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Abundance, Team Building, & Taking the Brick

Carine Strom Clark

President and CEO of MaritzCX



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Carine Strom Clark, President and CEO of MaritzCX joins Dr. Jack Zenger and Dr. Joseph Folkman in this installment of the Zenger Folkman Leadership Podcast series to talk about women in leadership positions, building successful teams, cancer, abundance, and the impact of young people in the workforce.

Carine was recently named CEO of the Year by *Utah Business* magazine and listed as a 2013 Honoree in the *Forty Over 40* list. She is the former Senior Vice President of Marketing and Chief Marketing Officer at Symantec.

This eBook is a brief part of that conversation. Listen to the full podcast at zengerfolkman.com.

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Talk about your path to becoming the CEO of MaritzCX.

I've been in technology my whole career and I've worked with some amazing companies like Novell, Altiris, and Symantec. I had the opportunity to work, as a young person, in some pretty big jobs.

That training and scar tissue gave me the skills that I needed to do other things and one of them was to become the CEO of Allegiance. Its founder asked me to join him in 2012, and then Maritz Holdings International, which is a very large research company—140 years of business with a wonderful brand—saw what we were doing and bought Allegiance in 2014. They put Allegiance together with its market research firm and created MaritzCX and asked me to be the CEO.

You have been incredibly successful at building companies. Has leadership played a role as you've gotten the right people in the right positions?

I've been privileged to be part of some unbelievable teams, so I really take no credit for the success I've benefited from. I think leadership has been key to my being able to have opportunities. I was raised in a military family. Both my parents taught us to work really hard. The secret was just staying on the conveyor belt.

My parents taught us that if you have a vision and a plan that you can do anything. It never occurred to me that I couldn't build and grow companies.

In our research we found that women are rated better than men in ten of 16 competencies. Men are better at strategic perspective and technical expertise. Geeks, right? But women are better at ten. Why hasn't that translated to seats at the table?

My father was a Brigade Commander in the Army. He had more female company commanders than any other brigade. He said his female company commanders were tough but fair; they could discipline but also be very human.

When I graduated with my MBA, my father said, "I'm sorry. I thought the world would be better for you and your sister, but it's not. So you're going to have to be better to be equal."

When I look across the table there are not many female CEOs, not many female chairmen of the board, and there are not many women who run engineering teams. This is 2015, so it should be better. The Colonel was right: it should be better.

I think a lot of women take themselves out of the game early. It's unfortunate because there are smart, bright, capable women who can do a very good job of being leaders, mentors, and examples. It's too bad because our companies would be better, our communities would be better, and our schools would be better. Everything in our life would be better if we had more balance in leadership teams. Our customers are not all men and the world is not all men.

What has caused you to not toss in the towel and follow some of your women counterparts?

It never occurred to me that I couldn't do something. When I'm in a board meeting and it's all men and me, it really doesn't strike me until there's a break and I have to go to the restroom and everybody else goes in the other door and I'm like, "Hey that's weird. There's no conversation continuing in the room that I'm in."

I never give up and I think there are a lot of situations where I could be bugged because my counterparts, and a lot of them are men, will say things that are like a "complisult," a compliment that is actually an insult.

I'll give you an example. I went to a limited partner meeting. At the reception, one of the partners from California said to me, "Who's your husband?" And I said, "Bryan." What he meant was that the only women at the reception were the wives. I didn't catch that. He then asked, "What company is he with?" I replied, "He's retired. I wish I could be him." "Oh, why are you here?" I said, "I'm actually the CEO of my company." The next question, "Did you start the company?" Which was kind of weird—for me to be the CEO of a technology company I would have "to have started that company.

The next day he apologized and said, "I am so sorry. It just never occurred to me." I replied, "I know, right? Don't tell anybody." We're still in touch today and he's a lovely man. But it should be better.

You were able to balance two children and a husband and then in the middle of it have to go through cancer. Do you have any advice for people that are trying to keep balance and do it all?

Balance is tough, so I try for equilibrium. When I am at work, I'm the best executive I can be. When I'm at home, I am supermom. I choose not to make myself crazy because I can't do it all.



I have this great life. I've been very blessed. I've had wonderful opportunities. I wanted twelve kids, but that was very hard for me. I couldn't have children so I spent all my money and time to get these two wonderful, bright, intelligent, well-mannered boys. I feel very blessed to have the two, but I also benefited from having a good salary so I could pay for wonderful childcare. Not a lot of women have that option, so I'm very sensitive that it's tough for women to have equilibrium and balance in their lives.

Cancer was the hardest thing I've ever had to deal with. Everyone has hard things, but I decided that I wouldn't let cancer define me, but that I would take it on with the same passion, fury, and determination as I have with every single thing.

When you think you're going to die, it changes you forever. It ended up becoming a gift. The gift for me that changed my lens on how I see the world, how I see people, how I see my children, and how I view any challenge that I have.

What did cancer do to you as a leader?

