

**100 Wise Women  
Karen Lee  
University of Louisville University Club  
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**Good morning.**

**It is an honor to be asked to talk about my career, the professional experiences I've had.**

**This is a great setting to share some of my life with you as networking is a valuable tool in shaping the professional life I think you all would like to have.**

**I applaud Leadership Louisville for creating this opportunity to get out and network ... to meet others and become inspired ... find common ground and help in navigating rough waters or maybe even find validation that you are headed in a good direction.**

**It's great to swap stories of success ... and maybe failure, with others as they are valuable to learn from one another.**

**On the topic of success – I've come to believe that success comes from within and I also think that your assessment of personal success will change over time – as mine did – as a result of the challenges you encounter and how you meet those challenges. I think that those who are tested in their professional life and rise to the occasion are, by definition, successful.**

**The way I look at life, my success is not defined by the position I have at UPS, or the industry awards I've received, or the money I make ... but by the personal growth and development I was so fortunate to experience because of the challenges I've been given and responded to.**

**I've got two careers running in parallel, each somewhat dependant on the other, and both have challenged me in ways I could not have imagined that day I took my first flying lesson.**

**But before I jump into the career story I thought I'd give you a little personal information first. My husband was a career Marine when we married and he left the service**

**when I came to UPS. He had primary care of our 2 boys when they were really young and while he was staying home with them he took flying lessons and later started a career as a pilot. He flies for a Delta regional carrier now and has been with them almost 9 years. My boys are now 21 and 18. We live on a small farm in Fisherville with 5 dogs, 4 horses and my elderly parents. Mom and Dad love the country so when I built the farm I set them up in a nice apartment off of the garage. So, like all of you, we do the juggling act of day to day life, making choices about what is going to get done and what is not.**

**I tell you this so you know we have much in common – we all put our pants on one leg at a time!**

**Back to the career story.**

**I started what would turn out to be my aviation career in 1968 – you do the math! Of course I was just 3 at the time.**

**My dad was a pilot for TWA, so airplanes and travel were part of life – just like a car or a house. I didn't know I**

**loved them until I went for a ride with dad one beautiful Saturday morning. We were going for a piece of cherry pie and he let me bank the plane left then right.**

**I was afraid to push the nose down but was thrilled with the feeling of turning – how it felt in my hands, how it looked to my eyes. My birthday was right around the corner, so right after we landed, dad went into the airport office and bought me a \$5 discovery flight as a gift.**

**Wow! Women don't fly do they? I didn't say it out loud but it was screaming in my head. I was so darned excited – it didn't matter if they did or not. I couldn't wait to get my hands on the controls again – this time with a real instructor.**

**Of course I loved it – that sense of freedom, of looking down on the world was breathtaking to say the least. So I asked my dad for more lessons.**

**“Not so fast,” he said, “If you want to fly, you have to pay for your own lessons.” So I began my flying career**

**learning a life lesson – money grows more and more precious the less and less you have of it.**

**I made some really hard choices about how I would spend the little bit I had – and ultimately it all went to the airport. And I worked hard for it as many teenagers do.**

**As I closed in on getting my private license a few months later, I ran out of money – so my dad made me a pilot-to-pilot loan so I could finish. He then kept track of every dime as I paid it back – let's not make it too easy for the kid!**

**Move ahead two years or so, and I'm in the middle of my junior year of college and I hated it – way too confining, too straight line – so I quit.**

**The lesson about not quitting something that's important to the future didn't come home to roost until a few years later – but since I didn't perceive at the time that a college degree was important to my future – off I went.**

**I decided to teach flying until I could figure out what I wanted to do when I grew up. I had enough hours to get an instructor's license by that time.**

**At the time I DID NOT realize that I was starting a career in aviation. I just loved to fly. Few women had careers in aviation back in the late 60s and early 70s – so it never occurred to me that I would end up a lifelong professional aviator.**

**The next part of my journey took me to Puerto Rico – I just have to tell you this because it makes me laugh even today. It's a great example of another life lesson – you have to be persistent or you might not get what you want.**

**I needed hours in a twin engine airplane so I could get a job flying twins. But I couldn't get a job flying twins because I didn't have enough hours, it was a catch 22.**

**I heard that there were small tour operators in Puerto Rico that flew twins and would hire pilots without**

**looking too closely at how much twin engine time you had. Perfect!**

**So I went south fully expecting to land a twin engine flying job – I was pretty well qualified - or so I was told.**

**At the airport, I went counter to counter to each tour operator, asking for a job as my friends had told me to do. At each and every one I heard the same thing – “no women, no women, we don’t hire women.”**

**I had made a gross planning error by failing to recognize that I was trying to get a flying job at a time when women didn’t fly for a living. What made me think geography would change the outcome I have no idea! Well, no problem, they could not hold out forever.**

