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January 26, 2016

All the news from GPSEG in less than 3 minutes!

Leadership Insights

By Suzanne F. Kaplan



Amy Kothari
President and CEO, My Alarm Center

Helping Clients Feel Secure in Our Insecure World

Neither security fears following 9/11 nor financial fears during the recession reduced My Alarm Center's client base. Actually, sales increased; and clients did everything possible to maintain their coverage.

"We are recession proof because customers want to keep their sense of security when the world around them is insecure or crime goes up," President and CEO Amy Kothari explains. But she quickly adds that My Alarm Center retains customers due to the customer experience the company provides.

"Training our customer care representatives to be empathetic, compassionate and flexible when a customer calls is incredibly important. We want our customers to feel like we're a small local company that understands their needs and is always there for them. As technology evolves, we are shifting our emphasis from just 'protection' to 'connection.' This means we also provide the most advanced home automation tools to provide peace of mind to all our customers."

The value that customers see in alarm monitoring became quite clear when a customer came to them asking to promote the company and its monitoring process. Sadly, his mother had died in a fire in another city. She had smoke alarms, but with her hearing aids removed, had not heard warnings as a fire smoldered- eventually killing her. He knew that if monitoring had been in place the fire department would have been alerted, and she would still be alive.

Connections Translate to Growth

Kothari has worked very hard to keep essential customer connections while building the company to be the seventh largest residential security provider in the country. With over 15,000 alarm monitoring companies in the US, all providing essentially the same equipment and remote connections, My Alarm Center differentiates itself with its emphasis on customer experience, contributing to its success.

When Kothari joined the company as CFO in 2002, they had fewer than 10,000 customers and approximately \$300,000 in monthly revenue. Now, 13 years later, as CEO, she serves over 185,000 customers with nearly \$7 million in monthly revenue.

A Risk Taker from the Beginning

As the oldest of five children, Kothari started her leadership role early. Her father was a risk taker in his career, but did not always encourage her to follow him. She was determined, however, and not only became a risk taker but a big proponent of "putting my head down, figuring it out and just doing it." That has remained her philosophy-through jobs and product development for which she had little or no experience. She always asked questions, figured it out and did it.

She believes that she, and her staff, are not unique-someone has done "this" before. "So go find the experts, learn from them and then go do it."

A Visionary Leader Who Trusts her Staff

In interviewing Kothari, I was struck by her vision for the company and willingness to charge ahead-while surrounding herself with diligent people whom she trusts and takes a hands - off approach to leading.

She utilizes the Predictive Index, a tool for employee selection, onboarding and leadership development, and then delegates and allows employees to do their jobs.

Kothari values being a generalist, but surrounds herself with smart people who know how to do the specifics required for their functions. No matter the title or role of employees she is recruiting, she looks for the same four characteristics: being smart, curious, driven from within and having a positive can-do attitude.

The Future and Her Wish for Younger Employees

As a proponent of risk taking, Kothari has been disconcerted recently in attempting to hire younger people for company job openings.

She is noticing that Millennials are more risk adverse and "programmed" for what their parents deem appropriate for them. She urges young people, "To take risks and have fun." She says, "At 26 or 29 or 30, take risks in jobs while you are still young, even if it means a lower salary. Go for the variety of experiences and see where it takes you."

Suzanne F. Kaplan, President of Talent Balance, is a generational consultant, speaker, writer and GPSEG colleague. In Leadership Insights, she interviews and writes about outstanding leaders to share their stories and experiences. Although we've all probably read some of the thousands of publications on leadership, it's the personal insights that Suzanne will be capturing for our benefit.

We welcome your comments and suggestions of other CEOs and leaders, including those not well known to GPSEG, whom you would like to see featured in future columns.

Corporate Mortality: Are Life Spans Shrinking?

Much is made of the trend away from long term "permanent" employment. Entrants into the job market have adapted their expectations to understanding they will change jobs, if not careers, every several years as the economy and environment changes. Many respond by positioning themselves as independent consultants who offer their services to multiple employers/buyers, spreading their opportunity, as well as their risk, among numerous projects and clients, continually reinventing themselves and pursuing lifelong learning strategies.

In the current issue of *Harvard Business Review*, authors Martin Reeves and Daichi Ueda of the Boston Consulting Group (BCG) and Simon Levin from Princeton University explore similar factors affecting individuals and natural ecosystems- diverse, dynamic and unpredictable business environments- to analyze the potential life cycles of companies themselves, suggesting a shrinking life span of companies who fail to adapt to increasing complexity. They cite three broad trends contributing to rising corporate mortality: diverse environments that are increasingly harsher and less predictable; technological innovation increasing the pace and impact of change; and higher levels of interconnectedness linking markets, industries and global populations.

BCG offers a quick assessment tool for testing whether a corporate strategy is aligned with the risk environment at <http://robustness.bcgperspectives.com>.

Quick Reminders to GPSEG Members

- Check your member profile - is it up to date? This is your networking link to other members who may be looking for you. Log into the web site and go to "manage profile."
- Check your [Causeway](#) subscriptions - are you subscribed to your preferred lists? Note: if you have an aol or yahoo address, your messages are probably not reaching most members. This is not because of our system but is the result of a 2015 policy of those ISP's. Consider changing to another email address to ensure others get your postings.
- Note that many subgroups and committees have new meeting schedules, formats and volunteer opportunities - if you have not been to a meeting in while, take a new look.
- New all-member programs such as the CEO Summit Series are in full gear and other new offerings are being developed to provide targeted programming to member interests and professional needs. As the saying goes...."watch this space."

Members in the News

Michael Blumberg will be conducting free seminars on Guru Marketing. To learn more, visit his [website](#).

Click [here](#) for an article in Greater Charlotte Biz Magazine featuring GPSEG member **Greg Robey**.

Have news to share? Please send it to maureen.waddington@gpseg.org for inclusion in the next newsletter.

Spotlight on Success

Have a story to share? Please send it to maureen.waddington@gpseg.org for inclusion in our newsletter.

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