



Louise Woerner

Chairman and CEO of Home Care of Rochester

*"I am in the world to change the world."
Käthe Kollwitz*

The turning points of Louise Woerner's life all seem intertwined, in a sense. Almost predestined, they would one day coalesce into a skilful balance between the two extremes that Louise was always forced to occupy: the aggressive feminist fighting for recognition against the prejudice of her time, and the caring woman who merely wanted to succeed on her own terms. With influences coming from her family life, her scholastic life, as well as her professional life, one might say that her whole life is a series of turning points, rather than one singular moment that made all the difference.

Nevertheless, let's start at the very beginning in order to understand the full scope of the story of Louise's success.

One of her first and most important memories is sitting on the sill of a second floor window of her family's home where she played checkers with her maternal grandmother. One day, upon winning, she came to the sudden realization that her grandmother had let her win. She asked her why, only to receive the reply, "Because you love winning so much". This straightforward response opened Louise's eyes in a number of ways. First of all, it revealed to her the competitive aspect of her personality that could succeed in a career, even if the times were unfriendly to the idea of women

working outside the home. Secondly, it instilled in her a world view wherein she felt gratitude for all the times others bestowed generosity upon her and helped her move ahead.

Louise carried her "love of winning" over to school with her, where she achieved a high level of academic success, becoming what she describes as something of a "nerd". She recalls enjoying some aspects of the simplicity of that age, such as the fact that she and her family used to sit down to dinner every night together. It was at one such dinner that she had another eye opening experience.

Her father asked her what exactly she planned to major in while in school. When Louise replied that she wished to become a lawyer like her father, he casually responded with the off-hand assertion that there had never been a good woman lawyer, and that there was no reason she should think that she would be the first.

Such a comment was reflective of the times that Louise grew up in. However, she did retain an encouraging influence in the form of her mother, a visionary who saw that women would have more choices in the future. She encouraged Louise to pursue anything she wanted to, even while her father was urging her to take sewing classes and other traditionally feminine subjects.

When Louise did go to college, she majored in business at Trinity University as an undergrad before going on to the University of Chicago to pursue her MBA degree. She was able to attend Trinity on a full scholarship as a result of her academic prowess. Actually, her first scholarship was to Stanford, but she was unable to accept that offer because of her family's reluctance to send her all the way across the country to California.

While at Trinity, she worked all throughout school as the secretary to the chairman of the department, Ray Erlandson. This offered quite a lot of good experience in more ways than one. For starters, she learned much about business from her close contact with the faculty, and internalizing their credo

that **management is about “getting things done through people”**. However, she also learned that expectations for women would extend beyond the walls of her own home, when Erlandson told her that he would disown any daughter of his who left Trinity without being married. In addition, she saw that she was the only female in her classes, so she knew that there was going to be a tough fight ahead of her. It occurred to her for the first time that the advice of people like her father and Erlandson wasn't intended to be cruel, but rather just reflected the reality of the times: it was going to be incredibly difficult for a woman to succeed in business, and they simply wanted to protect her. Nevertheless Louise remained determined to succeed.

After graduating from the University of Chicago, she met yet another mentor figure, Joe Halbach. It was here that she experienced another of her turning points when Halbach offered what he said was critical advice: that she had to get the feminist chip off her shoulder in order to succeed. Louise realized that it was in fact limiting to view things through the perspective of herself against the world, and she began to try to see things as a more level battlefield, even if that wasn't entirely the case.

The change resulting from that was fairly major, and Louise started to meet with more and more success. She was offered a job as an analyst in the Nixon White House by Halbach and accepted it. After the White House job, she went back into the private sector with a consulting firm. While there, she spent a lot of time doing research work on social security data. From this research, she began to realize certain trends, such as the growing age of the average worker, and the fact that she could easily capitalize upon this knowledge to fill a certain niche. Even in her own family, she realized that her father was completely unable to get along on his own after the death of her mother.

It occurred to Louise that she could turn the family values she had enjoyed as a child into a successful business, merging both aspects of her personality together into a cohesive whole. As a result she founded Home Care of Rochester, a service which offers the elderly home care assistance preparing meals and other domestic concerns.

She met with a setback right off the bat when she had to contend with New York State regulations that forced her to re-brand her corporate identity as one that centered on health care in the home. She recalls all kinds of illuminating encounters, such as a luncheon with Max Farash, a real estate magnate of the Rochester community, who asked Louise what was the most money she had ever lost in a business deal. After she gave the answer, Farash said "well then you're tested". This helped her to realize what she calls her fundamental tenet of business:

"You have to be able to fail forward."

That realization to learn from failure, however, proved to be for the better. As one of the first home health care providers in the region, Louise went from three active employees to a full 640 full time employees in just a short amount of time.

Today, she spends most of her time working on a succession plan for her company, gradually passing ownership on to the employees so that the company and its reputation will survive her. When asked about the key to her success, Louise comments that for her, **money has always been about the ability to buy freedom of choice and freedom of time, rather than material possessions.** When she began to lose the desire to "prove herself" and focused on her desire to simply become successful on her own terms, bringing together all of her many influences into a single whole, she was able to move forward and grasp this simple truth that has since made all the difference.