**I went back every single day, to every single operator.**

**Finally one morning, one of the guys who seemed to feel a bit differently about women and had taken the time to talk to me on my daily visits said “you know, you remind me of my daughter. Read this manual and come back tomorrow – I’ll see what I can do.”**

**It was that break that created my awareness that maybe I was going to fly for a living. I soon had my twin engine hours and the next challenge was right around the corner.**

**My dad paid a visit to San Juan and while he was there suggested that we go by all the commercial airline counters and pickup employment applications. I asked why? They don't hire women pilots. He said, "Hey, someday they will have to but it won't be you if you don't apply." Another life lesson – limit yourself to what you can imagine – not to what you can see.**

**So off went the applications – no internet in those days – each one painfully hand printed in an effort to make a good impression. And back came the postcards saying thanks but no thanks, we don't hire pilots without a college degree. Ouch! So back to school I went and 2 ½ LONG years later, I had a bachelor's degree in Aeronautical Studies. I should have finished the first time.**

**Four years, five flying jobs, one furlough, one year of unemployment as a pilot, seven airline interviews and seven rejections later, I finally got my big break with TWA.**

**I was the first female pilot for them and the 11<sup>th</sup> female commercial airline pilot in the world and it was my dad's airline to boot. What a blast I had – I was determined to be the absolute best crewmember to ever fly a TWA Boeing 727.**

**There were situations with being in that position that were pretty uncomfortable – and all of us were experiencing the same thing.**

**We had to wade through the nude girlie pictures stashed all over the cockpit ... put up with vulgar language and bad jokes about our names on the bathroom wall ... listen to – but not answer – the stupid questions about our menstrual cycles, our personal relationships and our futures ... when we would have to quit flying so we could get married.**

**But it was how we dealt with that discomfort that defined who we became – and for me it was total focus on being the best that any of them had ever flown with and total focus on being a professional aviator – not a professional female aviator.**

**My dad always said that I would be a success if pilots talked about me as a fellow pilot, not a female pilot. And 14 months later, when I received the second furlough notice of my career, the harassment had begun to be replaced with respect. If I sneezed, every TWA pilot knew about it within a day, so how I handled myself got around the crew lounges pretty quickly. Aside from that, I loved everything about it and I was darned good at it.**

**But the furlough was leading to even greater challenges I would have to meet.**

**During the furlough from TWA, I flew for two small cargo airlines and flew all over Europe and the Middle East ... in and out of Saudia Arabia, and had two more furloughs.**

**I then ended up at a small start up airline that had just won a big contract flying planes for UPS – United Parcel Service in those days.**

**I was burned out on the instability of the aviation industry, the furloughs and was frustrated with my inability to get a decent job outside of aviation.**

**I tried on several occasions to enhance my marketability by alternative employment, but found that I wasn't qualified to do much else besides entry level positions that could grow into something better over time. But I didn't want to completely start over since I knew my heart belonged in an airplane.**

**When I landed at Orion Air to help with the startup of the UPS contract, I begged to be involved in every aspect of the tiny, growing company – and they let me jump in with both feet.**

**I hired pilots, managed crew payroll and training records, built the crew's schedules and kept track of aircraft and crews – on and on.**

**It didn't matter to me how menial or grungy or hard it was, I raised my hand and volunteered to take it all on. I was hungry to learn and grow, and I could not have picked a better place to do it – I became a captain on the Boeing 727 while I was at it.**

**Life lesson – make yourself valuable to your employer – but not too valuable. After 3 ½ years of 15-16 hour days, six days a week, and almost no vacation, I again was burned out.**

**I couldn't keep going at the pace I was going – even in my early 30s. But I had long ago convinced them that I was able to do it all and it was a good deal for them, since one person is cheaper than three or four.**

**I did it to myself but didn't realize I was doing it. I ultimately gave up my management responsibilities – thinking that I had gathered enough alternative**

**experience to enhance my resume in case I ever needed it, and went back to full time flying.**

**Not much later I was recalled to my job at TWA and became an instructor on the 727 then the 747.**

**I was enjoying the challenge of becoming an expert on those aircraft so I could teach others. I was there two years when I read in the paper that UPS was going to start its own airline because it had outgrown the contract carriers and needed more control over the operation.**

**My ultimate networking story is this – a pilot I hired at Orion and who I helped through some rough times at the beginning of his employment there had worked his way up to training manager at Orion.**

**He was the first employee from the contract carriers hired at UPS to help start the airline. He called me soon after to say that UPS was anxious to hire qualified women into the management team.**

**I didn't want to make another change at that point – I was settled back in at TWA and was five months pregnant with my first son. I knew how crazy a startup would be and wasn't really interested in living through that kind of chaos again.**