When you think you're going to die, you look across your life. I did 18 months of chemo—that's a long time to be thinking about how you're going to live differently. I decided I would show my team and my children what it meant to do hard things. My goal, especially to show my children what it meant to stand up to something really awful, was to be a different kind of leader.

After chemo, I actually quit my job. I was the Chief Marketing Officer at Symantec. The top of the pile, the best job on the planet, big platform, cool job. And left it.

I went to Allegiance, an 80-person company with about 7 million in revenue in this tiny sector of customer experience that I care about.

People said, "She's lost her mind. The cancer has destroyed her." But I wanted to do something special. The founder was still there and most people said I was crazy to not fire the founder. I have an abundance mentality so I'm willing to lose to win and he's willing to lose to win.



I said to him, “Look I will come and do this but I’m not going to fight with you. We are going to do this together, but the music stopped and I’m in this chair.”

What do you look for in leaders?

At MaritzCX I had the opportunity to build from scratch or I could take from either company. I was very thoughtful about what the positions required. If you see my leadership team today, they’re all very different. None of them is like me. They are better at their job than I ever was. They were all hand picked for their jobs.

I look for things that you might not think about. I look for people that are very resilient, determined, and teachable. I look for people that are humble, who may not necessarily have a pedigree in exactly what I need, but that they’re willing to crawl through a field of broken glass and fiery darts to have the team be successful.

I’m very proud of my team. I just hired a CFO. Hiring the last guy is a hard thing to do because you’ve got this nice mojo with the team. I took my time hiring him. I didn’t hire what was perfect on paper. I hired for fit, his determination, and his personality. He came to me two nights ago and said, “This is the most fun I have ever had in my career. Thank you so much for giving me this opportunity.” Yeah, we got the right guy.

What you would say to somebody who wanted to adopt a more abundance mentality?

Throughout my career I’ve had bosses who just care about scarcity—there’s only enough for me and not anyone else. The teams I love being a part of are teams where we cared more about all winning together instead of just being the one winner. Success for you was not a loss for me.

I’m willing to lose to win. Because I care so much about what I’m trying to do, I’m willing to give up something that I care about that the team can benefit from. I learned a long time ago that abundance solves every problem.



People say to me, “Oh, I’m not a scarce person.” I reply, “I promise you we all do this.” Because when we get on the plane we fight for overhead bins because that is a scarcity problem. If I can put one bag in the overhead and one bag under the seat we all can fit. But if I just put this in here, no one will really notice, and since I’m in first class they’re not going to say anything. Then that poor last guy that gets on the plane. It happened to me two weeks ago, I was almost the last guy on the plane because of a delay. There was a woman who got on after me that threw herself over me to get that last spot. The pre-cancer me would have dressed her down, but the after-cancer me started laughing. This is scarcity.

If you think about it, you really could look at your whole life and see examples of scarcity and abundance every day. Imagine if we change that, at least in our own patch.

What’s your next big challenge? It seems that you have done it all.

I don’t know that I’ve done it all, but I am very focused right now on the things that I can do to lift people. I think that we all could do a better job of lifting people as we rise in our personal lives and careers. I have a lot of things I still would like to do. I don’t know how much time I have, but it doesn’t matter.

I can look across my ecosystem and I want to be able to see a difference. I work with a lot of universities because I have a passion for helping young people leapfrog some of the mistakes that we made. We need more strong leaders, we need more strong women, we need more strong young people, and we need them not to be afraid. They’re smarter than we were and they will do unbelievable things. The world will get harder. So if I can do that, then I will have done what I need to do. When I finally die they will say nice things, which is always great, but they will all smile and they’ll say, “You know what? No one tried harder and no one really cared as much as she did.” And that’s good for me.



What advice would you give to people who want to become better leaders?

Be open to the universe of possibilities and when someone throws you a brick, take the brick. When someone tells you you're terrible at something, you might just be terrible at it. Feedback really is a gift and we don't do a great job at accepting it.

People ask, "Are you a natural leader?" I don't know. I just know that if you want things to go well and you're willing to step up, it's okay to be wrong and don't be afraid to fail. I've learned more from my failure than from any success.

I can take a beating like no human I have ever met. But I want to learn from everything that happens to me. I'm wrong a lot. I'm willing to be wrong but I'm also willing to convince you that I might be right.

We hear a lot about the younger generation. They're different. What do you see there and what are some of the challenges?

I think there's a lot they can teach us. I think that they are unbelievable rookies. I hired an intern named Fenton and this kid has done more in my organization than any of the MBAs I've hired because he's not afraid to bring an idea and develop it all the way.

They are digital natives. They grew up in this digital world and we have to embrace that. They are able to have simultaneous partial attention. They are on the computer, they are listening to music, they're doing Facebook, and they're texting. That's okay as long as they get things done. They have great ideas.

They also don't need stuff. They don't need an office. They need a nice computer, but they don't need stuff. They don't pick up voicemail. They text. They might be right in a lot of things, but I worry that they don't read enough because there's wonderful things in reading. But they're our future. They're smarter than I was at their age. They're fearless.



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