presence" you felt the moment she walked into the room. She's just one of those unique individuals that you are immediately drawn to because she is a natural leader. But what you find yourself attracted to is how natural and down to earth she really is. She's a "listener" first and definitely a deep "thinker" but doesn't profess to have it all figured out. It's her willingness to be open & vulnerable as a leader that we believe is one of the main keys to her success.

She's very quick to deflect credit and attention and would rather focus on others specifically her team/her mentors and her family as the main reasons for her success. Ironically, our follow-up interview of Shelley actually became more of an interactive discussion among the three of us rather than just a question and answer session. What we found was Shelley actually was more interested in us and our viewpoints. You can see that she feeds off it and it energizes her which is representative of her managing style open and collaborative. She was determined to make our discussion worthwhile and interesting and hopefully a learning experience for everyone involved again, another example of how she is interested in something bigger than herself.

If you ask Shelley the keys to her success we are confident she will tell you it's been her commitment to education and her mentors that paved the way. She still meets with her mentors to this very day and maintains her commitment to young students and workers. It's her willingness to continue to learn and be open to new ideas that sets her apart from many leaders' styles. At a time when many leaders are struggling with the generational differences between older and younger workers, Shelley seems to seek out and embrace those differences and then works to create an environment that balances and engages the best of the old and new. Successful leaders do not see problems or differences as threats rather they see every problem as an opportunity to learn and improve. That's why Shelley Boyce is a successful leader and mentor.

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