**He called me every other day or so, trying to get me to change my mind – sound familiar? I gave in and sent a resume and a few days later I was scheduled for an interview. The rest is pretty much history.**

**I fortunately made the right choice when I was offered a job at UPS, and I began what has become my second, parallel career.**

**I was a diamond in the rough when I got to UPS – luckily there were many people who could see through my shortcomings and were willing to coach, mentor and polish me. And there was plenty to work on.**

**I was a terrific pilot, technically very strong and I knew a lot about what it took to make an airline run from my days at Orion, but I didn't know much about running a**

**business, managing and developing people, and working within a large corporate structure.**

**I had to learn that flying airplanes was secondary and that I was expected to contribute as a management partner – talk about culture shock.**

**I will be frank with you about my weaknesses – we refer to them as development needs. There are many of them ... I can be impulsive, headstrong, passionate, persistent, blunt, stubborn ... emotional ... on occasion, combative and negative. I have never been good with details or numbers, I was not a good listener and I am quite reserved and an introvert.**

**There! That is just about all of them ... and recognizing them is half the battle. But some of my weaknesses also turned out to be strengths, once I learned to channel them properly and use them at the right time, in the right situation.**

**Passion, persistence, combativeness, impulsiveness and reserve can all work for you once you learn how to use them constructively.**

**I realized this within a couple of years of getting to UPS.**

**Because we are a large company, I was given the structure I needed to either mold my weaknesses into strengths or whittle them down to insignificance, so my natural strengths could then stand out. I'm very articulate and I have strong leadership qualities. I'm strategic, logical and visionary – enough to balance out the weaknesses and to build an excellent career on.**

**So I jumped into my UPS career – the second one of my life – with both feet and never looked back. It was hard sometimes to be a manager first and an aviator second, but I enjoyed the transition as I could feel myself growing and changing. And 23 assignments later, I'm here as the director of airline safety and a captain on the Boeing 747-400.**

**Among my assignments, I worked as a chief pilot, training manager, passenger charters manager, crew resources manager, flight standards manager ...I've been the airline's director of operations and even spent a year teaching in our corporate leadership school ... to name a few.**

**I also spent 13 years working on advanced technology systems for our aircraft that will be the standard in the future as the industry and FAA modernize our air traffic system.**

**People took notice. I worked hard and I was judged by the work I did. I set a high standard for myself as I wanted to be the best that I could be, I wanted to reach my full potential ... that was how I defined and measured success.**

**The journey had its bumps as well you might imagine. There were times when I felt that I was undervalued, that people had a lower expectation for me than I had for myself ... that the glass ceiling really was there.**

**My response to those occasions was to keep on doing what I do best – and that is to work hard, grow and learn – all the while, being the happiest when I felt I was making a positive contribution to the team.**

**I'm always proud to say that at UPS, if you have an honest heart and act with integrity, the only other thing that matters is how well you do your job.**

**In the end, that's the only thing that people should be judged on.**

**Now I'd like to shift gears and talk about the importance of support and networking as you make your way through your careers. Events like this one today are important and I urge everyone to take full advantage of this opportunity, myself included.**

**I mentioned earlier that I am an introvert by nature, and I do not count networking as one of my strengths ... at least not in the typical sense that we think of networking. I've concentrated on networking with other aviation professionals and only when it was associated**

**with the advanced technology I worked on for so long.  
A very narrow view indeed.**

**Networking with people in your own line of business is  
OK; but networking with people from a variety of  
backgrounds is where you really start to learn things.**

**A network should include both women and men. I have  
been influenced by some strong women in my UPS  
career, but almost all of the influence came from men in  
my aviation career.**

**So what's the rest of the recipe for success?**

**I believe that the key ingredients are hard work, solid  
experience, a willingness to learn and to embrace  
change, and the final ingredient ... how you choose to  
look at the obstacles you run into.**

**I think that most successful people see obstacles as  
opportunities to grow, as personal challenges to be  
overcome by personal power.**

**In parting, I would give you these words of wisdom ... concentrate on performance, never let them see you sweat, be generous in your heart, trust until given a reason not to, pick your battles carefully and embrace every new challenge as a development opportunity. Oh yes, don't forget – put your pants on one leg at a time.**

**I'm looking forward to being in the audience at the next 100 Wise Women event, so I can work on my networking skills along with the rest of you.**

**Before I go, I'd like to mention June 20. If you haven't heard about it, the Women for Women organization is holding a Champions for Her Walk/Run Festival to raise money for 11 different community organizations.**

**I am coordinating UPS's participation in the event and it's another great opportunity to network. I would love to see you there. Visit the website [www.champions4her.com](http://www.champions4her.com) and check it out.**

**Thank you.**